



# Ageing Playfully: Design Report

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## Executive summary

**Ageing Playfully is a collaborative project between Lancaster University and Age UK Lancashire (Lancaster office) that brings academics, designers and artists together with people with early stage dementia, their carers and Age UK community workers involved in their care.**

The project acknowledges the need for innovative and creative ways to engage with, and support, the increasing numbers of older people with dementia in the UK in their daily activities.

The aim of the project was to offer a creative, playful and supportive space during a series of workshops, where people with dementia could be given the opportunity to co-design 2D collages and 3D models, and thereby stimulate and facilitate their physical mobility, imagination, and social interaction in the group.

The workshops (four of them) were set up within the context of an existing weekly drop-in activity, run as part of the Age UK Lancashire 'circle of support' initiative. The project team invited those people with dementia and their carers, who already attended the Neuro Drop-In centre, to take part in the workshops. Twelve participants with dementia agreed to take part, with two carers and two support workers also attending part or all of the sessions.



Activities included a warm up session, such as games and singing; and with everyone working in small groups a creative co-design modelling session based on themes chosen by the participants. Themes focused in the first workshop on the type of things people most enjoyed such as being outdoors in the garden, having meals, dancing, and singing or social activities. The second session, focused on participants in small groups creating 3D models of their favourite garden. The main theme that subsequently emerged was music and in the remaining two workshops participants co-designed musical, mainly percussive models, using a range of art and modelling materials.

Participants as co-designers expressed enjoyment and enthusiasm when given this opportunity to engage playfully with each other in imagining and building models. Their carers and support workers noted how the workshop activities seemed to encourage interaction, with even the reticent, less confident members of the group joining in with the model building.

The project team encouraged interaction in two other ways outside of each immediate workshop session. Firstly, each participant was sent a postcard with a picture of the 2D or 3D model they had been involved in creating. This helped each person to remember the previous activities and their part in the model building in their groups, and also to be reminded of the next workshop. Secondly, following the session, after the participants' lunch break, the team showed them the models again and everyone was reminded about the session, and they could share some feedback.

This first phase of co-design is planned to lead to a second phase of development using the participants' models to explore potential digital-physical technologies, which could creatively enhance physical mobility and mental facility and imagination for those with dementia, and their carers and community workers.

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## 1. Introduction

**Ageing Playfully was a collaborative project bringing together academic researchers, designers and artists, from Lancaster University and professionals from Age UK Lancashire (Lancaster office), to work with a community of people in the early stages of dementia and their caregivers.**

Ageing Playfully was designed and funded as part of the Creative Exchange, an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Knowledge Exchange Hub, which aims to catalyse processes of collaboration between academics and non-academics by working together on imaginative and innovative products, services and experiences via a series of short projects.

The Ageing Playfully project overall aim was to create a space for professionals from Age UK, designers, artists, caregivers and people with dementia, to exchange lived experiences and expertise, and thus contribute to a better understanding of how digital-physical interactions may foster well-being through movement and exercise for people with dementia.

In this project, an opportunity was created for researchers and older people with dementia to work together to co-design mobility and wellbeing interventions that could potentially improve their quality of life, and empower them to become designers themselves. Who better to understand the values, needs and aspirations of someone with dementia than those with dementia? Through a series of playful activities and by fostering creativity, motivation and imagination, our participants were facilitated to evolve ideas to create plans or models (prototypes) that encouraged playful activities to support their continuing physical mobility and creativity.

Ageing Playfully has two distinct phases; the first is the co-design research project reported here. The second phase will be developed from ideas generated in the research, which will be taken forward as a design brief by the research project team. In the second design brief phase we propose to explore potential digital-physical technologies that could be developed from the co-designed objects from the research. Such objects may have the potential to shape experiences that may contribute to everyday wellbeing and enhanced physical mobility of people with dementia and their carers.

In this report we describe the project findings as well as our observations, highlights and challenges of the experience of co-designing with people with dementia. The project focused on four workshops with an Age UK Lancashire dementia support community. Each of the co-design workshops informed the next one, fostering creativity and ownership, and aiming to offer a “feel good” experience.

## 2. Project Background

Alzheimer's Research UK 2015 statistics indicate there are around 850,000 people in the UK with dementia (62% women; 38% men) and it is estimated this figure will rise to over one million people by 2021 (Alzheimer's Research UK, 2015). The financial cost of dementia to the UK is estimated at £24 billion every year; this includes health and care costs. Surveys report that only 35% people with dementia go out once a week, 28% have stopped going out of the house, 23% have had to give up doing their own shopping and 9% say they have had to give up doing everything. Of those respondents 35% wanted more support and 14% wanted to access activities. But the biggest barriers to accessing activities were lack of confidence, worry about becoming confused in public or getting lost and not wanting to be a burden.

