2022

Bits & Pieces: Project Review

Erin Partridge

Dominican University of California, erin.partridge@dominican.edu

Sadie Harmon

Elder Care Alliance

Katie Wade

Front Porch

Casey O'Neill

Front Porch

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2022.AT.REPORTS.01>

Survey: Let us know how this paper benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Partridge, Erin; Harmon, Sadie; Wade, Katie; and O'Neill, Casey, "Bits & Pieces: Project Review" (2022). *Art Therapy | Project Reports*. 1.

<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2022.AT.REPORTS.01>

This Project Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Art Therapy | Faculty Collections at Dominican Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art Therapy | Project Reports by an authorized administrator of Dominican Scholar. For more information, please contact michael.pujals@dominican.edu.

Bits & Pieces Project Review

AUTHORED BY

ERIN PARTRIDGE, PH.D; SADIE HARMON, MFA;
KATIE WADE, M.ED; CASEY O'NEILL, MPA

Our Goals

Explore the impact of creative collaboration on social connections between participants and volunteers in a friendly visiting program.

What is the significance of a participatory based research process where older adults, staff, and volunteers are all primary contributors?

How can we co-design programming to elevate a sense of meaning and connection for staff, participants, and volunteers?

Project Description

- 1** Formed an inclusive advisory group that included Social Call older adult participants, volunteers, staff and Elder Care Alliance facilitators and co-researchers.
- 2** The co-researchers established a critically important co-learning process through virtual group meetings and 1:1 conversations with researchers. This group met monthly for five months.
- 3** Rather than emphasizing creative experiences within an existing Social Call dyad, the advisory group valued a wide-reaching intervention. The group created Bits & Pieces (B&P), a menu of phone-based creative offerings such as a poem, joke, story, recipe, and more, to be offered to all Social Call members.
- 4** Social Call members were invited to participate and were given the choice to receive or deliver a B&P phone call. Social Call staff provided guidelines for the B&P calls.
- 5** Researchers debriefed 1:1 with advisory group members and staff to determine which mechanisms were most or least successful.
- 6** Social Call is collaborating with Creative Spark to deliver creative arts activity packets to all its members. Member creations will be collected in a 'zine', a do-it-yourself magazine, an idea that the B&P co-researchers proposed. While SC did not have appropriate resources at the time, we've since received a grant for the zine.

Learnings

LEARNING #1 THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS IS THE INTERVENTION

Staff assumed two things prior to the project:

1. The intervention would be something creative between volunteer & participant within their regular visits.
2. The chosen intervention would create meaningful impact.

We learned that neither of these were the most important factors. In fact, the collaborative group conversations were the intervention in and of themselves. Advisory group members reported feeling heard and valued during these calls at a higher rate than the Bits & Pieces intervention.

LEARNING #2 MAKE SPACE FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Research about creative aging programs has long understood the importance of social connection within creative programming. The meeting agenda itself should include time for general life updates, stories, or creative conversation prompts. This was not anything fancy, we just slowed the pace and pursued casual conversations as they occurred.

Creating this space allows individuals to be authentic and real; without this, the outcome will be compromised.

LEARNING #3 HONOR THE NEED PRESENTED

Some program participants had a high level of social need due to isolation or loneliness. Callers and staff didn't press the Bits & Pieces delivery if the person presented this need. In addition, one participant needed a social services referral so the conversation focused on that.

**"We'd do this again in a heartbeat!"
- Social Call Staff**

Learnings Continued

LEARNING #4 INCLUDE A VARIETY OF PERSPECTIVES

During the process, staff shared feelings of discomfort when the process felt slow. By the end of the project, it was abundantly clear how valuable the process itself was towards feelings of meaning and connection; ensuring a place where all voices could be heard. Making space for connection meant more inclusion and robust decision-making.

LEARNING #5 RESPECTFUL FACILITATION

The process should be coordinated by experienced facilitators who can keep the group on track while still respecting and hearing all contributions. For instance, we established a 'parking lot' for off-topic suggestions and needs.

LEARNING #6 ACCESSIBILITY

Any co-design process should be carefully planned in order to be accessible to all participants. This doesn't need to entail a costly investment of resources. Instead, listen to participant needs and be willing and able to modify format, timing, and tools so that everyone can participate