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***Creativity in Later Life: Beyond Late Style***

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**Creative Ageing: The Social Policy Challenge**

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Five Ways to Wellbeing

By 2071 the number of people over 65 could double to nearly 21.3 million, while the number of people aged 80 and over could more than treble to 9.5 million. Over the next 30 years, the number of people with dementia in the UK could double to 1.4 million. The current policy landscape marks a shift in thinking, away from 'deficit' models of later life towards a 'paradigm shift' which 'allows people to realise their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life-course and to participate in society' (World Health Organisation, 2012, p. 3). While previous models of later life care had focused on supporting acute illness in older age, health-care systems are being forced to find ways of supporting individuals to take responsibility for their own health, within their own communities. In 2008, the New Economics Foundation (NEF) was commissioned by the UK Government's Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing to review the inter-disciplinary work of over 400 researchers from across the world. *The aim was to identify a set of evidence-based actions to improve wellbeing which individuals could be encouraged to build into their daily lives.* This was distilled down to the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*, which is now a major driver of health policy in the UK. They are:

- connect
- be active
- take notice
- keep learning
- give

This chapter will look at how different types of creativity in older age can meet the social policy recommendations embodied within the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* with specific detailed examples. The chapter will also relate this to the ongoing work on wellbeing, post-2008. Whilst some commentators have suggested this formulation is absurdly reductive, the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* has had considerable success in being accessible to a wide-range of audiences and easy to embed in policy statements and to communicate to community-based organisational teams. Following a brief introduction to the British Policy Context, the chapter looks at how the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* can be realised through arts engagement giving detailed examples of arts practices towards a creative older-age.

### What Does Creative Ageing Look Like? The British Social Policy Context

Before discussing the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* in further detail the following section will consider the broader social policy context for older people in the UK over the past decade. (Readers specifically interested in the *Five Ways* may prefer to move to the next section). The Foresight Report (2008) emphasised the need for social change in order to optimise the mental capital and wellbeing of older adults and the creation of environments that would encourage this. In the same year, John Elbourne had been asked by the Minister for Pensions Reform to review the existing political engagement of older people. His report *Review of Older People's Engagement with Government* was published a month after the Foresight Report. The report emphasised the government policy focus on local solutions for local problems. The report complained that in spite of this policy objective, local authorities were still not making older people's voices a sufficient priority, with only a third of local authorities having 'meaningful engagement with the older community' (p. 43). Elbourne's report included recommendations that a UK Advisory Forum for older people be established with an and that there be an increased focus on 'developing engagement with older people' (p. 46) to ensure that older people were listened to and their independence and wellbeing supported.

While the report referred to wellbeing, no direct links with creative ageing were made.

Government responded to Elbourne's report the following year in *Empowering Engagement: a stronger voice for older people*, which articulated a commitment to develop a UK Advisory Forum on Ageing as part of the updating of the Government's Ageing Strategy (Department of Work and Pensions, 2009, p.25). The Forum then engaged in the development of the strategy, *Building a Society for All Ages*, designed to 'promote everyone's well-being, help keep people healthy, create a stronger, richer sense of community and boost our economy' (HM Government, 2009, p.4). There is evidence throughout the strategy of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* concepts seeping in to the policy recommendations, from references to staying active, (including free access to museums and galleries to everyone over 60 (p.13 & p.21), participation in later life learning (p.22) to strengthening bonds in communities through intergenerational activities which allow people to 'connect', as per the *Five Ways* (p.49).

In the following year, the government's white paper, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*, detailed its ambition to encourage *healthy ageing*, which included 'creating opportunities to become active, remain socially connected, and play an active part in communities' (HM Government, 2010, p.50). Both papers promote support of 'Older People's Day', which coincides with the 'United Nations International Day of Older Persons', as a way of celebrating the contribution of older people to society and a means through which to change negative attitudes towards ageing. Celebrations take place across the UK each year in October to celebrate ageing through creative means. In 2016, for example, a broad programme of creative activities took place in Hull, UK City of Culture 2017, ranging from theatre performances to tea dances to intergenerational choirs (Churchill, 2016).