The huge challenge represented by the rise in dementia has led to at least one of the UK Government 'National Initiatives' to focus on dementia. The National Initiatives have been set up by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Clinical Research Network (Clinical Research Network, 2015). As part of these national initiatives Age UK Lancashire Linking Communities Research team is currently offering a bespoke personalised service to those living with memory problems and their carers on a 'step up, step down' basis. The programme builds circles of support for those

with mild cognitive impairment to foster re-integration into the local community, access old hobbies and interests, and new social groups.

Ageing Playfully worked together with the Age UK Lancashire (Lancaster) support circle that takes place at two locations in Lancaster: a residential care home Dolphinlee House, which offers residential care and regular weekly drop-in sessions providing social activities for people with dementia still living in their own homes; and the Neuro Drop-In Centre, which is open to people with a range of neurological conditions including dementia, and runs regular supportive drop in activities and events. This 'circle' of support is enabling people living with dementia and carers to feel more included in their local community. The circle represents a precious opportunity to socialize and connect with others, and to be able to enjoy a sense of friendly group support. During sessions patients and carers meet their friends, participate in activities, enjoy a cup of tea or a meal and in this way can look forward to an enjoyable weekly sociable event.

Ageing Playfully worked alongside these regular drop-in sessions, recruiting participants from regular attenders. We collaboratively designed four co-design workshops for and with the participants, for which a co-design process (see



Figure 1. Ageing Playfully co-designers making "Our very own garden" model in one of the playful workshops.

Sanders and Stappers, 2008) was employed. This approach was adopted in appreciation of its emphasis on end-users being experts in their own experience (Sleeswijk Visser et al., 2005), because co-design aims to foreground local knowledge and values within the design process and in doing so hopes to improve the chance of a successful design outcome. Furthermore, co-designing with the recipients of the intervention is seen as a transformative process as participants have a much higher stake in its design, making and ultimately using the item.

The key element of the workshops was to literally play, in small groups, with 2D images and 3D art and craft materials, in a series of facilitated but, as far as possible, participant led activities. These focused on the kinds of leisure activities participants enjoyed such as gardening, walking, eating together, listening or playing music, singing, dancing, feeding and watching wild birds etc.

The activity plan the researchers initiated had to be flexible enough to enable the project team to work with themes and ideas that emerged from each

of the workshops, and thence to develop each succeeding session. In this way, by the end of the workshop series participants were able to co-design playful, physical 3D models with potential to be developed into a prototype physical '3D game', that encouraged mobility and mental stimulation.

The Ageing Playfully research design embraces the concept of playing as an inherently human activity that can bring about a sense of well-being (McGonigal, 2011). Through games that draw on imagining, creating, and embodying in play, it is possible to create a so-called 'magic circle' (Huizinga, 1938/1955) in which players may feel safe, resourceful and empowered within that moment and space (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003). Thus, as players in the 'magic' of this circle, participants of Ageing Playfully had an opportunity to create and collaborate, expressing their ideas in meaningful activities that boosted their imagination and empowered them to become co-designers.



Figure 2. **Project Background: Age UK Lancashire Circle of Support at Dolphinlee House, Lancaster, in one of the weekly 'dancing and singing' sessions.**

### 3. Preliminary Research Design



Figure 3. **Preliminary Research: Age UK Lancashire Circle of Support at Neuro Drop-in Centre, Lancaster, in one of the weekly sessions. The people attending the circle were keen on tactile props, such as textiles with different textures and colours.**

Prior to the start of the research and recruitment, as part of developing the fieldwork design, the first stage was getting to know all the people attending the circle of support based at both Dolphinlee House and the Neuro Drop-In Centre during weekly sessions. Importantly, this meant those attending the circle would also get to know the researchers. The circle sessions tend to alternate activities such as singing along and dancing with reminiscence conversations. Members of the Ageing Playfully research team were invited by Age UK Lancashire to join the circle and attend sessions for a period of approximately 3 months prior to recruiting for the workshops.

Some of the research team had little or no experience working with people with dementia. Thus, this period of getting to know those people attending the circle was essential as researchers met people in their social context, participating with them in their activities and becoming familiar with the ways different people expressed their experience of dementia. This also helped to dispel preconceived ideas about how people with dementia behaved. Indeed, researchers realised that it is not always obvious that someone has dementia, particularly when they are at a relatively early stage in the disease, and it can be hard, in this instance, to distinguish between patients and non-patients.

