



## About Us

**Aspex is a unique visual arts and educational charity based in Portsmouth. Our aim is to make the creation and enjoyment of art a more inclusive activity.**

We believe in the fundamental right that everyone has to access the arts and the importance of this to our physical and emotional wellbeing. We create varied opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to experience contemporary visual art - from looking and discussing, to making and curating.

We have a 41-year track record of connecting artists with people to make a social impact. Projects have been diverse, using art and artists to enable participants and audiences to learn new skills, take part in activities which increase confidence and self esteem, and bring people together through shared experiences.

Based in an historic former naval storehouse on the waterfront at Gunwharf Quays, a busy leisure and retail centre, our building provides an inspiring setting to welcome visitors to our creative hub/gallery base. From here we deliver an ambitious seasonal programme of exhibitions and events, while also reaching out across Portsmouth and South East Hampshire through offsite exhibitions, projects in the public realm and participation through our learning programme and Mobile Art Studio.

Our Learning Programme provides creative activities for a broad range of people: from young children and families, including locally based Refugee and Asylum Seekers; community groups; schools, colleges, universities; through to programmes for elderly people.





Artwork by Sylvia

## Who are we supporting

In 2014, Portsmouth Dementia Strategy predicted that there were 2186 people in Portsmouth with dementia, with 1703 of those still living in the community. Data indicates that this will increase by 24% by 2025.<sup>1</sup>

Our project specifically focuses on people with dementia still living in the community, those that have a diagnosis of dementia but live at home with family or support from carers. For these people there is a risk of isolation and a need to develop social connections. It is very easy for carers in particular to find themselves staying at home and having a much restricted social life. This leads to low levels of wellbeing and can lead to depression.

Our project enables people who are affected by low mood and often decreasing confidence and self esteem, the opportunity to form part of a welcoming and inclusive group, which promotes creativity and enjoyment. Participants are so focused in the sessions, living and finding fulfilment in the moment and through the achievement in completing a task of their choosing.

Alongside the workshops we enable a self-run carers support group in our cafe. This group enables carers to still be present in the building and in eye-sight of their loved one/family member, but provides some much needed respite and an opportunity to talk and share with others who understand their situation. Over the years we have been running the group, the carers group has been a lifeline to many of those involved, and many carers still attend even if their loved one can no longer attend or has passed away.

*'I would like to see this scheme in operation everywhere. I imagine it would be difficult for an outsider; to understand what a lifesaver this is, for participants and their carers and what long lasting benefits and friendships can result.'*

## The Project

**Aspex has been running the Generate programme since 2015, supporting people with dementia and their carers through visual arts activities in our community learning space. Over the past 7 years we have established a reputation for our work in this field and have become a firm part of the dementia community.**

The project involves weekly workshops for people with dementia to participate in visual arts activities. The two hour sessions every Friday are supported by two experienced local artists who are trained to support people with dementia. The lead artists guide and support each participant to take part in activities which are bespoke depending on their interests and needs. The space is set up like an open studio, with each participant able to take ownership of their own activities and work. As a result, each participant is creating their own body of work, in their own style and no two creations are the same. Some participants will be working in oil paints, while others are drawing. The workshops have a very personal approach, enabling the lead artists to build trust with the participants and over time encourage them to try new things and develop their skills.

Accessibility and inclusivity is key to this project. The person-centred approach to our work, means that we are able to support participants at all stages. We have developed a model which enables participants to work on their own projects, with tailored support and guidance, so everyone is working in a way which is appropriate to their interests and

needs. One challenge the participants often face is a realisation that they no longer have the same skills that they know they once had. Our way of working means we focus on the present and celebrate their current capabilities, rather than highlighting how their skills/functions have changed over time and reduces any possibility of comparison with each other, which could result in negative feelings.

*'When she is on her own she gets anxious and depressed. The group really lifts her mood - it is the only group that she attends now. The building is inspiring and light and the resources and exhibitions are of high quality. It is a place where she feels high self worth.'*

Our venue, an art gallery sited in the stunning, historic Vulcan Building, makes us unique to other provisions in the city. It is inspiring and aspirational and provides participants a calm, inviting place to visit. Often provision of this nature is held in tucked away spaces such as community centre halls or in health settings. Our Learning Space has been designed to not only be fit for purpose (with this target group in mind) but has also been designed to be fluid in the building, visible to our general audience and part of the everyday hub that is Aspex. It is a space that is used by all generations, with children through to adults coming together to create and spend time together.

