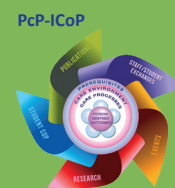


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ORIGINAL PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH

Bringing out leaders in dementia (**bold**): creating the conditions for persons to flourish as social leaders

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Abstract

Background: **bold** (Bringing Out Leaders in Dementia), funded by the Life Changes Trust, is a creative and innovative social leadership project for people in Scotland living with dementia.

Aim: A key part of **bold** is the **bold** programme, which takes a person-centred focus to help people empower themselves to flourish through creative methods and personal development. **bold** brings together people with a diverse range of skills and abilities on an equal footing in a safe and supported space, in which they can explore themselves as 'social leaders'.

Methods: An interdisciplinary team from the University of Edinburgh and Queen Margaret University collaborated with creative artists from the outset to develop the programme that uses a mixture of arts-based methods to encourage creativity, innovation and imagination to explore and develop leadership potential. These include creative writing, working with clay and collage, improvisation, movement, reflective walking, singing and song writing, voice and breathing, and performing arts. In this article we provide an overview of the programme's design from its outset and of how the creative methods have been adapted and developed to work online as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Results: A brief overview shows how **bold** has evolved beyond the online programme and how those who take part continue to find ways to create spaces for people living with dementia to flourish as they become part of the **bold** community.

Implications for practice:

- A programme for encouraging and empowering individuals to flourish requires a reflective and person-centred approach in a safe and supported environment
- Successful outcomes depend on multiple factors, including careful programme delivery planning, good facilitation, and commitment and belief from those who take part
- An inclusive and accessible approach is beneficial when using creative methods for people living with dementia

Keywords: Dementia, creativity, human flourishing, social leadership, arts-based methods, **bold**

Background

bold stands for Bringing out Leaders in Dementia, and the vision for the project is to ensure that communities across Scotland can all make a positive contribution to supporting people living with dementia. Our ethos is that:

‘Having a dementia doesn’t matter for who I am as a person or how I live my life and that everyone should be able to flourish.’

There are many misconceptions about living with dementia (Low and Purwaningrum, 2020). The aim of **bold** is to challenge these, as we find ways to learn from each other and create communities where people living with dementia can flourish.

Creating better lives for, and with, people living with dementia demands imagination and acknowledgment of the social changes and challenges they experience (Singleton et al., 2017). As a minimum, we require new ways of representing, thinking and talking about what we currently refer to as ‘dementia’; we need to challenge and disrupt problematic language, assumptions, attitudes, norms and practices. We also need to create cultures that are ‘fairer, more equal, more kind’ (Stodd, 2016, p 7), where relationships are valued, and everyone can flourish. This in turn requires a more responsible type of leadership – social leadership – that is characterised by humility, curiosity, a willingness to learn, to share and tell stories, to fight for what is right (Stodd, 2016).

This article will give an overview of **bold** and the **bold** programme in particular, and will detail the uses of social leadership and creative methods. **bold** is underpinned by three methodologies: social leadership, creativity and human flourishing. We begin with a description of how we work with and integrate these methodologies, and then look at the conditions we need to create change and support human flourishing. An outline of the launch of the online programme and how this evolved in response to a global pandemic is presented. We review the creative and embodied evaluation process and the key findings so far, and look beyond the **bold** online programme and how spaces for flourishing are created in our communities.

Who we work with

The **bold** approach to social leadership is innovative and interactive, and has been developed to work with people across Scotland who are living with dementia, as well as those who are interested in creating better lives for them. When we talk of ‘living with dementia’, we mean that a person either has a dementia or is living or working with people who have a dementia. The phrase is deliberately intended to focus on the experience of living, rather than being about the condition itself. In this way **bold** recognises that people live with dementia in different ways and so it brings together people from a range of backgrounds. This could include people who live with a dementia, a family member or friend, a professional carer, a member of NHS staff, an artist interested in working alongside people living with a dementia, or anyone with an interest in doing something positive to help themselves or others living with dementia flourish and reach their potential. This mix of people from different backgrounds is paramount in the **bold** programme as diversity is so important in social leadership. Social leaders need agility in their social communications and connections in different communities. Communities are where social leaders come together ‘to learn, to explore, to challenge and to co-create meaning’ (Stodd, 2016, p 48). A mixture of perspectives and experience is significant in helping us learn more about each other and ourselves. We are all working together on an equal footing.

