

Creative Arts Engagement To Enhance Cognitive And Emotional Well-being In Older Adults

A Community-based Feasibility Study

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BACKGROUND

Creative engagement through the arts **stimulates cognitive processes** such as memory, attention and problem-solving ¹, and fosters **social connection** ²— essential for mental wellness in later life ³.

For older persons of Chinese heritage, traditional practices such as embroidery and indigo dyeing reinforce cultural pride and continuity ⁴. Yet evidence on culturally adapted creative interventions remains limited, particularly within diaspora communities in regional UK settings.

Theoretical Frameworks

Erikson's Psychosocial Development ⁵ · Activity Theory⁶ · Continuity Theory⁷ · Sociocultural Theory of Creativity⁸ · Self-Determination Theory⁹

OBJECTIVES

1. Explore how textile arts may support cognitive engagement and fine motor coordination
2. Examine social interaction in fostering emotional support and community
3. Understand how cultural art forms contribute to identity, pride and belonging
4. Identify barriers to participation and facilitation strategies to address them
5. Generate practical recommendations for inclusive, culturally responsive programmes

METHODS

'The House of Evergreen Arts' — Five Month Artist Residency, Newcastle Chinatown

Weekly sessions (1–4 pm) · Taster sessions · Drop-in & snowball sampling

Embroidery · Indigo Dyeing · Block Printing · Observational Drawing · Sashiko · Photography

Participants: Aged ≥60 yrs; English/Cantonese/Hakka speakers; North East England

Data: Written reflections, audio recordings & semi-structured video interviews (15–30 min)

Analysis: Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic framework; inductive coding; 28 initial → 18 refined codes → 5 themes



RESULTS — FIVE KEY THEMES

13 of 17 participants (aged 64–80; 11 women, 2 men) completed the 5-month programme



Learning & Skill Development

Participants acquired embroidery, appliqué, Sashiko, indigo dyeing, block printing and smartphone photography — many continuing to practise outside sessions.

"I started everything from scratch. I keep learning until I complete the creation... I enjoy the satisfaction and adoration of a finished work." — JI



Social Interaction & Community

Friendships, mutual encouragement and a family-like atmosphere developed through shared creative tasks. The group named themselves 'The House of Evergreen Arts.'

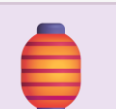
"We are learning from each other. We are helping each other. We are like a family." — AL



Enjoyment & Satisfaction

Sessions described as lively and fulfilling. Participation in the 2025 Chinese New Year Parade was a shared highlight, contributing to collective achievement.

"I create colourful works and feel satisfied and happy." — JI



Cultural Heritage & Identity

Indigo dyeing (Bai tribe, Yunnan) and Japanese Shibori sparked conversations on sustainability and slow craft, reconnecting participants with heritage and personal history.

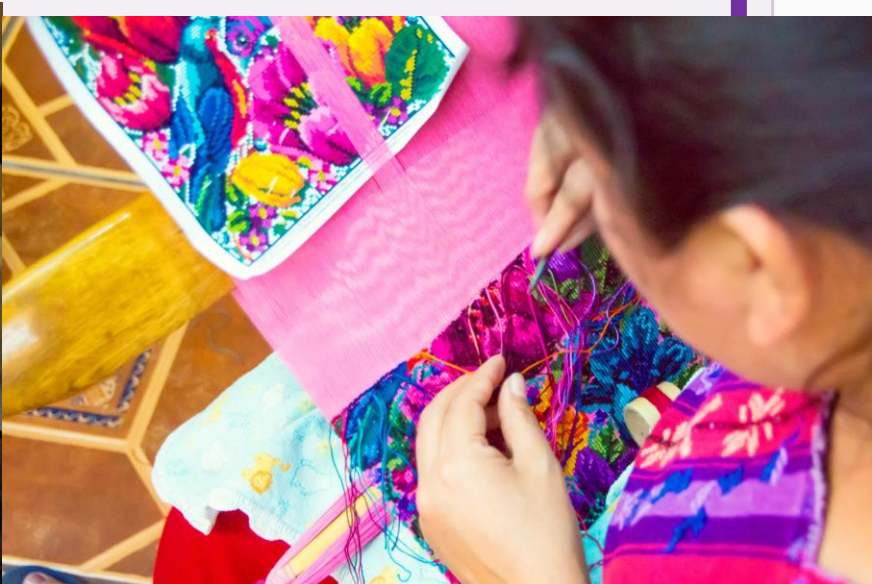
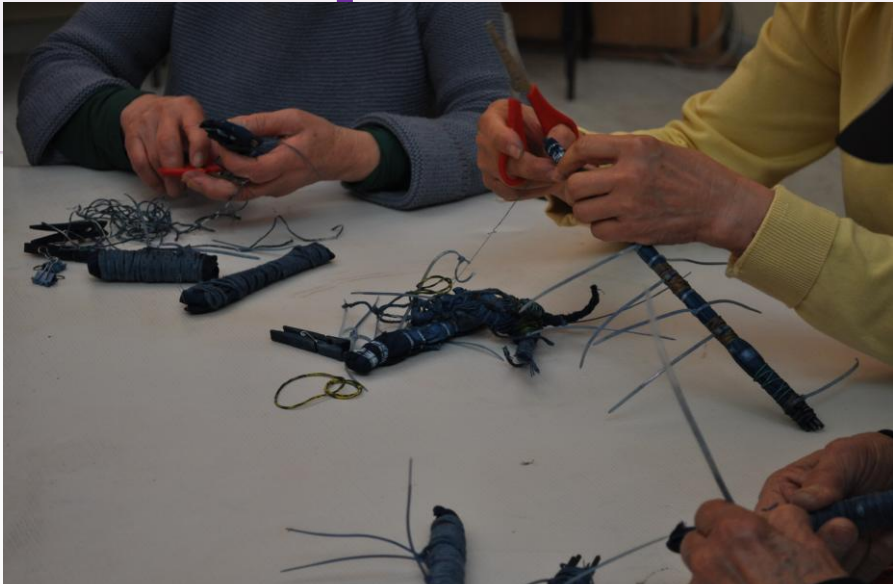
"I am very happy to participate in a cultural and traditional handicraft project that has been around for hundreds or even thousands of years!" — AL