*'The 2 hours of the class give me the only respite I get - and that is invaluable.'*





*'You can feel it - this is a very special place.'*

Throughout the year we also deliver a number of special events. Participants work is displayed in an annual exhibition in our Learning Space. This is a great way to celebrate the achievements of the group and share the outstanding work created with our wider audience. This year, the work was also exhibited offsite as part of a poster and billboard campaign around the city.

Another highlight of the programme has been the regular trips we are able to make. These outings provide an opportunity for participants, carers and staff to venture out together - they are a really important part of the programme because they help to build the social element of the group; it's when friendships really solidify. The day trips also take everyone out of their comfort zone and, by deviating from our routine for one day and visiting a new location, everyone becomes open to trying something new. Previous trips have included Tate Britain/Tate Modern, Watts Gallery, Mottisfont National Trust & Roche Court Sculpture Park. All our days out include experiencing a new art space, viewing artists' work and taking part in a creative activity - this is the only time that participants and carers create together, and it is

such a special moment. Days out also include a shared lunch and usually the much needed coffee and cake!

The Generate team responded quickly to the Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, devising a way forward that would enable Aspex to remain connected to the group and retain the routine of weekly sessions. All participants and carers were contacted, art materials were posted, a WhatsApp group set up, phone calls, newsletters and a Zoom coffee morning ensured that connection was maintained, before finally restarting in-person activity in July 2021.

Sadly, from time to time the group has to deal with the absence or death of a participant. Every absence is a void and impacts on the dynamics. The value of the group is clearly demonstrated by carers who have continued to attend alone, while many families have donated on losing their loved ones, and have stated that the artwork made by them is greatly valued.

Aspex is part of the Portsmouth Dementia Action Alliance, led by Solent Mind. We are working together to provide Dementia Friendly venues across the city. We have established relationships with organisations and service providers such as the Alheimers Society, Age UK, Remind (Solent Mind) and St James' Hospital Memory Clinic, who refer participants to us and work with us to promote our offer.

## Project outcomes

Over the past 7 years of delivering Generate, we can evidence the following outcomes:

- People with dementia have learnt new skills and had new experiences - resulting in improved health and wellbeing.
- Carers felt supported and had improved quality of life - resulting in improved health and wellbeing.
- Communities are connected through a dementia friendly environment; audiences are more dementia aware and value the importance of learning.
- Artists, educators and volunteers have been trained to support people with dementia.

Through this project key learnings about working with people with dementia include:

- The value of being open to exploration and unlocking memories through creative activity.
- Ensuring that carer and artist/participant are in each other's sightline.
- Noticing the speed of decline in participants, often before carers who are living with the condition.
- Wonderful results are achieved by treating people as people, taking a bespoke approach.
- Routine and consistency are key to success.
- Participants express themselves through the art when speech or writing is problematic.
- There can be both a high level of concentration as well as fun!

We have developed a robust methodology for capturing impact and evaluating the project. This includes 4 years of data collection using a 'Reflection Questionnaire' based on the New Economic Foundation's '5 Ways to Wellbeing' Health & wellbeing framework (aimed at improving Mental Health and Wellbeing for all), as well as an annual Satisfaction Survey developed with the University of Portsmouth.



From our most recent satisfaction survey in 2020, we can evidence:

100%

felt in a positive mood while attending the group

67%

feel the group has made them more confident in other areas of their life

100%

of our carers surveyed stated they found the carers support group a useful service

100%

found the workshops stimulating

83%

feel their mood has improved outside of the group as a result of attending

## Project Feedback

*'Living with dementia has closed down many of the activities I used to do. Having a regular slot on a Friday morning to meet up with others and be creative has become a really important part of my week. And the very positive attitude of Roy and Abi makes me feel my work is worthwhile.'*

*'I am pleased to say that from the start of joining, the pleasure of the Aspex art group has added to a real enjoyment to my life, together with warm friendship with my fellow artists and pleasure to my life.'*

*'I enjoy the support and friendship of other carers, the advice and sense of the shared experience. It's encouraging to know that one is not alone. I also enjoy the artists having such a stimulating and enjoyable experience.'*

*'My wife has sadly passed away, but the 18 months that she spent attending the sessions were life enhancing. Inspirational.'*

Artwork by Jo

*'Thank you for a wonderful service, of benefit to all, an absolute lifesaver in fact. Don't know how on earth I would have coped without it.'*



Artwork by Ray



*'He loved being part of the group and having something really positive to do. Painting was new to him and it turned out to be one of the best activities he's ever taken part in. Wish I'd discovered this before he had Alzheimer's.'*