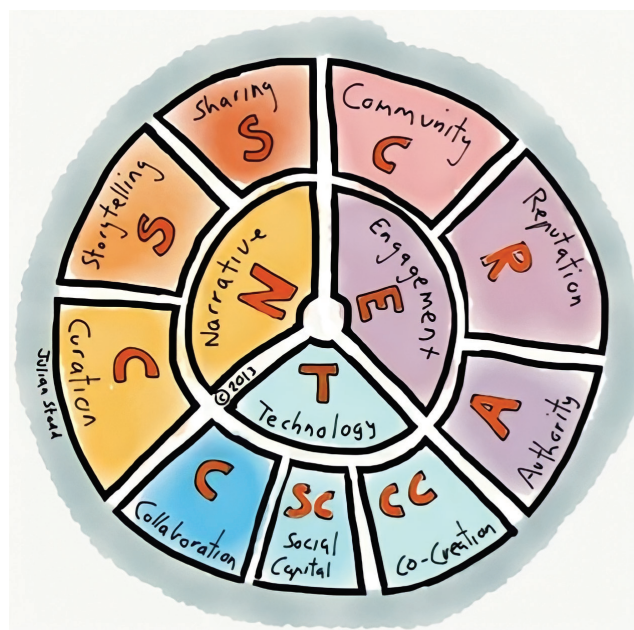
Therefore, everyone who takes part in the **bold** programme is known as a **bold** partner rather than a participant. We believe that anyone affected by dementia, whether personally or through others, should be valued as a full and equal citizen with the right to live a good-quality life and receive the right support when it is needed. We also believe everyone living with dementia has an important story to tell that can add to our understanding of how everyone can flourish and create social change for the better.

Aims and objectives

The bold approach – social leadership, creativity and human flourishing

The **bold** project was originally developed by drawing on a methodology of social leadership developed by Julian Stodd (2016). Stodd's model, known as the NET model for Social Leadership, is built on three dimensions: narrative, engagement and technology (NET). Each dimension is made up of three components. The components make up the 'skills, concepts, models and attitudes of the social leader' (Stodd, 2016, p 8)

Figure 1. NET model for Social Leadership (Stodd, 2016, p 11).



Stodd (2016, p 11) writes that:

'The full NET model can be represented in a circle: we start with 'curation' and end up at 'collaboration'. It's a circle because the journey never ends: once we have mastered the skills, we continue to refine them, and help others to achieve.'

A social leader is not someone who is necessarily in a position of authority (although they may be), but a leader who has community at heart, and who develops the ability to create change through sharing and building a reputation in authentic, flexible, collaborative and supportive ways (Stodd, 2016).

Also foundational to social leadership is the ability to look inwards, 'thinking about how you position yourself in the environment' (Stodd, 2016, p 9), share stories, to learn from each other, to be humble, allowing ourselves to make mistakes, and to form long-lasting networks and relationships.

Methods

bold uses a mixture of methods to encourage creativity, innovation and personal development. This approach focuses on creativity through activities like creative writing, including Haiku poetry and reflective journaling, and arts-based methods such as working with clay and collage. These activities encourage partners to develop their social leadership skills as they explore innovative ways of making a significant positive impact on the dementia world. Creativity enables people to: reframe problems; face up to complex challenges by taking a fresh approach; strengthen resilience; develop new ideas; and learn to express and understand ourselves and our potential impact in different ways (Simons and McCormack, 2007; Fancourt, 2017). Developing these connections is at the heart of the **bold** programme and collaboration is fundamental to being a social leader (Stodd, 2016).