In 2010, *Fairer Society, Healthy Lives* (Marmot Report), presented a

strategic review of health inequalities in England. The report emphasised the need to remove barriers to community participation and thus reduce social isolation and develop social capital, noting that '[s]ocial isolation impacts on health' and that 'social networks and social participation act as protective factors against dementia or cognitive decline over the age of 65' (Marmot, 2010, pp. 137-138). Well-designed green spaces were identified as a means of increasing levels of 'social contact and social integration' and encouraging older people to be more physically active in their communities (p. 131). The report identified six policy recommendations aimed at reducing health inequalities, centred around a life-course perspective, and highlighted the significant contribution made by services which 'promote the health, well being and independence of older people' (p.20). One of the pathways recommended for reducing social isolation is to enhance community empowerment, which relates back to the recommendations in Elbourne's review, two years previously. This advice clearly relates to NEF's *Five Ways to Wellbeing*, particularly in terms of the slogans 'connect' and 'be active', and brief reference is made to the importance of providing access to cultural facilities and green spaces as a means of reducing inequalities and developing sustainable communities (p. 126).

The coalition government's policy paper on older people, *2010 - 2015 Government Policy: Older People*, first published in 2013 and updated in 2015, provides a list of actions taken to address the issues of an ageing society. The policy states that as retirement becomes an increasingly 'active phase of life', older people should have opportunities to 'keep learning' and to 'connect' and 'be active' within their communities whilst taking responsibility for their own wellbeing. It celebrates the success of *LinkAge Plus*, a series of pilot projects which explored ways to improve local services for older people, and the announcement in 2010 of a £1 million government fund, *Active@60*, to help older people 'remain active, independent and positively engaged with society' (gov.uk, 2015). The fund was in addition to the *Ageing Well* programme, which ran until 2012 to support councils to 'provide a better quality of life for older people' (gov.uk,

2015).

Active@60 ran from March to December 2011, with the central aim of helping older people 'stay or become more active' in their communities, by engaging 'Community Agents' (community groups and volunteers, typically retired women aged between 55 and 69) to organise and promote activities which older people would find interesting (2012, Department of Work and Pensions, p. 2). The programme offered a range of creative opportunities through physical activities (including dance), social activities (including knitting circles and choirs) and those to develop skills (such as arts and crafts). Moreover, community groups were enabled through the programme to develop a more diverse range of activities for their members, such as one allotment group which introduced free art lessons, using a new creative activity as an incentive for people to join (p. 37). The programme's evaluation report on 'what worked well', *Outcomes of the Active at 60 Community Agent Programme* (2012), found that the opportunity to make friends and socialise (connect), get out of the house (be active) and learn new skills (keep learning) were in the top six reported benefits of the programme for older people. The report noted the value of engaging community groups in delivering this support, through providing a familiar meeting place for older people to participate in creative activities which facilitated opportunity for improved self-esteem and confidence, improved mental wellbeing and improved physical health (Hatamian *et al.*, 2012:47).

Similarly, evaluation of *Ageing Well*, a sector-led initiative to provide support for local authorities in England, delivered by the Local Government Association (LGA) and funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, addressed some of the issues and challenges presented by an ageing society (Harkness *et al.*, 2012 p. 2). Key outcomes of the programme encouraged direct involvement of older people, and included local authorities acquiring an 'increased awareness of the needs and challenges of an ageing society', putting structures in place to 'promote the wellbeing and quality of life of older people' and ensuring that 'council strategies are informed by the needs and aspirations of older people' (p. 8). It provided knowledge and

resources, such as strategies, action plans and engagement workshops, for promoting ways in which councils can create a 'good place to grow old'. The programme was to function as a 'catalyst and impetus for helping to change attitudes and improve approaches to tackling ageing issues' (p.49) while noting that such a 'cultural shift' does not come without challenges (p. 43). Significantly, it advocated creative ageing in, for example, Bristol, where LinkAge, (an initiative developed by the Bristol Older People's Partnership Board), worked with a local community arts organisation, *acta* (access creativity theatre arts), to set up an older people's arts group enabling older people to learn new creative skills through puppet making, creative writing and performance (LGA, n/d).