From this time together, some key points emerged for the research team, which informed the ways the team designed the workshop sessions and worked with the participants, their carers and support workers:

- The people attending the circle were keen on objects they could handle, such as textiles with different textures and colours. They liked to touch, squeeze and hold textiles or soft toys.
- People enjoyed singing along and dancing to songs from the WW2 era and other post-WW2 classics.
- They greatly enjoyed chatting, catching up, and sharing experiences with other friends from the circle.
- Routine is important! Changes in the routine had to be carefully explained, as any new activity or idea could be a bit stressful.
- Comfortable chairs were crucial. Mobility was difficult as many people in the circle had reduced mobility. Complications that included back and hip pain were common.
- Some people struggled to read and write, and many had age-related sight problems.
- Talking loudly but clearly was essential as some people had hearing difficulties. Thus, it was always good to repeat information and individually confirm that everyone understood what had been said or plans discussed.
- The group was full of brilliant minds! People talked about having done astonishing things in their lives, and some talked of amazing careers; as professional dancers, gardeners, photographers, or they had worked in the theatre or had been in the military. Each person had a unique talent and most loved to tell anecdotes.
- Tea and biscuits were the favourite part of the session (followed closely by lunch) and having fun was most important!



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## 4. Recruiting participants

Following ethics review, ethical approval for the project was given by the Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and additional permission obtained from the Age UK Lancashire (Lancaster) to recruit from the circle session groups. The research team was invited to talk with people attending the circle sessions about the project, and this included involving carers and support workers in the discussion. Information packs including consent forms were distributed and those wanting to take part were invited to join the first Ageing Playfully session. Our session was organised to run just at the Neuro Drop-In Centre, with Age UK providing transport and lunch. (The regular circle session still ran as usual at Dolphinlee House.)

Informed written consent was obtained at the start of the first workshop with the support, where needed, of carers and support workers. Consent was checked with each participant at the start of each workshop.

We recruited a total of 12 people (9 women, 3 men) with dementia. Two of their carers and two support workers, known to the participants joined us for all or part of the sessions. Two Lancaster University PhD students also helped at the workshops both had visited Dolphinlee House (one of them attended all the sessions and supported the video and photographic recording) and both helped participants with the 3D modelling process.

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## 5. Workshops

The team set up four workshop sessions. Each session ran for one and a half hours and included a break for tea and biscuits. Lunch was provided at the end of each session. As described in detail in Section 6, every workshop started with some general group activity as an icebreaker, such as sharing a memory or singing a song together. After the workshop, following lunch, the participants were shown their models again, as a reminder and, if they wished, to share some feedback before the research team left the group. Photographs were taken of the 2D collage or 3D models and each participant was sent a copy of the photo of their collage or model during the week, as an aide memoire between workshops. We also video recorded each workshop and this led to a short [film](#) describing some of the concepts behind, and aim of, the project. The video material was a record of the process of the co-design and was used both as feedback for the participants and also as part of the data analysis. We also used video and photographs when reflecting as a team between workshops to support the development of ideas for the next workshop.

## Workshop One: “Our favourite things”

The first workshop was key to the project as it served to open up and identify the pool of interests and to identify potential challenges for the project. The workshop explored the range and type of activities workshop participants enjoyed doing or watching. Working in small groups of 3 – 4 participants together with support workers, carers and a research team member as lead in each small group, were invited to co-create 2D collages of their ‘favourite things’. These were built on a board using postcard images of various leisure and everyday objects and activities. Participants placed the postcards to create what could be described as a ‘mood board’ of favourite past, present, indoor and outdoor activities. There were also coloured stickers and post-it notes for writing comments to add to the board.

The interest for the team lay in why these activities were chosen. The main motivations seemed to be relaxation and socialization, getting together and feeling good. Favourite activities included quizzes, going to the theatre, listening to the radio, gardening, going to the park, feeding animals or wild birds, doing crosswords, reading magazines and dancing. The most recurrent themes were music and garden or outdoor life and these were followed up in the subsequent workshops.

### *Highlights from the group discussion feedback about the collage activity:*

“The cat is beautiful, [I] feel like stroking the cat”

“We like friends and company, it’s a great thing to bring us all together...”

“We love music, we like to sing along... and try to dance...”



Figure 4. A ‘mood board’ or collaborative collage making by Ageing Playfully co-designers favourite past, present, indoor and outdoor activities. Different materials and images used; stickers, stamps, coloured pens, playful cards.