There has been much research into creativity and innovation, and leadership for creativity (Moos, 2014) and there is a link between social and creative activities and the preservation and support of cognitive function (McFadden and Basting, 2010; Fancourt, 2017; World Health Organization, 2022). Arts-based methods have also been shown to enhance self-efficacy, self-belief and self-affirmation (Fancourt, 2017). Simons and McCormack (2007, p 298) give an example of using creative arts with graduate students to 'creatively come to know who they are' in terms of their values, and explain that this 'sets the scene for developing interactive dialogue with oneself, and others'. Similarly, the methods used in **bold** make it possible to consider self and personal values with other like-minded people. This allows us to safely explore different perspectives, develop confidence (Fancourt, 2017) and provide the opportunity to safely make and celebrate mistakes as we think about who we are as social leaders. Fancourt and Finn, (2019, p 10) state that:

'The creativity involved in arts participation is thought to develop creative thinking, problem solving and the reconstruction of beliefs.'

Therefore the creative, arts-based methods that we use in the **bold** programme enable us to look beyond our existing situation and imagine something else beyond the here and now. We suggest this is a key skill as we seek to challenge the norms and make positive social change alongside people living with dementia.

Through using the arts, trust develops (Fancourt and Finn, 2019) and evidence shows that engaging in arts-based activities can often support social cohesiveness and social identity (Lee 2013; Fancourt, 2017). We engage in playful, joyful and meaningful methods of creative expression. According to Frederickson (2001, p220), the positive emotions of joy, interest and contentment widen a person's range of thought and actions, and create the 'urge to play, push the limits and be creative'. **bold** uses such methods to create open and safe environments within which we can think, discuss and articulate our personal and shared values and beliefs in creative ways, allowing supportive and authentic relationships and commonalities to emerge and develop, as well as ways to connect and collaborate. Through collaborations our shared values can then be taken and integrated into communities and spaces where people living with dementia can flourish.

We can also use these creative methods to share our stories with each other and the wider world. Sharing our **bold** stories, which are rich with our shared values, is important as stories have the capacity to act and become materialised as we share them with the wider world (Greenwood, 2020). Therefore, the creative sharing of **bold** stories give the stories the potential to bring about social change and fairer, more equal cultures (Stodd, 2016).

Creativity can help uncover our hidden strengths and vulnerabilities, as it 'enables holistic engagement of mind, heart, body and spirit' (Titchen and McCormack, 2013, p 67), helping us to realise our potential as we allow ourselves to flourish. Creative activities are significant in generating the conditions for people to become empowered to engage with their personhood and connect with themselves and others (Simons and McCormack, 2007). Significantly, the **bold** programme was designed by a team of experienced artists and facilitators who have first-hand experience of engaging in creative practices in the community with people living with dementia. **bold** facilitators have all witnessed the positive impact of creativity on cognitive stimulation, growth and flourishing. Examples of this effect include **bold** partners living with dementia who have re-engaged with painting and the visual arts, or who have embraced Haiku writing as a result of the programme. This has a lovely ripple effect on their confidence as they become empowered to flourish in a way that is right for them as individuals. We have seen the powerful impact that sharing stories through creativity can have on our understanding of how we connect with one another, and how meaningful collaborative relationships can form, develop and make a positive difference to the social world.

A common concern from prospective **bold** partners as we developed the project was people feeling they are 'not creative'. **bold** suggests everybody can be creative (Plucker et al., 2004) and it is never too late to discover or rediscover creativity. Since the project's conception, programme facilitators have strived to develop a space where **bold** partners are supported as they are encouraged to try out new approaches to learning, focusing on the process rather than the outcome. Facilitators authentically share their own fears and vulnerabilities about their 'creative skills' with **bold** partners, approaching tasks with playfulness and fun, and often with much laughter, reassuring partners that there is no right or wrong way. Partners begin to flourish as they realise they are free to find their own creative expression.

Creating change through human flourishing

Together with social leadership and creativity, at the very heart of **bold** lies an ecology of human flourishing framed in McCormack and Titchen's (2014) work. Our creative approach supports partners to flourish as leaders in dementia and equips them with the skills to shape change and develop spaces where people living with dementia can flourish within their own communities.