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), in their report *Quantifying and Valuing the Wellbeing Impacts of Culture and Sport* (2014), found that arts engagement is associated with a higher level of wellbeing 'valued at £1,084 per person, per year' (Fujiwara, Kudrna & Dolan: p.9), when assessed through the Wellbeing Valuation Approach (a method which uses self-reported levels of wellbeing). Two years later, DCMS published *The Culture White Paper*, the first of its kind in over 50 years, which stated that 'we are now beginning to understand better the profound relationship between culture, health and wellbeing' (2016 p.13). The white paper states that 'engaging with culture (visiting, attending and participation) significantly increases overall life satisfaction' (p.15), and acknowledges that there are an increasing number of case studies and research projects on 'the benefit of cultural activities for older people' (p.33). However, the white paper stated that more evidence of the wellbeing benefits of cultural engagement is required and called for more collaborative working between commissioners and the cultural sector. More positively, the white paper declared that the government would work with Arts Council England 'to ensure that publicly-funded cultural events [...] have a cumulative positive effect on health' (p.33); respond to recommendations made in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing inquiry report (published in 2017, see below); and work with initiatives including the

*What Works Centre for Wellbeing* and the *Centre for Ageing Better* to explore how to measure the impact that culture can have on older people's wellbeing. Arts Council England and the Baring Foundation's *Celebrating Age\_Fund* has been providing financial support since 2016 to enable cultural spaces to empower older people through programme development, commission older artists to inspire creativity in later life and enable older people to access creative activities throughout the community. Evaluation of these funded programmes may contribute to the evidence-base for 'creative ageing'.

*Agenda for Later Life 2015: A great place to grow older* set out Age UK's policy priorities for ageing, the principal one being to create 'communities where older people can have the opportunity to stay active and be recognised as valued members of society' (Age UK, 2015:5). In 2017, Age UK published an *Index of Wellbeing in Later Life* in response to the lack of a coherent means to measure wellbeing for older people and to support 'evidence-informed advocacy and policymaking' (Age UK, 2017, p. 3). The index includes 40 indicators of wellbeing across five domains: personal, social, health, resources and local. Links with 'creative ageing' can be seen in indicators under the domains of personal, social and health – thinking skills and intergenerational connections (personal); creative and cultural participation and social participation (social); physical activities and mental wellbeing (health). Furthermore, these indicators can be related directly to the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* - creative and cultural participation (take notice), physical activities (be active), thinking skills (keep learning), social participation (connect) and civic participation (give) (p. 6). Significantly, the report claims that engagement in creative and cultural activities, ranging from playing a musical instrument to taking part in a carnival, 'makes the highest contribution of 5.75 per cent to one's overall wellbeing' (p. 5).<sup>1</sup>

Reports such as the *Index of Wellbeing in Later Life* are welcome additions to the development of a creative ageing policy landscape, however for the

assertion that engagement in creative and cultural activities are of particular benefit more evidence on the efficacy of arts interventions in later life is required. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW) Inquiry Report *Creative Health* (2017) provides some examples of the contribution the arts can make to 'healthy ageing' in older adulthood and end of life care. However, gaps in the evidence base in areas relevant to later life, including prevention and management of long-term conditions and delaying admission into residential care are evident (p. 156).

The final recommendation in *Creative Health* is for evidence to be regularly reviewed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, so that it might be included in its guidance, leading to more evidence-informed policy. The challenge in consolidating the evidence stems from the diversity of creative activities which benefit people in later life and the heterogeneous methodologies and reporting styles adopted to provide evidence. *Creative Health* calls for mixed-methods research to demonstrate the financial reductions, such as reduction of GP visits and hospital admissions, possible through arts engagement in later life, combined with creative research methods such as film making, to enhance the relevance and impact of the evidence in persuading policy-makers and commissioners of the benefits of arts engagement in older age (Creative Health 2017; Pluye & Nha Hong 2014).

The arts play a vital role in creative and supporting feelings of wellbeing. Exploring our creativity offers myriad ways to connect, move, give, learn and notice – the five ways to wellbeing (Wiseman, Director of Public Health, Gateshead, quoted in Creative Health 2017).