*'He (my Dad) liked the peaceful, supportive environment and when we left at the end of the session he had a spring in his step, was chatty, jolly and delighted that he'd done so well and that the team had been so complimentary about his painting. I felt so proud of him. It has been lovely to see him show an interest in something that he can do by himself and feel independent. The team were all very welcoming, understanding and supportive and made my dad feel at ease, so I wanted to say thank you for that and for giving me a little bit of my dad back.'*



## Case Studies

### Barbara

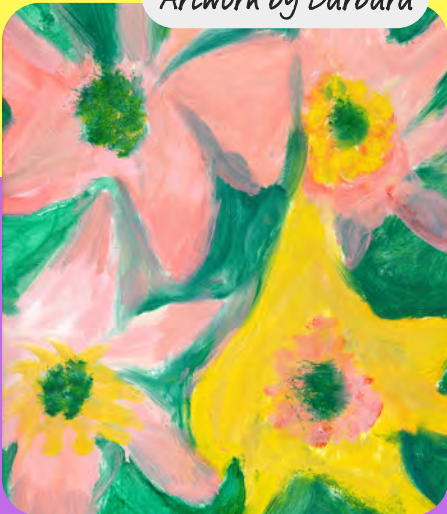
Barbara is an original member of Generate and had limited art experience in her life. She began with simple colouring and drawing exercises and quickly progressed to painting, where she discovered her love for oil paints. Now regularly working at an easel, Barbara produces large scale oil paintings, 'Painting like proper artists do' as she says.

*'Friday can't come around fast enough. There are friendship groups - it's the high point of my week - better than darts!'*

In 2016 Barbara was offered an Artist Residency at Aspex, an opportunity to really immerse herself in her work and also take part in some additional mentoring from other artists. This residency also really promoted the high quality of work being created to the wider audience of Aspex.

(Barbara goes to darts twice a week and now regularly creates paintings for members of her darts group. She is so well known for her painting now, she often gets requests from her friends and family).

Artwork by Barbara



*'One of the main things I've learnt about the participants is to never underestimate them! I've been astounded by the work they have created and I'm constantly surprised by their willingness to try new things, to push themselves and their ability to achieve.'* – Vicky Chapter, former Learning Programme Manager

### Roger

Roger was a regular member of the group from 2015-2020. He developed his own unique style producing detailed line drawings using fine felt pens. Although the work would begin without a predetermined outcome, the mostly abstract drawings often revealed personal references, such as the faces of Roger's grandchildren.

During the class Roger said he felt absorbed in his work *'in a sort of mindfulness way'*. He felt safe in the familiar.

Roger passed away in 2020 but his wife is still in contact with the group. In 2018 she told us that they would quite often talk about the art class at home and show visitors Roger's painting of Spinnaker Tower which still hangs on their living room wall.

Artwork by Roger



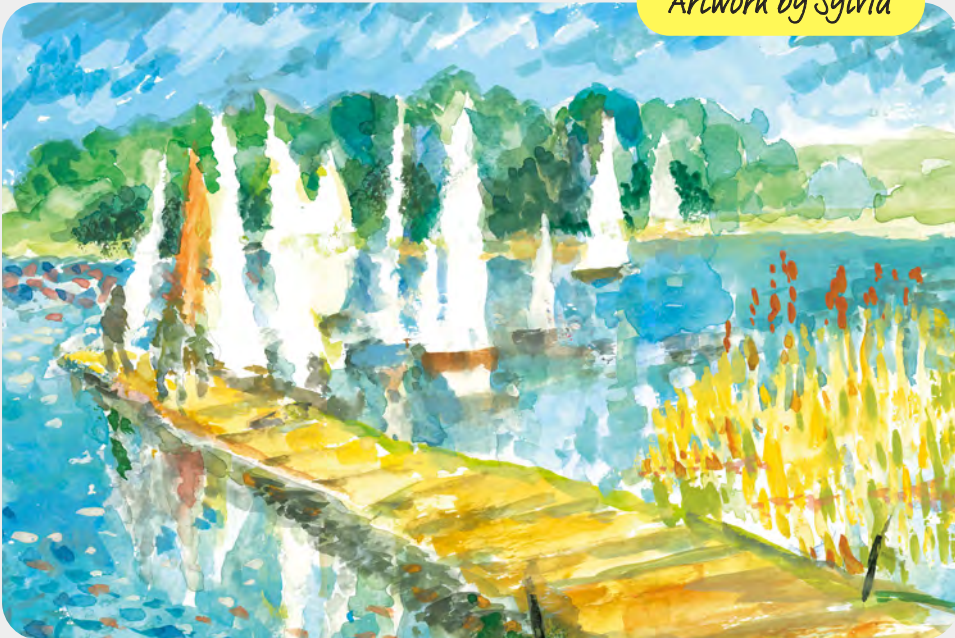
## Sylvia

Sylvia has been a long term member of the group. Before retirement Sylvia spent her career working as an art teacher and brings a lifetime of experience in painting. Unfortunately, Sylvia suffered a stroke a few years ago which has affected the right hand side of her body and the use of her right hand. Never one to give up, she has worked to develop new ways of holding her brush to enable her to continue painting - the most important thing for her is to build adaptations to overcome the disability.