Our understanding is that flourishing means:

'Maximising [through helping relationships] the potential for individuals to achieve their potential for growth and development' (McCormack and Titchen, 2014, p 1).

Flourishing can seem difficult for some people living with dementia because of the way it can change the shape of relationships with those around them, and how they chat and communicate with each other. Some people find it difficult to know how to support people living with dementia to continue to flourish, or indeed to understand that flourishing is possible for them.

bold is committed to enabling human flourishing for all people living with dementia in different ways. It is committed to promoting positive attitudes and understanding about the experience and the impact on daily lives. This requires that all those who experience dementia, either personally or alongside someone they care for and/or live with, become empowered to discover how they can flourish in ways that allow them to feel safe, listened to, valued and respected.

bold creates the conditions for people to flourish as social leaders in the dementia world by taking a person-centred (McCormack, 2004) approach towards partners. We take partners through a series of phases, using creative methods, and developing nurturing and trusting relationships through holding safe, supportive and brave spaces (Arao and Clemens, 2013). **bold** encourages reflection on and in practice and supports people to challenge themselves and each other to take ownership of the process of addressing any barriers that might hinder their potential to flourish. This in turn empowers people to take actions in their everyday lives to make our communities across Scotland places where people living with dementia can flourish too.

Year 1 of the bold programme

The **bold** programme launched in 2019 and the original intention was that it would run as an in-person programme over a period of five years. The following section describes its first year and the way in which we adapted and developed the programme through the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2020.

In the first year of **bold** we successfully developed a strong and recognisable identity and reputation as an authentic and rigorous programme that had credibility. The potential for change through **bold** became clear. The first two social leadership programmes were successfully delivered in person on a residential basis for people living with dementia in Inverness and East Lothian. Feedback from partners reflected that they felt 'more confident and maybe brave', 'motivated' and 'inspired', and noticed that

they had a role to play in making positive change. An example of this is reflected in a poem based on the feedback of partners from the East Lothian cohort.

East Lothian feedback poem

*I find myself welcome, comrades together
Boundaries pushed and physically engaged
In fun meaningful activities.*

*I find myself supported, and my comfort zone respected as I become part
Of this innovative work.*

*I am open, intrigued, informed, and valued
Calm and privileged to attend.*

*I am energised, excited, positive, confident
As I notice:*

I HAVE A VOICE

*As we come together with like-minded friends
Shared values, commitment, and goals
We will show love and character
Be creative and BOLD
Bringing positive change to the spaces we roam.*

During the residential programme in East Lothian, four core **bold** values were developed with partners. The foundation of these values was the partners' stories and creative work. These values were:

- Showing love
- Showing character
- Being creative
- Being **bold**

These values have become the threads that run through every aspect of our **bold** work.

Follow-up workshops were in place for partners who had attended the first two residential programmes, and plans were in place to begin the delivery of a third face-to-face programme in Arran and North Ayrshire. But at that point in March 2020, soon after the second residential in East Lothian, we found ourselves drawing our programme to a halt as we entered the pandemic and a national lockdown.

Boldly evolving through a global pandemic

We responded quickly to the lockdown with immediate resilience measures, contacting existing partners to assure them we would keep them informed of our future plans. The **bold** team then turned its focus to discussion around and reflection on what **bold** could look like in a virtual space that could take us through and potentially beyond Covid-19. The pandemic made more visible the erosion of the rights of people considered to be more vulnerable than others (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2022). For many people living with a dementia, their potential to flourish appeared to have been further impaired as the loneliness, isolation, anxiety and confusion that they sometimes experience had been compounded. Therefore, a need to create a fairer, more equal, kinder and more effective culture where all people could flourish took centre stage and the need to continue with **bold** and its purpose was felt more acutely.

