

Godly Play and Dementia Conference 12th July 2014

How can we begin to summarise the events of a conference? It was such a varied day with opportunities for meeting others, networking, listening to inspiring stories and challenging experiences. This is a collection of 'snapshots' from the day, particularly those elements which offered some practical ideas: suggestions for activities, some things to think about and some links for further information.

John Killick's Session: playfulness and personhood

If we are to work with people with dementia, it is useful to reflect on the qualities of playfulness:

- Think about a special playful moment from childhood, then a playful moment from adulthood.
- What 'qualities' do these times bring to mind? Are there similarities and differences?

People with dementia often play more naturally. Humour happens in the moment; in the ridiculousness of everyday events. Some examples of humour which seem to speak of this:

- The films of Jacques Tati e.g. 'Mon Oncle', 'M. Hulot's Holiday'
- The cartoons of Michael Leunig and Spike Milligan
- Charlie Chaplin said of his work that it was an opportunity to, "take out our pain and laugh at it"

Read more about John's work

<http://www.johnkillick.co.uk/>

<http://www.dementiapositive.co.uk/>

Playful painting: let your artist out

Peter Privett led an enjoyable workshop on discovering your inner artist, giving all of us the opportunity to tap our creativity and spontaneity in a co-operative way. Using an exercise he'd developed for working with church ministers on retreat, he began with a huge piece of paper and asking us to choose a coloured pen or crayon each, and begin to doodle. We then moved the paper round and coloured in what someone else had done, moved again and each did a variety of marks in spaces left. By the time we'd finished doing this, the paper was completely full and looked randomly beautiful.

Doing this helped us to access our inner freedom, and doing it co-operatively just added to the experience. It made creating something beautiful into a playful and unthreatening thing, where the beauty of the piece was allowed to emerge and be created amongst us, rather than being prescribed before we began.

Peter's workshop within the context of the whole day was a reminder that there is the capacity to play, to create and to enjoy within all of us. Just as the work of creating poetry is not beyond people with dementia working co-operatively with an empathetic skilled listener, so the work of creating a spontaneous piece of art is not beyond any of us who forget that we have the capacity for creativity when brought to the surface by a skilled practitioner.

It was a reminder that life is full of colour, difference and vibrancy.

Letting your hair down

In readiness for the Workshop we had gathered the chairs round in a circle but John Killick began by saying he would never set up like that for one of his groups, as for people with dementia, a circle is actually very intimidating; rather he would invite them to sit round the edge of the room.

Greeting

John began by asking everyone to leave their seats and to greet one another. Those we knew we were asked to greet in our normal way, and those we didn't, in whatever way felt appropriate.

Sculptures

We were then invited to form pairs and one of us became a sculptor and the other was arranged/moved to be the sculpture. The sculptor was asked to give the piece a name.

We then swapped..

Then someone who had enjoyed being the sculptor was asked to create a group sculpture using us all and then give it a name. After much laughter and hilarity 'The seven ages of man' emerged. After this a second person had a go and again with much laughter we had a piece named 'The fountain of life'

Reflecting on this game John spoke about this being particularly good for people who have very little or who are losing their language.

'Grandma's Footsteps'.

The next game was an old childhood favourite 'Grandma's Footsteps'. Again this was said to be good for people without too much language. It certainly brought out the competitive side in some of us!

100 words about Me

After all these rather boisterous games we asked to do something rather different - to write in not more than 100 words, something about who we were. After about 10 minutes we were then asked to hand it in to John who gave us someone else's to read and we had to try to identify who it was in the group. Having somewhat dreaded this personally, the experience turned out to be very affirming and positive.

John explained how in one of his groups it would sometimes need a carer to be the person writing it down.

The Chat Show

We then had a chat show type interview - someone volunteering to interview another member of the group. John asked for this to be done straight but explained that sometimes he would ask the person to ask stupid questions and the other to give stupid answers. He said how this, say, in the context of a Care Home, could reveal interests and involvements that others had been completely unaware of.

Saying Goodbye:

The Workshop finished with us being asked to say goodbye to each person and this certainly took much longer than the greeting. It demonstrated how in just the space of an hour the games we had played and the 'letting our hair down' had done something very special!

Looking for some inspiration?

Read about Deacon Lois Howard's work in the Diocese of Lexington, USA

<http://www.keyhallonline.org/profiles/godly-play-discovery-recovery/>

<http://www.keyhallonline.org/profiles/godly-play-discovery-recovery-alzheimers-disease-part-2/>

With thanks to Liz Cannon and Rachel Wadey for their workshop notes.