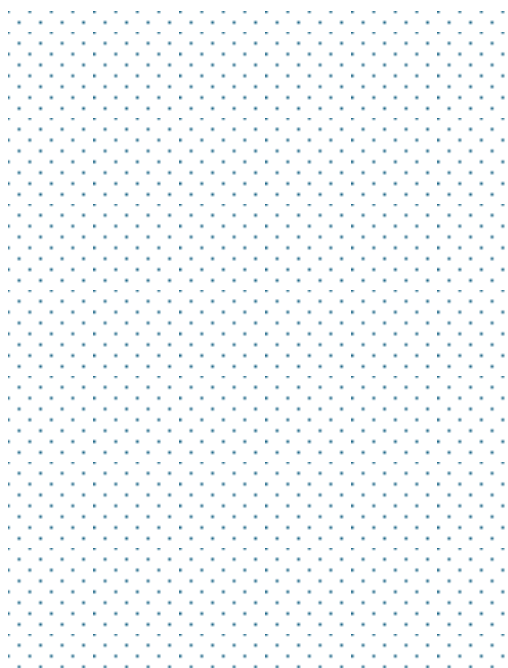


“It Gives Us Freedom To Be Ourselves”: How Mindfulness And Arts-based Interventions Promote Meaningful Engagement In Dementia Care

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KEY TAKEAWAY: Integrating mindfulness within arts-based programmes affirms personhood, restores agency, and promotes social connection and well-being in people with dementia and their caregivers while providing opportunities for meaningful engagement.

INTRODUCTION	METHODS	RESULTS	CONCLUSIONS	REFERENCES
People with dementia (PwD) face stigma, discrimination, and exclusion from social and creative activities, as societal misconceptions erode recognition of their personhood. Declining autonomy intensifies loneliness and social isolation. Arts-based programmes emphasising creative expression and mindful presence offer promising pathways to restore agency, affirm identity and promote connection. By engaging the body and senses, these approaches enable PwD to reconnect with themselves and others through dance, movement, and shared experience.	This work draws on "The Mind your Next Dance" (MYND) program, developed using an exploratory, multiphase sequential mixed methods design. International perspectives of PwD, caregivers and dementia experts were incorporated through qualitative interviews (n=31), a focus group (n=10) and a Delphi study (n=30). Reflexive thematic analysis, guided by a critical realist approach, explored how mindfulness and dance movement psychotherapy (DMP) promote engagement and well-being and challenge stigma.	Integrating mindfulness within arts-based programmes can foster positive outcomes for PwD and caregivers. Mindful attention to movement, breath, and multi-sensory experience enable PwD to reconnect with their bodies and interact with others, facilitating emotional release and meaning-making. Participants reported improved communication, relational closeness, and greater confidence in self-expression. Emphasising sensory engagement over verbal instruction, with no “right” or “wrong” way to participate, empowered PwD to engage on their own terms.	Mindfulness and arts-based programmes can transform cultural narratives that frame dementia negatively by affirming personhood, autonomy, and social inclusion. Safe, non-judgemental spaces enable PwD to explore suppressed emotions that might otherwise manifest as behavioural disturbances. Person-centred, strengths-based approaches grounded in individual preferences and remaining abilities support self-expression, social connection, and identity reclamation, improving mood, well-being, and quality of life for PwD and their caregivers.	Fancourt, D., & Finn, S. (2019). <i>What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review</i>. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. Gialama, M. (2023). <i>The “Mind Your Next Dance”(MYND) Programme: a mixed methods study of a mindfulness-based dance movement psychotherapy for people with mild to moderate dementia and their caregivers</i>. Vol. 1 (Doctoral dissertation, National University of Ireland Maynooth). Karkou, V., Aithal, S., Richards, M., Hiley, E., & Meekums, B. (2023). Dance movement therapy for dementia. <i>Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews</i>, (8). • CONTACT  For further information: mariagialama@bath.edu X: @maria_glm mariagialama.com/en 