

Creative dissemination: Using found poetry with people living with dementia to share experiences

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We worked with a group of experts by experience on a survey about public involvement in research with people living with Dementia. This survey was completed by Dementia researchers, facilitators of public involvement and experts by experience.

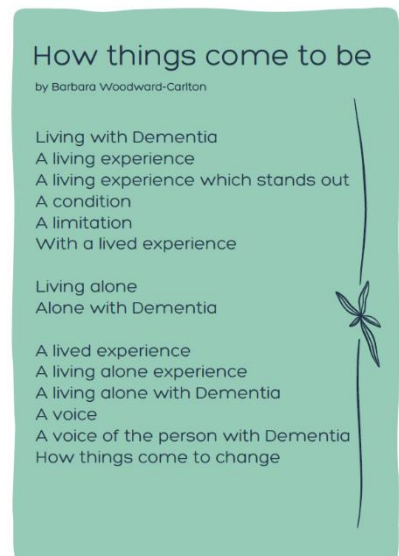
As the project developed, the group felt there were important messages they wanted researchers and research funders to hear. Not only about what works and what doesn't, but how dementia and research involvement is experienced.

As a group, we decided that found poetry offered a creative way to communicate these messages.

What is found poetry?

Found poetry is created by taking words and phrases from an existing text and reframing them. In our case this was the survey data about challenges of public involvement with people living with Dementia and key learning.

The process involves identifying words and phrases that stand out to you as a reader of the text, and then arranging them into a poem, with some adjustments and additions. Like a collage with words.



What we did:

We ran a workshop to co-create the poems as a group. But before we got stuck in, we held a preparatory meeting about 2 weeks before.

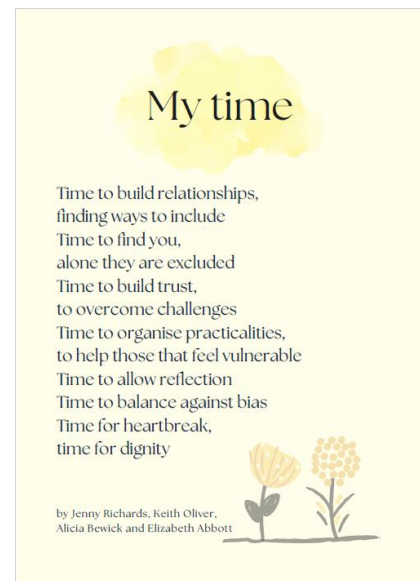
Preparation

In a meeting we talked through what found poetry is and what might feel worrying or unfamiliar about poetry. It was important to acknowledge that poetry can feel uncomfortable or intimidating. We spoke openly about people's past experiences of

poetry, particularly anxiety linked to school, “getting it right,” or the idea that poetry has to rhyme or follow strict rules.

We talked together about:

- The many different forms and styles poetry can take
- That poetry can be written or spoken (many felt a connection with poetry through music/song)
- That poetry is a vehicle for expression: a way of sharing experiences, emotions and ideas so that a reader or listener might feel something similar.



This helped to reduce pressure and started us thinking about how we could co-create poems in a way that felt achievable and supportive for everyone.

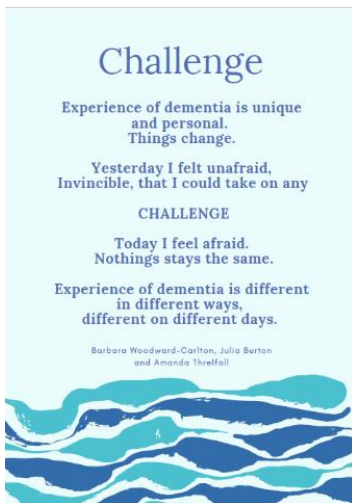
We agreed that, before the workshop each group member would receive a pack by post containing:

- The printed, anonymised survey data¹ on challenges and key learning
- Clear, step-by-step instructions what they should do in preparation of the workshop
- Pens, markers and a notebook

Materials were sent by post so participants could read the survey data in their own time in preparation of the workshop. Group members were invited to highlight words or phrases that stood out; and make notes about why something felt important, feelings and thoughts about what they read.

¹ The survey did not collect any personal data or characteristics, only the area of participants' work. However, data was anonymised where specific organisations or projects were mentioned.

The workshop



The workshop took place online. We:

1. Revisited what found poetry is and the steps involved
2. Split into two groups of 4 including one staff member who facilitated and co-created
3. In quick-fire style, looked through the survey data together on screen, and invited people to call out words or phrases that stood out to them.
4. Collated the chosen words and phrases on an online white board and started shaping them into a shared poem.

We used simple literary techniques such as repetition, grouping similar ideas, rhythm and emphasis

This was a collective process and we quickly noticed that we all had different strengths. For example, some people were very good at 'spotting' ideas that would go together or interesting alliterations. Some highlighted rhythm and others had visual ideas of how the poem would look once written down.

What happened

Some participants felt so inspired that they began writing their own poems even before the workshop. The group was excited and proud having created something powerful together that was rooted in our project findings.

We brought all the poems, both group and individual, together into a booklet, which also included artwork the group had produced during the project. Each poem was printed as a poster, and some were recorded and edited into a [video](#).

This became not only a creative tool for communication but also an important part of the involvement itself, sharing memorable experiences and mixed emotions such as anxiety and joy.