### The Five Ways to Wellbeing in Action

The concept of wellbeing comprises two main elements: feeling good and functioning well. Feelings of happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity and engagement are characteristic of someone who has a positive experience of their life. Equally important for wellbeing is our functioning in the world. Experiencing positive relationships, having some control over



one's life and having a sense of purpose are all important attributes of wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>

As we can see, the NEF report wellbeing is defined as 'feeling good and functioning well' (Five Ways to Wellbeing NEF Report, Aked *et al.*, 2008:1)<sup>3</sup> and the 'functioning well' part, above, relates to our functioning in the world and includes having some personal volition and control (NEF report:2). Emphasis is laid on actions an individual can take rather than on instrumental or structural change which requires government intervention (NEF report p.4). The report suggests that, when combined, these elements may generate 'mental capital', comprising resilience, self-esteem, cognitive capacity and emotional intelligence (NEF report:13). Unlocking the 'mental capital' in older people to release their potential and promote their wellbeing are identified as priorities (Foresight Report – Executive Summary: p.34 and Full Report: p.206), and 'social networking' is seen as an important part of the solution. The Foresight report highlights depression and anxiety as significant issues for older people and demands a 'step change' in the governance of older people (Foresight Report – Executive Summary Report p. 33). Reductive images of ageing abound (Hogan 2016), and the need to combat negative stereotyping and the under-use of older people is highlighted to allow the mental resources of older people to become more fully available for themselves and society. This can be realised by the co-production model that is a key principle for many of the participatory arts that will be surveyed, which we will discuss below. Indeed, it is clear that community arts activity offers much of what is being advocated for older people, especially with regard to the importance of social networks and social activity which combat isolation and promote the development of social relationships and community engagement (NEF report:34-35). Furthermore, as Aked *et al.* point out, activity protects against cognitive decline in later life and wards off depressive symptoms and anxiety (NEF report :7). Some health authorities are making bold statements about the value of the *Five Ways*, e.g. 'By adopting the five ways to wellbeing, you can increase your life expectancy by 7.5 years', states North West NHS. Links between the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* and the arts for health have been made by Hogan & Warren (2013), Cameron *et al.* (2013) and Hogan (2017), who have noted that these five actions link to behaviours which

can develop in participatory arts projects. Hogan and Warren (2013) explored how this can be particularly beneficial for older women, who are often disempowered through gender discrimination and disenfranchising cultural factors. This chapter will further examine the Five Ways to Wellbeing explicitly in relation to arts engagement.

### Connect

Social participation has been shown as crucial for good mental-health (NEF report p.5). The report identifies social relationships as critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a 'buffer' against mental ill health among people of all ages (NEF report p. 5). The research synthesis concludes that sustained social relationships, when positively experienced, are 'supportive, encouraging, and meaningful'. An important finding is that wider, more 'superficial' relationships are *also* important for people's feelings of connectedness and sense of self-worth in relation to belonging to communities (ibid p. 6). Thus membership of cultural groups as a participant, or even as an audience member, can engender important aspects of wellbeing.

Choir master Gareth Malone is an example of someone who has popularised the health benefits of community singing through his television programmes (Warren and Hogan 2013; Hogan 2017). His musical endeavours with 'military wives', most of whom had never sung before, and his more recent projects with hospital staff, mail, water company employees and airport employees show the benefits of participation, offering stories of the boosting of individuals' self-confidence. Moreover, an important aspect of work-based choirs has been in bringing together people who would never normally meet: thus a hospital porter could get to speak to a consultant surgeon, for example. In the case of the Royal Mail, tensions between the workforce and management were palpable, and participation in the choir gave improved opportunities for interchange and shared understanding. Furthermore, the programmes illustrate how workplace morale was generally boosted through participation.<sup>4</sup> The military wives ended up singing to the royal family at the Royal Albert Hall. Notwithstanding these prestigious performances, the primary enduring legacy noted by the women

when interviewed was *enhanced social support and camaraderie*. For older populations, experiencing loneliness, this sense of social support and fellowship is important. Choirs are a type of community. It is evident that these community arts activities do encompass the essential aspects of the *Five Ways* with intensely social aspects and group bonding achieved through rehearsal and performances. Thus such engagement meets the 'connect' part of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*.

In visual-arts practice, connection can take place on many different levels, from the installation of an art work in a hospital, and the debates about it, to the production of art works in community settings. User and staff engagement and a sense of control over developments has been found to be crucial to the success of arts in hospital projects and in palliative settings (Daykin *et al.* 2010 p.43). Many community-based art projects give participants opportunities to make their own art. Studio-based approaches offer a range of social interactions and self-expression via the making process. Various ways of structuring studio experiences exist. These might include informal, round-table, spontaneous sharing or facilitated turn taking. Alternatively, more formal presentations by individuals to the group might be undertaken with or without group critique. Group art projects may enable communication by necessitating negotiation (Hogan & Coulter 2014): these can range from individuals producing a piece or segment of a larger work (for example, a small piece of stained glass for a window or a fabric segment for a collage or banner) to works which are conceived and executed through intensive processes of group discussion and on-going co-operation. What might seem like small differences can have large effects on how interactions with others are shaped. The latter example might give rise to feelings of insecurity about negotiating or being sufficiently assertive or being heard and valued. The Gorton Visual Arts Group's 'Rolling Programme', which ran from 2014-2015 in Manchester, empowered older artists to take collective control of their own visual arts' project through their involvement in the co-productive design of the project, which led to the production of a collective piece of work (People's Health Trust, 2017). A skilled group facilitator can help feelings to be articulated and can steer the experience in a positive direction, if an intensive group model is in action, as art therapists work