Key to any future project development was that we retained the core **bold** focus that everyone should be able to flourish, and that our underpinnings of social leadership, creativity and human flourishing remained secure. It was also important that any future programme would continue to give partners the opportunity to tell and share their stories. As highlighted earlier, storytelling is an essential skill in

social leadership (Stodd, 2016) and in creating spaces where people can flourish. The pandemic forced us to rethink how the project could be delivered on an online platform while maintaining its ethos, values, core purpose and aims.

We were committed to creating an initial online programme that would be as engaging and impactful as our in-person offering and fully inclusive of people living with a dementia; a space for partners to grow over the duration of the online programme and beyond. Rather than trying to 'shift' the existing structure from a physical to virtual space, we took a fresh look at the core of **bold** and what we were learning about working on an online platform.

The team dedicated a significant amount of time to attending online seminars in the early stages of the pandemic in order to develop a firm foundation about best practice online and an understanding of what worked well and what didn't. Our overriding aim was to ensure the programme was accessible for people with dementia. Drawing on our first-year evaluation and experimentation with a range of creative online practices, we achieved clarity about what the seven-week **bold** online social leadership programme might look like.

The essence of what we wanted to achieve through an online programme is captured in this poem by author and social justice activist L.R. Knost (2017).

*Tell your story.
Shout it. Write it.
Whisper it if you have to.
But tell it.
Some won't understand it.
Some will outright reject it.
But many will
thank you for it.
And then the most
magical thing will happen.
One by one, voices will start
whispering, 'Me, too.'
And your tribe will gather.
And you will never
feel alone again.*

Our intention was for the new programme to focus on six core themes, based on a synthesis of the themes of the original programme:

- Connecting with self and others
- Storytelling
- Being brave
- Social leadership
- Flourishing
- Dementia

We were clear that the four **bold** core values identified through our face-to-face workshops remained at the heart of the future programme: being **bold**, being creative, showing love, showing character.

We discussed the most accessible online platforms to host the programme, and decided that Zoom,

'a cloud-based video conferencing platform that can be used for video conferencing meetings, audio conferencing, webinars, meeting recordings, and live chat' (Barron, 2020),

would be the best online videoconferencing platform to use.

Once we had agreed on the platform and what the online programme would look like, we spent time planning its content and exploring how we could translate some of the creative methods we had used in person. Some of these methods, such as creating a poem using our hands and using an object to encourage personal storytelling, translated easily to the online setting. Others, such as the voice exercises, had to be adapted. The final online programme included a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities that partners would be invited to engage with. We agreed that we would limit the cohort in each programme to between 16 and 18 partners.

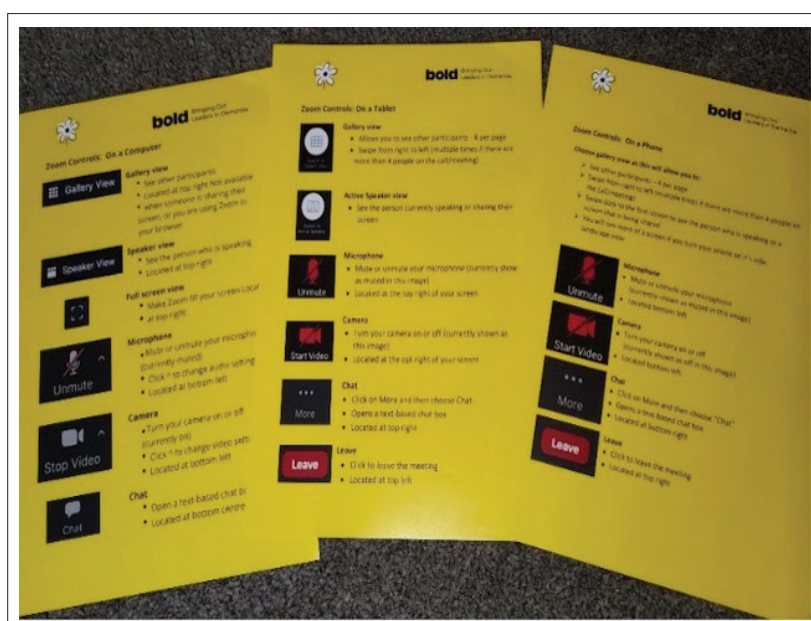
The bold flourishing kit

As creativity is at the heart of **bold**, we developed a creative flourishing kit, which was sent to each partner to use throughout the online programme. It contained a range of materials, information cards, instructions and documents to help people get online and use Zoom. This process was time consuming but we knew that getting it right was key to the success of the programme. A considerable amount of time was spent researching materials to use and the logistics of getting these out to partners safely.

