

Impact report 2021



The Elder Tree programme was delivered by Writing East Midlands between 2018-2021 and is part of the Celebrating Age programme, which was jointly funded by Arts Council England through the National Lottery and The Baring Foundation.

The aims of The Elder Tree were multitude: to empower groups of older people to create new work stimulated by museums, archive collections, heritage spaces, and by professional writers; to work with cultural spaces and other organisations to empower older people to shape or lead quality activities; to support proven approaches to engaging older people as visitors, audiences, or participants in creative processes; to test and apply new ways of engaging with older people; to commission older artists and art with particular resonance for older people; and to celebrate art created by them.

The region wide project consisted of twelve creative writing residencies which connected with older participants and audiences with a view to reduce feelings of social isolation and loneliness through creative engagement. Activities include storytelling, reminiscence writing, poetry, group reading and role-play and all sessions embodied an ethos of celebration and fun.

Engaged over **246** participants

66% were 70-109 years old

Delivered **124** creative writing workshops in 12 residencies throughout the East Midlands



860 attendances in creative activity

Employed **20** writers, many of whom were over 55 and from diverse backgrounds



Worked with **21** different cross sector partners including health and social care organisations, NHS, AGE UK, Creative People and Places organisations and Museum Development East Midlands and heritage settings.

90% of the attendees said that they enjoyed the creative sessions



88% of the participants said that doing the activity with other people and helped them feel more connected

90% said the sessions were worthwhile



Participant Feedback

Well for one thing it gets you out of yourself. You haven't got to just sit in your room cogitating and thinking about what's going to be done the next day. You've got each day to plan 'cause you've got so many things to do.

(Irene, care home participant on why she enjoyed the Elder Tree)

A community participant considered how good the group was for her:

I had a breakdown, and I think it has done me good coming in the afternoon, it is really stimulating as well.

(Polly, community)

Participants were taught not only new skills in writing, but also the publishing industry and the professional side of the creation of art.

Yes it has been a very real experience, because it's not just about that I'm learning to write but also I'm getting something published so I'm learning a lot about the publishing side of it.

(Elaine, community)

We're all talking about our own identities, and it was very exciting to hear about other people's identities as well and confusion, and different things, and people's experiences of love, and marriage, and children.

(Amrita, community)

A lot of the time you feel all het up and it (creative writing) helps you to be able to bring out what you're feeling and discuss your thoughts with others to help you write it.

(Judy, community)

The Elder Tree empowered older people to connect with each other and explore and discover topics they really cared about through the vehicle of creativity. Each group was participant led and worked towards creative outputs which interested and excited them, and as a result we produced 4 anthologies, 1 series of posters, 1 series of postcards, 2 pamphlets of postcards and reminiscences, 1 experimental sound piece, 1 showcase (with pieces performed by professional actors), 2 scrapbooks, a series of community banners, a website and 2 promotional films. An audio sculpture encompassing all 12 residencies was created by artist, Graham Elstone. We also trained 50 people in how to work with older people using creative writing and museum artefacts as inspiration. Many of the groups continued to meet after the project end, with care homes which we worked in incorporating creative writing into their delivery of activity.

The UK population is rapidly ageing; the latest national statistics report over 19% of the population is aged 65 and over, with older people much more vulnerable to loneliness and more prone to experiencing physical and mental health problems. As a result of this, we are now seeking further funding for The Elder Tree, to further support hard to reach communities throughout the East Midlands and to truly celebrate the contribution older people make within society and further reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness through the power of creative activity.

Find out more about the project at <https://writingeastmidlands.co.uk/projects/celebrating-age-elder-tree/>