Figure 5. One of the final Collaborative Collages, showing how themes started to emerge.



## Workshop Two: “Our very own garden”

The theme and activity of gardens and gardening was taken directly from the first workshop, when participants expressed their shared interest in staying close to nature, gardening and being outdoors. In this workshop, participants were able to choose from a range of modelling art materials including Lego, plasticine, and textiles. Working in their small groups they used these materials to create a group model. They explored features and characteristics of what a dreamed, imaginary garden would include. Thus, as co-designers participants created models of their small group's ‘dreamed’ gardens and these all had very rich stories to accompany them.

We noticed that as co-designers participants enjoyed pinning down material on boards, building up structures, touching and working with colourful fabrics of different textures. At first some people struggled with the modelling (which followed the concept of a ‘rapid prototype dynamic’ described by Carlopio (2010) as the rapid creation of a physical scale model). Participants were reassured that this kind of 3D art modelling is not about making something perfect or beautifully finished. As co-designers they were able to follow the flow of combining ideas, represented by materials that mediated and expressed their conversations. During the workshop the participants as co-designers were, with a few exceptions, able to overcome some initial frictions in working with other people in their small group and find ways to create collaboratively. The telling of stories and the imagining of the scenes and the representations of various people they placed in the garden models supported the process. This group activity emerged as source of enjoyment encouraging them to work together.

The imagined gardens emphasised features that provided feelings of safety, being more connected, being comfortable and feeling relaxed. Participants remembered names of flowers, plants and vegetables. The group had fun imagining, making up stories and modelling them, and in this way their unique gardens were co-created. Most importantly our participants as co-designers had a wonderful time building these!

We had started this second workshop by playing a song as an icebreaker. Participants seem to like it and kept on singing this song, tapping and whistling it as they modelled. Prompted by this the team decided that the next workshop had to include music as principal theme.

### *Highlights quotes from workshop about gardening and gardens:*

“I like sitting and seeing others doing it!! [Laugh]”

“I like the colours, such beautiful and bright colours...”

“I like to put it together like that, they stick together...”

“This is a bridge in between them, I like them not to be too lonely”



Figure 6. Workshop Two “Our very own garden”: co-designers modelling their ideal garden and garden activities and features.



Figure 7. Workshop Two “Our very own garden”: different 3D art model materials mediate conversations and represent ideas.

## Workshop Three: “Our very own musical instrument”

Inspired by the good reception of music in the last workshop, in this third workshop we set up an activity that allowed participants to explore music, musical instruments and sound in a playful way. The participants, still in small groups, co-designed their own musical instruments by incorporating a large range of materials that varied from spoons and pans to strings and sticks and all sort of sonorous and ludic (playful) objects.

This was a very playful and animated workshop. Participants co-designed some unique percussive sounds. For example, one group created a musical soundboard filled with sonorous materials, some of them emulating existing musical instruments, such as xylophones and maracas, but one or two others with entirely original ways of creating percussive, tuneful sounds using hollow egg shapes and elastic bands.

Participants seemed to become more inspired and excited about the model making activity as the workshop series progressed. This was evident as they arrived in the workshop space, which they started to recognize as ‘creative time’. They started to gain more confidence with playing and making activities. Everybody participated from the beginning of each workshop, though some of the more engaged participants encouraged others to join in the singing. This included male members of the group, who were less engaged in the first couple of workshops. In this music workshop everyone became involved in a noisy amalgam of singing, tapping, drumming and beating. It was very interesting to observe that by following the rhythm of certain spontaneous melodies some participants recalled the lyrics of the songs. Workshop Three ended with people playing music using their soundboard and singing!

### *Highlights from Workshop three about the music models:*

“We’ve just created about three new instruments in this table that I never knew existed.. how great is that!”

“Oh, it’s so amusing.. [we] made some beautiful instruments”



Figure 8. Co-designers imagining and building their own musical instruments by incorporating a large range of materials.

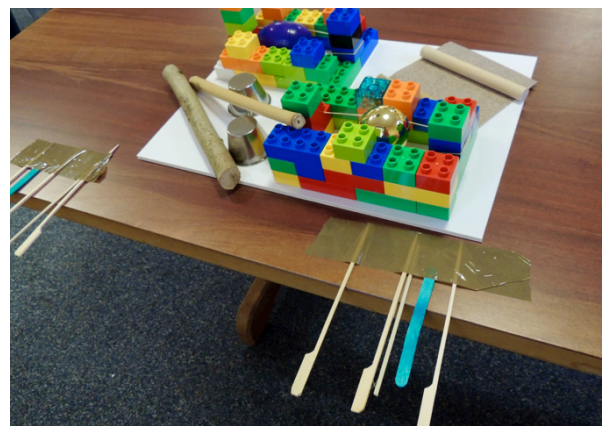


Figure 9. Participants co-designed some imaginative musical soundboard filled with sonorous materials, some of them emulating existing musical instruments, such as xylophones and maracas, but one or two others with totally original ways of creating percussive, tuneful sounds.