Figure 2: Creative flourishing kit



Figure 3: Instructions on how to use Zoom



We included 'I want to speak please' and 'I can't hear you' cards for partners to hold up while online if they needed to.

Figure 4: 'I want to speak please' and 'I can't hear you' cards



Envelopes were included for each week of the programme, containing instructions for that week. This supported our partners in planning and preparing for each weekly session in advance.

Many partners felt excited to receive the flourishing kit – they felt taken care of. Zoom had become a popular online video conferencing platform during the pandemic and some partners commented that the instructions and inserts we provided were the best they had seen on any course.

One partner commented that receiving the creative materials was a joy, particularly as they had been so well curated and a lot of care and attention had gone into the boxes, saying she, '*felt supported and cared for before the programme had started*'. Another said the flourishing kit had made such a positive impact on her that she was trying to take the kit idea forward in her own work practice. She could see why sending resources as '*a gift*' was an important part of making people feel part of the programme.

The launch and ongoing development of the bold online programme

The first online programme began in October 2020. Sixteen partners took part in this cohort. Each session of the programme started with grounding, breathing and gentle, playful physical exercises. These exercises introduced partners to creativity, connecting to self and others, and safely exploring different perspectives in an online space.

Partners responded well to the online space, which they felt was a safe and supportive place where they were able to share their stories, connect with others and take time to flourish.

We also implemented a learning zone page on the **bold** programme [website](#), for private access by **bold** partners during the **bold** programme, where they were invited to access the asynchronous online activities presented in pdf and video format to ensure accessibility and inclusivity. These activities included: sessions on poetry and Haiku; working with clay; how to make a collage; leading and following; voice and breath exercises; movement; and reflective walking. The focus would always be on inviting partners to have a look and take part in these activities, rather than insisting that the activities were completed. Most did take part in each of the activities and shared their work with us each week.

As a social leadership programme, **bold** recognises the importance of our communities, as it is within them that stories can be told, shared and amplified (Stodd, 2016). Sharing stories within communities

gives people the opportunity to hear them and choose to respond to them. Acting on a story creates new stories which are then shared and potentially gain momentum to influence change (Frank, 2010). As Julian Stodd says, 'different communities have different types of conversations' (2016, p 67), and it is within communities that stories develop a community narrative and the potential to influence social change.

The online creative space that the **bold** programme developed was one where partners could build confidence in their own storytelling skills, so that they could use these skills as social leaders in their own communities.

Since the successful delivery of the first online programme, we have to date facilitated a further five online programmes, with a total of 82 **bold** partners completing the programme. We aim to deliver three programmes per year, taking time to reflect on and flexibly adapt our mode of delivery to best meet the needs of our partners and to maximise opportunities for people living with dementia to flourish as social leaders and create a positive impact in their communities.

Evaluation of impact

bold is committed to the consistent evaluation of our work to inform best practice for people with dementia and understand the impact of the programme. We needed an evaluation methodology that was creative, integral and evolving that engages partners and reflects their lived experience of social leadership development and flourishing in the dementia world.

Drawing on the eight elements of human flourishing framed in McCormack and Titchen's (2014) work on flourishing (bounding and framing; co-existence; embracing the known and yet to be known; being still; living with conflicting energies; embodying contrasts; harmony; and lovingkindness) we developed a creative and embodied evaluation process that incorporates the four core **bold** values, our understanding of human flourishing and the social leadership underpinnings of the project.