purposefully with group processes (Hogan 2016). However, even if the interaction is just a conversation with another participant during the tea break, there are opportunities to connect with others, improving social links and relationships, as older artists who participated in the Rolling Programme stated 'It's a very friendly community' and 'I've made lots of friends' (People's Health Trust 2017, p.4). The social interaction involved in arts engagement can help to overcome loneliness, which in turn can act as a protective factor against dementia (APPG 2017, pp.126-127).

### Be Active

The NEF research synthesis concluded that regular physical activity is associated with a greater sense of wellbeing and lower rates of depression and anxiety in all age groups (NEF report p.6). Aside from the biophysical aspects of activity, physical activity is thought to have important consequences for feelings of self-efficacy, as well as distracting negative thoughts (NEF report p. 7). Longitudinal studies provide some evidence to indicate that physical activity guards against mental decline in later life and against the onset of depression and anxiety (Kirkwood et al., NEF report p. 7). Furthermore, the report concludes that even small changes in activity levels of elderly people will enhance wellbeing (NEF report p. 6). Many cultural activities have physical aspects, aside from getting to and from the activities themselves. In the context of community singing, sessions often include vigorous physical 'warm-up' exercises, such as bending and stretching, mouth stretching movements and body shaking to limber up and relax muscles. The deep breathing required for singing has recognised physiological benefits. Being 'active' extends beyond the actual art activity, as choirs often also have social activities associated with them. There is often interim practice, so being in a choir often involves more than just the engagement in the class. There is also arguably a sense of responsibility which is positive, because a certain core number of participants is necessary for a good sound in each music part (bass, tenor, alto, soprano); if there are too few altos then that part will sound weak and have an impact on the overall sound, or if one is responsible for bringing the sheet music that day one must turn up, and so there is a positive sense of obligation. Often community choirs are short of men

for the bass section, so there is extra pressure for basses to attend regularly. There is an opportunity for affirmation, which elderly men may be lacking. The benefits of singing for older people have been recognised by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) which has endorsed 'A Choir in Every Care Home', a project recommended in a study on singing in later life (Clift *et. al* 2016). Though we are using the example of music, one can also see how a visual art-making activity might contain similar components from bending and stretching over a large art work, walking to the venue, helping to set up a room or serving refreshments. Both types of engagement are psychologically and emotionally stimulating in different ways, involve concentration and decision-making. Though dance is a more obvious example involving physical exertion, the above examples illustrate how different types of arts engagement meet the 'be active' part of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*.

### Take Notice

The NEF research synthesis suggests that heightened awareness and 'mindfulness' are associated with positive mental states, as well as 'self-regulated behaviour and heightened self-knowledge' (NEF Report p. 8). Taking notice is about being aware and being attentive. Opportunities for self-reflection and emotional engagement are inherent in the art process; when we sing well, we need to think about the meaning of the words and allow ourselves to feel emotion and consequently there is great satisfaction to be gained from self-expression through artistic engagement. Singing can be surprisingly cathartic and the performance exhilarating.

In the creation of physical art works, concentration and attention to detail may be an important aspect of the making process. There are instants of just being in the moment. Absorption and rapt attention can be satisfying and mood altering. There are also aspects of perspective and composition that require analytic reflection. There is consideration of the use of materials as surface results are sought. The NEF report, synthesising a large body of research, (p.5) notes that repetition can remove the potency of activities and one of the strengths of participatory arts engagement that it is varied and challenging. The

transformative and revitalising nature of art making is hard to capture. As one of the authors of the current chapter has noted elsewhere

... metaphors, symbols and the expressive use of art materials combine to create a rich language for self-expression and the opportunity for the translation of strong emotions into pictorial expression which can be visceral in its intensity. Differences in scale or perspective, tone and colour... allow for a potentially sophisticated articulation of thoughts and feelings.... The use of symbols enables the expression of moods and immaterial ideas or qualities, which would otherwise be hard to articulate. Tacit embodied feelings can be sensed and explored through the manipulation of materials. The process of making art works is in itself potentially revelatory, triggering strong feelings and revealing previously unexpressed issues. The materials themselves, their very substance, can be evocative. It is a sensory process in which the movements of the body and the tactile sensation of the materials are evocative' (Hogan 2016(b) p. 1).

