

Film-making by people with dementia helps raise their social status and provides an 'aide memoire'

Our project suggests that making 15-minute films with care home residents in the early stages of the disease is aiding their social inclusion and understanding by others of their previous lives.

Dr Andrea Capstick hit on the idea of making short films with people with dementia after looking for ways to involve them more fully in her undergraduate and Masters' courses at the University of Bradford.

'The idea had been to make the films to show to the students, but after I completed the training in participatory video, I wanted to open it up for people with dementia across the board, and thought this would make a good research project,' says the lecturer in dementia studies.

So after doing a small feasibility study with six people in a day centre run by the Alzheimer's Society in Leeds, she is now in the process of making a suite of short 15 minute films with up to 15 care home residents in the early stages of the disease and six of their formal carers about what matters to them.

Participatory video, or 'PV', encourages individuals from marginalised groups to take an active role in creating a highly personal film in a bid to make them feel more socially included and boost their self-esteem.

Social inclusion, wellbeing, and activity levels of each care home resident will be formally assessed, using validated scales,

before, mid-way, and a month after completion to see if the impact is sustainable. And the cost will be compared with that of other activities to see whether it offers good value for money.

'One of the biggest advantages is that care staff and service users enjoy working on it together. We live in a visual and digital age, which is of interest to a lot of care staff, while the glamour element is very meaningful for older people.'

Dr Andrea Capstick

Dr Capstick's feasibility study showed that her subjects often couldn't join in group activities at the centre, which did little to enhance their social standing, and made them feel left out. 'A lot of activities involve word games, quizzes, and bingo, which rely on cognitive acuity, and these women weren't very assertive either, so they got left on the sidelines,' she says.

But all that changed after the films were made, she recalls. 'They were proud of what they had done. And there was a certain amount of surprise among the



others that they had been able to do it. The others started talking to them about it, rather than just thinking of them as people who couldn't do a crossword.'

PV is quite a technical process, and not really appropriate for people with sensory disabilities or dementia, she acknowledges, so it has been adapted, by using a very small and inexpensive hand held camera that is easy to use.

Participants are consulted about their preferred content, using visual and aural prompts, such as family photos, archive material, and musical clips – and for those with mobility issues, this is filmed on their behalf.

Plenty of non-technical tasks

But there are plenty of hands-on opportunities for those who can't do the technical stuff: selecting the images they find interesting and developing story lines; deciding what to keep in and take out; supplying voice-overs; and even deciding who gets to see the finished product.

Relatives can also get involved too. The only subject matter that is off limits would be a film about the care home itself.

'The older people we are talking to grew up in an era where movies were the height of glamour and romance, so the idea of being in a film is important to them,' says Dr Capstick, adding that it has the additional benefit of serving as a permanent aide memoire.

One of the other measures will be the impact on staff, who, she says, enjoy working on these projects. 'There's often a pretty big age gap between the staff and residents, and they [staff] struggle to find things to talk to them about. But they are often surprised at how eventful a person's life has been and what they have done.'

Dr Capstick will use her experiences to draw up guidelines on using PV in similar settings – from the basic kit required to the ethical issues. And she hopes not only to screen the films at relevant conferences, but also to enter them in competition.

Project: [Can participatory video enhance social participation and wellbeing for people with dementia in residential social care?](#)

Lead: [Dr Andrea Capstick \(a.j.capstick@bradford.ac.uk\)](mailto:a.j.capstick@bradford.ac.uk)

Institution: [Bradford Dementia Group, University of Bradford](#)

Completion: [Spring 2013](#)