The aims of our evaluation are to:

- Understand how partners have flourished throughout the **bold** online social leadership programme and beyond
- Encourage a deep level of imaginative thought or complex recollection of events, that is person-centred and led by partners
- Gain deep insight into the transformational potential of the programme in terms of how partners understand themselves to be social leaders in dementia
- Understand the differences that **bold** partners have made in their communities
- Understand the efficacy and social impact of the **bold** programme in the flourishing of people living with dementia

Our evaluation draws on data from a wide range of sources and includes:

- Weekly onscreen feedback from partners in different creative ways
- Partner comments on social media and to the **bold** team
- Project facilitator field notes from planned conversations
- 'Talking spaces', which are offered to partners during the programme as needed
- Partners' creative work and personalised **bold** story film
- The **bold** team's written and dialogic reflection on workshops, project progress and social impact
- Recordings and reflections of follow-up coffee mornings after the end of the online programme
- Partners' ongoing engagement with the **bold** community, and sharing of changes in the way of being in the dementia world
- Reflections on a **bold** exchange event – an online conference facilitated by **bold** partners
- **bold** partner outputs after the online programme – podcasts and social media posts
- **bold** mini-commissions, which offer partners a chance to create content that contributes to a flourishing space, bringing the values of the project and partners to life and contributing to building a **bold** community

We collect and evaluate data from a wide range of resources to ensure a robust evaluation process that captures the outputs from the programme through the lived experience of the partners and the **bold** team. The creative outputs from our partners provide rich and accessible data that tell their leadership and flourishing story. These outputs also reflect the embodied experience of **bold** partners as they flourish as social leaders.

The following images are some of the creative outputs from our partners that we use in our evaluation.

Figure 5 Hand Poem

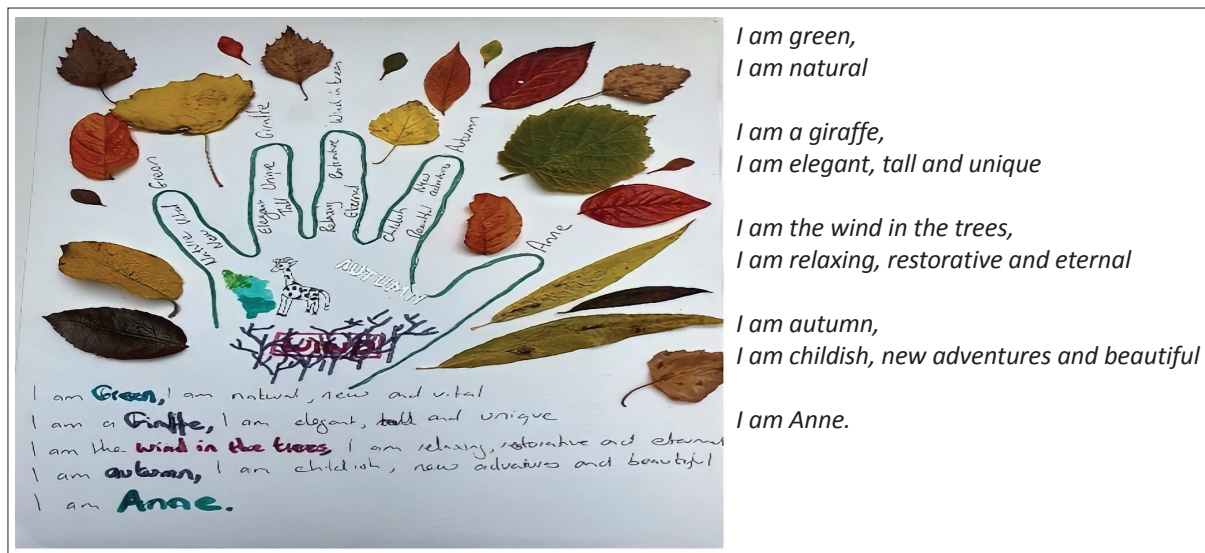


Figure 6: Collage



Key to evaluating the impact of **bold** is the analysis of partner feedback and comments about their experience of the programme and the difference it has made to them as social leaders. Therefore, comments partners leave on social media, or offer in emails or one-to-one discussions with the project team are all collected and analysed as part of the process.