In musical activity, musical arrangements and repertoire changes, and with art making there are endless opportunities to make unique works of art. For those working figuratively, there is also a practice of observation of nature; this practice can lead to a more acute consciousness of objects and landscapes and can heighten awareness. Thus such engagement meets the 'take notice' part of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*.

### Keep Learning

Learning in adulthood has been linked with positive effects on wellbeing, in terms of life fulfilment, cheerfulness and a sense of worth and resilience. Self-esteem, self-efficacy, a sense of purpose and competence and enhanced social integration are all linked with such engagement, as well as feelings of hope (NEF report p. 9). The learning of new musical repertoires and the development of new skills are essential elements of community singing in an ongoing challenge and a continual source of stimulation. Often, as part of the warm-up activity or after it, percussive rhythmic clicking and clapping is practiced to improve coordination and timing so as to improve overall performance. However, participation in a community choir might also lead to the positive decision to learn to play an instrument or to learn to sight-read sheet music. Furthermore, 'Silver Song Clubs' have been shown to promote learning 'as an antidote to

cognitive decline' in addition to improving quality of life and providing social support (APPG, 2017, p. 123).

In community arts and other artistic endeavours, there are manifold opportunities to learn new skills, from gaining expertise as to how to mix paints to create particular hues, knowing what effects different brushes or grades of pencil can create, acquiring technical skills required for representing three-dimensions or convincing perspective. There are more intellectual aspects that may also be immediately recognised. Looking at the work of other artists may become part of the practice for inspiration, and cultural reference, and can include trips to galleries and libraries, which can 'contribute to increased psychological wellbeing and have a part to play in age and dementia-friendly communities' (APPG, 2017, p. 128). A member of the group who has more knowledge and confidence about art and art practices may facilitate this. Often simple visual prompts such as a pile of post cards of art works may act as a stimulus. Art works can be responded to in very personal ways, triggering personal memories and reflections (Newman & Goulding 2013). There is also emotional learning to be had, as the image reveals unexpected aspects of self, which are then attended to. Images can surprise us, engagement with artworks can be 'personally and collectively beneficial for older people' and can 'create meanings that help maintain a positive sense of self' (Newman, Goulding & Whitehead 2014 p. 447). Thus such engagement meets the 'keep learning' part of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*.

### Give

The NEF research synthesis notes that feelings of pleasure and contentment are strongly associated with participation in community and social life; furthermore, that 'helping, sharing, giving and team-oriented behaviours are likely to be associated with an increased sense of self-worth and positive feelings' (NEF report p. 10). For older people, volunteering is associated with a sense of purpose and importantly offering help to others has been shown to be associated with reduced mortality rates (NEF report p.10). Engaging in community arts, there are many opportunities for altruism, from giving a fellow

choir, theatre or art-group member a lift home to more technical engagement such as researching venues, translating a song into English, writing a musical arrangement or setting up. Moreover, performance to assist fundraising and to support local social and community events is often an aspect of what community choirs do. Giving can also include nurturing others who are beginners and need more support. The altos might meet at a member's home, under the wing of an experienced singer, to practice a particularly complex section, for example. This might be sustained with home-made cakes brought by choir members! Likewise, a more experienced artist might teach a technique to another group member, instructing others in how to use materials or to achieve a particular effect, or more pragmatically simply to show them where materials are kept. An image might become a gift. Exhibitions can support good causes or raise awareness of particular cultural or political issues. Thus such engagement yields opportunities which meet the 'give' part of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*.