Figure 10. In this playful musical workshop everyone became involved in a noisy amalgam of singing, tapping, drumming and beating. It was very interesting to observe that by following the rhythm of certain spontaneous melodies some participants recalled the lyrics of the songs.



## Workshop Four: “Our very own musical band”

In this final workshop the activity was a continuation of the musical theme. This time each of the group built a different instrument with the idea of forming a musical orchestra. One of the groups made string instruments, another focused on percussion instruments and the other small group created instruments inspired by rattles and shakers. For the first time each of the groups had a different aim and different range of materials.

All the participants were especially engaged with the activities in this final workshop, and people seemed to feel the most comfortable and relaxed compared to earlier sessions. The co-designed instruments were ingenious and inventive. For this activity we incorporated bigger and more robust materials, and all the models were actually operative instruments and were more developed than in the previous workshop. Again we observed that by playing and making rhythms, participants were able to remember the complete lyrics of songs.

### *Highlights from workshop four about making musical instruments:*

“I like this sound, I could play with this all day!”

“Let’s make out a song and try to play it. I used to play a lot of music before, but it’s surprising what we can play with these made up instruments, these drums...”



Figure 11. Co-designed model of musical instrument set based on rattles and shakers.

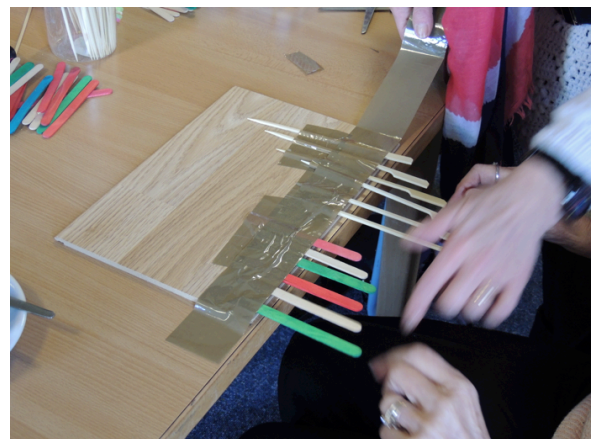


Figure 12. Co-designed model of musical instrument set based on xylophone and percussion types.



Figure 13. For this activity were incorporated bigger and more robust materials, and all the models were actually operative and more developed instruments.

## 6. Workshop tools, strategies and activities

How exactly were the workshops facilitated? And what sort of dynamics were in place? The activities were devised in ways that ensured both participants and research team kept the process simple and fun and this could be inclusive but allow individual expression. Below are some of the activities that proved successful in the co-design workshops:

### Icebreaker activities

Icebreaker activities, run at the start of every workshop, were important as a way to help to relieve stress, reduce tension and encourage a more immediate involvement by participants. The activity was designed to help them to relax, thereby allowing them to be more receptive to listening and contributing. Some icebreaker activities were inspired by those used by the support circle; it was a way to maintain a familiar activity that helped to build confidence in this new workshop situation.

### Hot Potato



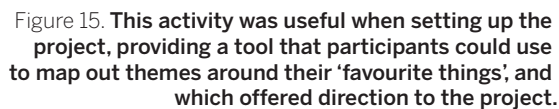
Figure 14. Inspired by the game: 'Pass the parcel'. Instead of the 'parcel', a colourful soft ball/fluffy pillow was passed like a 'hot potato' while music was played.

This activity was inspired by the game: 'Pass the parcel'. Instead of the 'parcel', a colourful soft ball/fluffy pillow was passed like a 'hot potato' while music was played. Whoever had the ball when the music stopped had to answer a question matching the theme of the workshop. For example, in Workshop Two the question was, "what do you like to do in the garden?" In Workshop Three: "what is your favourite musical instrument?" or in Workshop Four: 'make the sound of favourite instrument.' The addition of the soft toy followed the idea that people with dementia enjoy interaction with physical, ludic (playful) objects, especially soft fabrics, texture based materials and colourful materials. Touching textiles, squeezing and rubbing the soft ball with the hands thus becomes quite important as a way of people to engage with the activity.