Sylvia now produces the most wonderful paintings in watercolour and gouache and regularly brings in photographs and her old sketches & paintings to create works in her 'new style'.

She tells us that between sessions she talks about her work with others and this is very enjoyable, if she misses a session it affects her.

*Artwork by Sylvia*



## The Team

Our dedicated team is vital to the success of the group. Our two Lead Artist Facilitators have been working on the project for the past 6 years, both joining the organisation initially as volunteers to gain skills in working in this field. They are supported by the full Aspex staff and volunteer team, all of whom took part in Dementia Awareness training and regularly work on the monitoring and evaluation for the project.

We refer to our staff & volunteer team, our participants and our supporters as our 'Aspex Family' – each individual plays a part in making the work we do so special.



## Roy Eneas

### Lead Artist Facilitator

*'It was exactly the sort of work I was looking for, using Art as a method of slowing down the effects of dementia in our participants, and for our participants to continue to produce credible art works as an individual. Having retired early myself to look after my father in his later stages of dementia, I have had a personal understanding of dealing with the problems and care of people with dementia, which has been valuable during my work with Generate. It is definitely the most satisfying job I have had in my career!' – Roy*

Roy joined Aspex in 2013 as a volunteer following his retirement as an artist, illustrator, photographer & art teacher in London. Following a short period volunteering on the Generate project, Roy became one of our Lead Artist Facilitators.

Roy is now also working with the Alzheimer's society, using transferable skills developed through the Generate project.

Image (right): Roy and Abi with two Generate participants.

## Abi Wheeler

### Lead Artist Facilitator

Abi also joined Aspex as a volunteer, supporting our front of house team on a Friday morning, at the same time as the Generate workshops, so was very familiar with the programme. Shortly afterwards she began to work on the Learning Programme and then joined Roy as a Lead Artist Facilitator for Generate.

Outside of her work with Aspex, Abi is Creative Director of Ryde Arts on the Isle of Wight and lead on Ryde's cultural programme for Historic England's Heritage Action Zone. Her own practice takes inspiration from aspects of British heritage and she enjoys working in response to archive material and physical collections.

A constant challenge is the deterioration in the participant's condition, different rates depending on the nature of the illness. While this is the case, it is also the case that the Lead Artists are more 'tuned in' to the group and are more personally resilient.

*'The needs of the participants are constantly evolving which places a demand on Roy and I to ensure that all members of the group have an appropriate level of support. As dementia manifests itself differently in different people it is difficult to plan ahead. We need to be flexible and able to improvise week to week as the members of the group change and/or different combinations of participants are in attendance.'* - Abi

## Kathleen Wilson

### Volunteer

Kathleen has been a long-term volunteer on the Generate project since 2017.

The role of the regular volunteer Kathleen has been invaluable, she is reliable, grounded and a huge support to both lead artists- her presence means that their focus is always on participants.

Kathleen tells us that Generate is never not on her mind - she is always looking for things to bring to stimulate the creativity.

*'Roy and Abi do an incredible job, caring, patient and great support to the artists. They can do no more. There is always a lovely atmosphere and they are extremely dedicated and experienced'* - Kathleen





*'Generate is a joy! It has built over the years and expanded Aspex's engagement programme. The Generate group is an integral part of the Aspex family. Their presence makes Aspex a richer and more holistic experience'* – **Joanne Bushnell, Director**

**We would like to thank all the funders who have supported the Generate programme over recent years.**

Portsmouth City Council, Reconnecting Communities (2021–22)  
Charles Hayward Foundation (2021–22)  
The Southern Co-operative (2021–22)  
The Rayne Foundation (2017–2021)  
Arts Council England, Catalyst:Evolve (2017–2021)  
Portsmouth NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (2015–2016)

Individual donations, including those from family and friends of participants.



The content for this report is drawn from a detailed independent evaluation by Janet Mein, 'Aspex Portsmouth: GENERATE Artists Living with Dementia Project' covers the period 2017–2021 and is available on request.