

# Impact of 5 years' focus on Dementia-friendly work at Capital Theatres revealed in report

Scotland's largest independent theatre charity, Capital Theatres stages over 700 performances each year across the Festival Theatre, the Kings Theatre, and The Studio. Alongside this diverse programme of national and international artistic work, sits Capital Theatres' extensive learning and participation programme.

In 2015, Capital Theatres began working to improve the provision of meaningful artistic and social activities for people living with dementia, and their families, friends, and carers.

Supported by funding from The Life Changes Trust, The Robertson Trust, and The Rayne Foundation, Capital Theatres worked to create more inclusive dementia friendly environments in their venues with building adaptations to allow the Festival Theatre to be a dementia enabled environment and a diverse programme of activities that has been shaped by persons living with dementia.



The range of artistic programming, creative projects, and social activities offered to people living with dementia now comprises a variety of regular events and activities, including dementia friendly performances, workshops with visiting companies, networking opportunities, social cafes, training opportunities, and participatory events with live music, drama, and dance.

This dementia friendly community programme has grown into an important network of support and activity for communities across Edinburgh and the Lothians.

In an external evaluation conducted by Emma Smith, Research and Knowledge Exchange at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the impact of this programme has been explored, representing the voices of participants and providing a narrative for the learning that has taken place.

Over four months (December 2019-March 2020), three programme activities 'Tea and Jam', 'The Satellites', and Dementia Friendly performances, were evaluated covering music, drama, and dance. The qualitative study drew on case studies and ethnographic methods, including participant observations, ethnographic interviews, and semi-structured interviews.

The report concludes that the programme at Capital Theatres has a profound impact on its participants, with findings suggesting perceived improved mental and physical well-being, reduced isolation, and increased autonomy. It also noted that there were added benefits from the activities taking place in a heritage setting and with the level of artistic quality the organisation is able to bring to them.

A strong sense of community amongst the participants and staff has developed, with staff reporting significant emotional investment and pride in the programme.

Dawn Irvine, Dementia Friendly Co-ordinator at Capital Theatres said: "We take a human rights-based approach, creating opportunities for persons living with dementia to take an active part in their cultural life, to be decision makers and creators of their own experience and to continue to flourish through the arts. Capital Theatres also concentrates on raising awareness and reducing stigma attached to a diagnosis of dementia.

"The long-term continuity of these activities is particularly

important and we know there would be significant benefits to continuing and expanding the programme and sharing the learning and expertise that has been developed over the last five years with other cultural and artistic organisations.”



## Adapting to the current closure

Capital Theatres closed the Festival Theatre, the King's Theatre and The Studio on Monday 16 March and as well as many performances being cancelled, several dementia friendly events and activities were also cancelled. In order to provide continuity for participants Dawn Irvine, Dementia Friendly Co-ordinator adapted to deliver a programme of events informed by the participants and created by staff and artists currently working from home.

These events include Contactless Afternoon Tea deliveries to approximately 70 people in the Lothians, recently expanded in partnership with Dementia Friendly East Lothian. The entertainment is pre-recorded performances available online, by MP3 or posted out in DVD format and baked goods are delivered by local bakers. Many have shared wonderful photos of people enjoying the tea parties at home, laying the cakes out beautifully and dancing around their living rooms.

What started as A Brew and A Blether, a relaxed drop-in chat on Zoom for people with lived experience of dementia, providing a sense of community, is evolving shaped by the participants and their needs. The group are now going on virtual tours and behind the scenes at organisations they are now unable to visit. They started with Gorgie City Farm and next is Biggar Puppet Theatre.

For those who want to get more actively involved Tea and Jam has moved onto Zoom. The monthly sessions encourage everyone to grab an instrument, or sing, and jam along with musician Gus Harrower.

For Joy to the Moment Capital Theatres put out a call online for short films of people being creative outside. These are being edited together and will be sent to people who are shielding indoors or those in care settings who are isolating in their rooms in an effort to bring a little of the outdoors...indoors. Grant Stott, Ian Rankin and Alexander McCall Smith provided films as well as others from children at The Edinburgh Steiner School, local artists, dancers and comedians and other members of the public.

To find out more about our Dementia Friendly work during the closure and other behind the scenes activities visit [www.capitaltheatres.com/raise-the-curtain](http://www.capitaltheatres.com/raise-the-curtain)



Now

At least 90% of Capital Theatres' income is generated from ticket sales and trading income, meaning that the sudden closure meant an immediate loss of the two main sources of income. To date Capital Theatres has refunded 52,900 tickets with a value of over £2.5m. The postponement of the panto until 2021 will result in a further £2.3m loss of income.

The sad truth is that its vital community services alongside the core business and the future of the Kings Theatre are under immediate threat.

It is currently campaigning to receive emergency support to the same level as other publicly supported theatres which would allow Capital Theatres to play its part in the renewal solution for Edinburgh and Scotland, and beyond its 3 key venues provide local community health and wellbeing benefits, deliver the year round cultural offer for local citizens and retain 230 jobs.