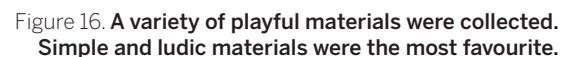
### Opening song

From the first workshop the research team observed that music seemed very important. For instance, it was evident that songs "stayed" with the participants, so they kept on humming and tapping its rhythm. The song chosen in the first session was a classic from the 1960s, Morecambe & Wise, 'Bring me sunshine', as it was easy to remember and popular. In the next workshop sessions the team experimented with more rhythmic music, like Miriam Makeba's song 'Pata Pata'. At the start of the last workshop the team used the contemporary 'Happy' by Pharrell Williams. All these songs worked well in engaging and prompting participants to join in with the singing, even if they did not necessarily know the song well. This would suggest that the song did not need to be reminiscent, but that new or less well known music was also welcomed and effective for people to be involved in the activity.

## Collaborative collage



## Collective Modelling in Small Groups



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## Narrative and sharing activities

### Emerging Narratives: Imagining, abstracting and representing

Providing the range of modelling materials encouraged the group members to agree that one or another object would represent different things, and that it would be perfectly acceptable to change an object's meaning in combination with other materials. Changes in scale and colour led, at times, to humorous situations and so the stories would develop and transform, inspiring participants as co-designers to immerse themselves into some intricate representations with fully developed storylines. There were two ways the research team made use of continuing storylines to emphasise the event and to provide a reminder for the next event:



Figure 17. Co-designers negotiated that one or another object would represent different things and ideas: flowers, green house, herbs and vegetables. Participants discuss names of plants and how to represent them.



Figure 18. Changes in scale and colour led, at times, to humorous situations and so the stories would develop and transform, inspiring participants as co-designers to immerse themselves into some intricate representations with fully developed storylines.

### Show and Tell

After every Ageing Playfully workshop participants had lunch together. Then they continued with other weekly activities planned by the Age UK Lancaster's usual circle of support. After lunch, the Ageing Playfully research team took all the co-designed models into the lunchroom to show participants the work made during the workshop. This simple mechanism reaffirmed the participants as co-designers. They could appreciate their group model, and thus were given an opportunity to feel that all the play led to something valued by the whole group. This helped to close the session on a positive note.



Figure 19. The Ageing Playfully research team took all the co-designed models into the lunchroom to show participants the work made during the "Our favourite things" workshop.

### Postcard Memento

After each co-design workshop one of the Ageing Playfully team sent a postcard to each of the participants. The postcards were created from photos of the model and personalised with a note. This was a physical memento that recapped what had been designed and reminded each participant about the next workshop. This connection with the participants was meant to be a simple but meaningful gesture, which created empathy and helped them feel considered. The postcards also aimed to act as a medium whereby embodied memories of the workshop in physical objects could be kept by the participants and re-visited, stimulating their memories of the activities. This seemed to work well; some participants kept the postcards in their personal handbag and proudly showed them to each other. Maintaining actual correspondence with participants appeared to create significant engagement with the Ageing Playfully activities.

## 7. Research opportunities and intentions: what next?

The project outcomes were two-fold:

### 1. A Co-Design Kit:

A set of materials and tools, strategies and recommendations, as presented in this report and in the [video](#), that would help the facilitation of playful activities within similar groups of people who suffer from memory and cognitive impairment. This outcome does not aim to be a finished product, but rather a toolbox for caregivers and professionals to facilitate other co-design experiences.

Workshop participants appeared to enjoy co-designing! They had positive responses to creative and playful activities, imagining and making stories. The process seemed to help them to engage with each other and the activity with comparatively less help from support workers than was observed in other more facilitator led activities. In the last workshops as soon as participants arrived in the space and saw the white board on table around the boxes of materials, they asked, “what are we making today?” Thus showing that they remembered the workshops and the activities, and that it engendered a positive response.



### 2. A Playful Plug-n-Play Music Board

The second idea to be developed as part of the next phase of the project is a prototype for a “Playful Music Plug-n-Play Board” based on the models developed by Ageing Playfully participants. The board would enable other older people with dementia, working either in small groups or individually with their carer or support worker, to make and develop different musical instruments. Each time they used the board they could add to the material and build the musical toolkit together. These co-designed instruments would invite shared playing, tapping, exploring rhythms, recording, re-playing, and singing along, with the aim of encouraging mobility, creativity and wellbeing. As noted above, Ageing Playfully participants as co-designers showed immense enjoyment for playing music and singing along. An observation that concurs with a growing literature and reports on the benefits of music in all forms for people with dementia (see [www.ageuk.co.org](http://www.ageuk.co.org) 2015). The activity of tapping and pressing buttons, pulling and squeezing materials on a playful music board would seem to have the potential to encourage mobility and imaginative individual and social engagement.



