

## Service-Learning in Aging: A case study of Art Facilitation in dementia care setting

### Presenters

Sophia Law, Associate Professor, Visual Studies, Lingnan University

Carol MA, Head of Gerontology Programmes (Master & PhD), S. R Nathan School of Human Development, Singapore University of Social Sciences

### Abstract

Dementia is an emerging public health challenge in the world. The improvements in healthcare have contributed to people living longer and healthier lives, which also has resulted in an increase in the number of people suffering from non-communicable diseases, including dementia. According to WHO (2017), the number of people living with dementia is expected to triple from 50 million to 152 million by 2050. Dementia not only disturbs those who have it as well as their caregivers and families, but also poses substantial challenge to healthcare and social care systems worldwide.

To cope with the growing burden of ageing and dementia, increasing numbers of programmes to promote active ageing and maintain a healthy brain are being executed around the world. Service-learning in aging is getting popular as it can play an important role in helping young people to get to know and connect with the elderly. This paper proposes a service-learning programme of artistic creativity to facilitate expression among people with early dementia to help them to better communicate with others.

### Objectives:

The service provided by this project goes beyond ordinary leisure activities to offer carefully structured artistic and creative tasks through which those with early dementia can use art as a language. The objectives are as follows:

1. encourage behavioural activation in persons with early dementia through artistic creativity;
2. improve the quality of life of persons with early dementia through the joy and fun of art making;
3. forge a better alliance between persons with early dementia and their relatives and carers through recognition of the images created;
4. enhance the students' understanding of dementia;
5. promote communication and connection between the students and the elderly;
6. improve the students' social awareness of the social issues related to ageing; and
7. promote the students' sense of civic engagement and social commitment.

### Methods:

The authors will use a case study supported by the Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease Association (HKADA) and Art for all to illustrate how art facilitation can be a language in dementia's world.

The programme, which ran from December 2013 to June 2014, consisted of a series of eighteen specially designed creative workshops for 14 elders, aged 59 to 94, who were suffering from mild to advanced dementia. A group of volunteer participants, including three relatives, two social workers, five elder students and three youths, were recruited as observers. To provide them with some basic knowledge about dementia, art and creativity, the volunteers received ten hours of lectures given by a geriatrician, a professional artist and an academic professor prior to the beginning of the workshops. Each of the observers was paired with an elder enrolled in the programme; they observed the same elder in all of the workshops. Relatives and caregivers accompanying the elders to the workshops were also invited to join the workshops.

#### Outcomes:

College students had a personal and emotional experience with elderly people. The connections forged encourage students to think about the meaning of ageing, associated social issues and their roles in society. It is the fundamental belief of the programme that good service-learning is a pedagogy that induces cognitive development and brings about transformative change.

A book, called *Colours of Dementia* with the images produced by the elders with dementia. These images reflect the individuality of each elder, reminding us of their distinctiveness and uniqueness as people. Through these colours, we are able to connect to them as individuals. This case study has shown that art as a language to connect young and old. Similar programme and settings could be replicated in other countries, especially in Asia to test out the impacts of art facilitation on the elderly with dementia.