### Discussion & Conclusion

In terms of research-guided practice, there is a strong case to be made that community-based arts in health and participatory arts initiatives encompass all aspects of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* as illustrated in this essay and that they are also significant in aiding recovery from mental ill health, potentially touching on key recovery processes (Hogan 2017). Indeed, 'social participation' is a crucial factor in mental health resilience (Boyle & Harris 2009). Social networks have been characterised as 'the very immune system of society' (NEF Co-production Manifesto p. 8). It is clear that much participatory arts activity meets the ideals of co-production, which seeks to encourage people 'to use the human skills and experience they have to help deliver public or voluntary services'. Since participatory arts are often created in and by communities and sustained by those who engage in them, they produce resources that are 'no longer the preserve of professionals or commissioners, but a shared responsibility, both building and using a multi-faceted network of mutual support...' (NEF Co-production Manifesto pp. 10-11). As Nick Clegg put it in 2009, 'We should not all be supplicants at the state machine, but enabled to take charge of our health'. Or as David Cameron (2007) put it, 'The public become, not the passive recipients of



state services, but... doers, not the done-for' (cited NESTA discussion paper 2009 p.2).

The philosophical basis of co-production sees:

that public services, and technocratic management systems have become blind to the most valuable resources they process.... The fact that social needs continue to rise is not due to a failure to consult or conduct opinion research. It is due to a failure to ask people for *their help* and to *use their skills they have*.... Instead, people are defined entirely by their needs and so those needs become the only asset they have. No one should be surprised when people then behave in ways that perpetuate such needs (NEF Co-production Manifesto p. 11).

Unlocking the 'capital' of an ageing population can be an important facet of a significant cultural shift. Certainly, key aspects of co-production are evident within participatory arts and correspond with the call to unlock the mental capital of older people. A potential critique of co-production *per se* is that it is a bourgeois notion that will tend to use those who already have high levels of assets and side-line those with less well developed skills, creating pockets of profound deprivation and disenfranchisement. There is potential for women to get side-lined because of deference norms in certain communities and more generalised inequality which puts men forward as leaders. It is a model that is also perhaps potentially undervaluing of professional competences, which are important to arts production and facilitation, because it advocates that experts are not necessary. Facer and Enright (2016) provide a more complex model of co-production, which will in turn can help analysis of wellbeing interventions, as they emphasise the multidimensional nature of projects and the complexity of roles within them. The arts can't be viewed as a simple palliative, since they can be employed in a variety of ways with very different models of what participation and co-production means. Nevertheless, this essay has illustrated precisely how arts engagement can meet the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*.

If elements of co-production do reduce the distinction between producers and consumers, for example, or devolve leadership, then activities like that of choir master Gareth Malone given above might resist the criticism that the arts are being used as a palliative to sustain a capitalist model of employment relations. On the other hand, as

the New Economics Foundation emphasise, if co-production is used primarily as a means of using human skills and experience to help deliver public or voluntary services, then it can be characterised as a means of underpinning government cuts, possibly in a cynical manner. Increasingly framed within a neoliberal political agenda, these discourses about successful ageing expediently place the responsibility for the maintenance of well-being on the ageing individual. Additionally, successful ageing now includes them also serving as crucial ‘assets’ in maintaining and developing services (Bülow and Söderqvist 2014).

Nevertheless, on a less cynical note, further research (NEF: Happy Planet Index) would seem to confirm that *creativity and connections with others correlates with happiness cross-culturally*: ‘those who consider certain values such as loyalty and creativity to be most important are more satisfied with their lives than those who value things such as wealth and strong government more highly’ (p. 31). Therefore, despite our scepticism about neo-liberal principles endorsing ‘active self-entrepreneurship’ as a means of overcoming welfare dependency (Bülow and Söderqvist 2014), we nonetheless argue for creative ageing as proving the foundations for older-age wellbeing.

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<sup>1</sup> Data collected from the Understanding Society (USoc.) annual household survey in the UK.

<sup>2</sup> Definition on Ways to Wellbeing website page. [http://neweconomics.org/five-ways-to-wellbeing-the-evidence/?\\_sft\\_project=five-ways-to-wellbeing](http://neweconomics.org/five-ways-to-wellbeing-the-evidence/?_sft_project=five-ways-to-wellbeing)

<sup>3</sup> NEF Report refers to the Executive Summary unless the full report is referred to explicitly.

<sup>4</sup> However, in the later programmes, the choirs competed against each other, which may have annulled some of the original benefits of participation for the losers, though it did make for interesting television, (the competition was justified in terms of improving artistic standards which is an ongoing tension in community arts discourses).