Clockwise from top left:

Figure 20. **Percussion board**  
co-designed by Ageing  
Playfully Participants

Figure 21. **String board**  
co-designed by Ageing  
Playfully Participants

Figure 22. **Xylophone board**  
co-designed by Ageing  
Playfully Participants

Figure 23. **Maracas and shakers**  
set co-designed by Ageing  
Playfully Participants





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## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

In this section the key messages and recommendations are summarised, together with some thoughts on the personal experience of the research team involved in this project and developing approaches to engage with people with dementia as co-designers.

### Key messages

A number of key messages and recommendations can be taken from the research work conducted during the Ageing Playfully project. The key benefits and messages are described below:

- Creative activities in a group workshop environment can make an active contribution to the improvement of the quality of life of people with dementia.
- Creative ‘making’ activities that stimulate multisensory experiences, including tactile, auditory and visual, can be especially helpful by increasing the engagement, social inclusion and upper body movement of people with dementia.
- Well-facilitated workshops, such as those run by the Ageing Playfully project, can help in uplifting the mood of people with dementia and contribute to social connectedness.
- Staff at Age UK Lancashire commended the design and facilitation of the workshops, as they observed the events encouraged people with dementia to engage at a high level with activities and others in their group.
- The research has suggested the development of a workshop facilitation musical instrument based toolkit as a means of increasing social interaction skills and mental wellbeing for people with dementia and to encourage their upper body movement.
- The project team has prepared this freely available design report to illustrate the lessons learnt from this pilot project and provide some recommendations on how facilitators may run workshops in a similar fashion.

### Key recommendations

Thirteen key recommendations based on the data analysis, experience and lessons learnt through this project are summarised below. These are divided into pre-workshop engagement, workshop planning, workshop running and post-workshop engagement:

#### Pre-workshop engagement

*Engage with workshop participants and carers, support staff several weeks prior to the start of the workshops.*

This is essential in getting to know the people you will be working with, but more crucially when working with people with dementia, early pre project or workshop contact helps significantly in encouraging people to become comfortable with you. It is recommended that you attend existing drop-in sessions (coffee and tea meet-ups, lunch clubs, support groups, etc.) and gradually contribute and get to know people involved.

#### Workshop planning

*Carefully select the workshop room/venue and set-up according to individual and group needs.*

If possible it is recommended that workshops run in the same location as an existing group session takes place or choose another familiar venue. Comfortable chairs are crucial as mobility issues are common with such groups.

*Share and discuss your planned activities with support staff or other professionals working with dementia groups for feedback, and include activities that the group is already more or less familiar*

Routine is important! Changes in the routine have to be carefully explained, as any new activity or idea could be a bit stressful. Hence heeding the advice and feedback of existing support staff about your planned activities is most useful.

## **Running the workshops**

*Start the workshop with an icebreaking or warming up activity each time.*

Icebreaker activities, run at the start of every workshop, are important as a way to help to relieve stress, reduce tension and encourage a more immediate involvement by participants. The activity should be designed to help workshop participants to relax, thereby allowing them to be more receptive to listening and contributing.

*Workshops should not be more than two hours in duration and should include several breaks with refreshments in between.*

It is recommended that workshops do not start any earlier than 11am, as people with dementia need ample time to prepare and reach the workshop venue. This is particularly important if some form of public transport is used but still useful if people are relying on a dedicated door to door service. Ideally workshops should start with some refreshments (tea, coffee and biscuits) as this provides an opportunity for socialising.

*Include model-making activities in the workshop to get participants engaged, excited and active.*

Material modelling in the activities has the potential of being highly participatory and inclusive, and this approach can actively engage even the more introvert workshop participants. The tactile element of such activities includes sculpting and sticking materials together and building up the models in playful ways. This is a very engaging method of connecting with people and their ideas, allowing them to go beyond conversation into tactile and visual expression via the 3D model.

*When using model-making activities reassure participants that modelling is not about making something perfect or beautifully finished but to represent different things/ideas.*

Providing the range of modelling materials will encourage group members to agree that one or another object would represent different things, and that it would be perfectly acceptable to change an object's meaning in combination with other materials.