Challenges & Perseverance

Physical limitations, language barriers and initial self-doubt were overcome through tailored facilitation, peer support and determined persistence.

"What matters is persistence and perseverance." — JI



KEY FINDINGS

13

Participants Completed

64–80 yrs · 11F 2M

5

Month Residency

Weekly 1–4 pm sessions

5

Emergent Themes

From 28 → 18 → 5



Culminated in the 2025 Chinese New Year Parade & public exhibition, 3 March 2025, Newcastle Chinatown — and the formation of a new Chinese Elders Craft Group

COGNITIVE & PHYSICAL ENGAGEMENT

Memory Recall

Creative tasks stimulated autobiographical memory and recall of cultural traditions — aligned with 'use-dependent plasticity' theory.

Fine Motor Coordination

Embroidery, stitching and detailed textile work exercised hand dexterity and sustained physical engagement.

Problem-Solving & Attention

Navigating new techniques exercised executive function; sustained concentration required over 3-hour sessions.

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

Enhanced Confidence

Mastering new skills built self-efficacy; participants shared work with family and took pride in creative achievements.

Improved Emotional Well-being

Sessions described as lively and positive; creative expression served as a non-verbal emotional outlet.

Strengthened Social Bonds

New friendships, collaborative decision-making and mutual encouragement created a family-like community.

Cultural Reconnection

Participants reconnected with heritage; those new to Newcastle found meaningful cultural engagement for the first time.



CONCLUSIONS

Culturally adapted participatory arts **can enhance psychosocial well-being¹⁰ and cognitive activity¹¹** among older adults — supporting person-centred, inclusive dementia care strategies.

The project offers a promising model for **creative ageing**, demonstrating how arts programmes can foster personal growth, social connection and cultural affirmation — as a **scalable, low-cost community health intervention**.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Relational approach

Value the shared journey of creation over the final product (Relational Aesthetics).

2

Cultural responsiveness

Incorporate familiar cultural symbols, traditions and languages to enhance emotional resonance and reduce barriers.

3

Accessibility & flexibility

Adaptive materials, drop-in formats and multilingual facilitation to accommodate varying abilities and attendance.

4

Invest in skilled facilitation

Artist-facilitators should be technically proficient and sensitive to the diverse needs of older persons.

5

Mixed-methods evaluation

Capture both qualitative insights and, where appropriate, quantitative outcomes to build the evidence base.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

No pre/post measures

Self-reported perceptions rather than objective outcomes; susceptible to recall and social desirability bias.

Small purposive sample

n=13; community-recruited; may not represent broader older adult populations.

Cultural scope

Primarily Chinese descent in Newcastle — limits generalisability to other cultural/geographic contexts.

Future directions

Longitudinal outcomes · Cross-cultural implementation · Mixed-methods designs · Policy translation for dementia prevention.



Reference



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