*Combine storytelling with the model-making activities to increase playfulness and allow participants to develop rich stories and express themselves.*

The telling of stories and the imagining of scenes and representations of various objects will enable the group to have fun sharing and creating stories as they model them. Changes in scale and colour can lead to humorous situations as the stories develop and transform, inspiring participants as co-designers to immerse themselves into some intricate representations with fully developed storylines.

*Select and use materials that are colourful, playful, tactile, textile-based to enhance participant engagement and creativity.*

The variety and the simplicity of the materials, the ludic, playful and colourful range of textiles and plastics invites rich and immediate responses, with participants wanting to touch, rattle, build and combine materials. People with dementia enjoy interaction with physical objects, especially soft fabrics, texture based materials and colourful materials. Touching textiles, squeezing and rubbing soft objects with the hands thus becomes quite important as a way for people to engage with an activity.

*Use pre-prepared and pre-cut materials that are do not require fine dexterity but are easy to manipulate and use.*

Sometimes people with dementia have limited dexterity skills. For example, not everybody is able to cut out with scissors or work with stickers. Hence, providing simpler modelling materials that required less cutting out and manipulation can ensure that everyone can participate in the modelling activities.

*Create a space for co-creation and collaboration to increase socialisation amongst workshop participants, fun and engagement.*

Facilitate the workshop activities in small groups of no more than 3-4 people with one or two carers/ supporters. This helps to avoid people feeling overwhelmed by too much interaction with people, instead to feel able to be part of a small more manageable number. The result is more likely to be participants appreciating their group's model and to feel part of the process. This can give them the opportunity to feel that all the play led to something valued by the whole group.

*Incorporate music in several of your workshop activities to increase participant engagement, physical activity, fun and reminiscing.*

In music based/related workshops there is the potential for all participants to become involved in a noisy amalgam of singing, tapping, drumming and beating. Following the rhythm of certain spontaneous melodies seems to trigger some participants to recall the lyrics of the songs and this can stimulate memories about a or times in their life where those songs were played.

### **Post-workshop**

*Follow up between each workshop and provide participants with a physical memento related to a workshop activity.*

After each workshop create and send (preferable via post) a physical memento postcard that recaps what had been designed in that workshop. Postcards also will remind each participant about the following workshop. This connection with the participants is a simple but meaningful gesture, which creates empathy and helps them feel considered. The postcards can also act as a medium whereby embodied memories of the workshop in physical objects could be kept by the participants and re-visited, stimulating their memories of the activities.

## **Personal experience**

### **What is it like to work with participants with dementia?**

Facilitating Ageing Playfully co-design workshops, particularly for those members of the team without any previous carer training or experience of dementia, was an incredibly stimulating and rewarding experience. The workshop participants were able to form a group with great enthusiasm for creative activities, and they expressed enjoyment attending the workshops every week. Engaging with people with early stages of dementia in a creative way, as well as bringing back their prototype designs to the design studio and thinking about how to develop these, was not just a process of working towards the specific deliverables of the project. The process also meant facilitating social inclusion and wellbeing around people with some of the most need in the community.

The Ageing Playfully project experience suggests that an emphasis on personal stories, on individual identities, and the value of people's ideas, can potentially seem to have an impact not just in the quantifiable aspects of care, but in what it means to suffer from dementia.

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## 9. Research team



**Dr Emmanuel Tsekleves** is a senior lecturer in design interactions at Imagination@Lancaster. Emmanuel designs interactions between people, places and products in the areas of health, ageing and well-

being, by employing creative design methods with digital technology. Emmanuel is interested in the co-design of playful artefacts and interactions that link the digital with the physical world and that encourage and empower the general public as well as people with lifelong and progressive disabilities and their carers to develop design solutions for themselves.



**Dr Amanda Bingley** is a lecturer in health research in the Division of Health Research, Faculty of Health and Medicine. Amanda is involved in work with the Centre for Ageing Research and has an interest in research with older

(and younger people) with a focus on health and place. When facilitating research with people of all ages she works with a range of qualitative approaches including narrative, ethnographic, creative arts and participatory research methods.



**Ms Malé Luján Escalante** is a The Creative Exchange PhD researcher in the area of Digital Public Space, exploring Materiality and In-materiality of physical-digital experiences in making. Male is especially interested

in memory processes and time experience that she is approaching by experimenting with diffractive methodologies.



**Mr Adrian Gradinar** is a Creative Exchange PhD student conducting research in the area of the digital public space, exploring the Internet of Things and how digital information can be integrated with familiar objects.

Adrian is also interested in game design theories and how digital games could be interconnected with the physicality of the surrounding world.

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