A reflexive analysis of all of the collected data is then completed for each of the eight elements of human flourishing, (McCormack and Titchen, 2014). In doing so, the emerging elements of the NET model for Social Leadership (Stodd, 2016) and the four **bold** core values within each element of human flourishing are identified.

A further article showing the outcomes of our evaluation will be published in due course, but our preliminary analysis of the data collected thus far suggests that through the **bold** programme, a specific kind of social leader develops – a **bold** social leader. This is someone who:

- Is from a diverse group of people who make this difference in their local neighbourhoods, families, communities and social groups, or in organisations around them. They may be, but are not necessarily, in positions of authority, but develop the skills to influence their communities
- Demonstrates the four core **bold** values, showing love, showing character, being creative and being **bold**
- Wants to flourish and help others to flourish
- Is willing to take the time to explore their own values in creative and meaningful ways, and seek out what helps them flourish
- Takes the time to identify the values they share with others around them and **boldly** find ways to join with others to make a difference in the dementia world through collaboration and networking, and by creating spaces for everyone to flourish in different ways
- Finds different ways to curate, share and tell their story to influence social change

Noticeably, the partner comments and feedback have indicated that people have particularly appreciated having a safe and supportive space. This has been particularly important throughout the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, where everyone's mental health has been constantly under threat and where people living with dementia have been adversely affected. Some feedback from partners included:

'This has been a lifeline for me, and it is helping me thrive.'

'I was close to burnout and realised how important it was to take time out for myself to go for a walk and to make time for myself.'

Another partner added:

'I appreciated having the time for some creative reflection away from work as it helped to free up my mind. It also reminded me about the need for self-care and looking after your own mental health and work-life balance.'

This feedback led to the **bold** project team winning an Early Impact Award in the Mental Health Research Incubator Awards, 2022. A public member of the judging panel commented specifically that:

'bold has impacted the participants in a very personal way which feels uplifting and transformative.'

Conclusion

The **bold** programme provides a safe and supportive environment where partners are able to explore their potential as social leaders in dementia in creative ways, and find ways to flourish as they make positive changes for people living with dementia in their communities. They develop the skills to amplify their stories in meaningful ways and connect with their own **boldness**, encouraged to be active in creating flourishing spaces for others.

A significant impact of the project has been the power of being creative for individuals and as part of a group. Being able to try things and learn from them has been powerful and promoted freedom and expressiveness. Seeing how this links to individual process and learning has been wonderful to watch. Eliciting our sometimes unknown or unrecognised abilities and talents is central to enabling flourishing. Once we tap into that inner source, the potential for growth, development and flourishing knows no bounds. Everything is possible! Instead of focusing on dementia as a disabling condition, we focus on everyone's abilities and as a result people flourish. There is a real sense of authenticity as we work together in the **bold** project with partners. As a team, it has been a privilege to share experiences with each other and partners, and to have honest conversations in this safe and supported space. Our partners' willingness to try new things and take themselves out of their comfort zones has been inspiring.

bold is unique in that once the relationships with other partners are formed, they don't end abruptly when the programme does. They continue to deepen and strengthen over time through the follow-up workshops and **bold** community.

These words from one of our partners are a fitting tribute to what we are trying to do as social leaders in dementia:

'Social leadership is about telling your own story. If it's authentic then it will resonate with other people.'

The **bold** project has shown that a creative approach to facilitating, learning and research allows individuals to interconnect with their 'physical, social, spiritual and creative natural being' (McCormack and Titchen, 2014, p 20). It allows individuals to build strong and authentic relationships with others, and to form strong collaborations that they can take out into their communities and use to help creative positive social change for people living with dementia. It opens up a space where individuals can flourish, where communities can flourish and importantly where people living with dementia can flourish.

We leave the final word to Nancy McAdam, a partner who lives with dementia. In the film *A Year of Being bold* (2021) she says:

'I thought it was a fantastic project to involve people in. When you have dementia, you are slightly at the side of other people but at the same time there was nothing to show that. Of course, I would recommend it to people. It was lovely being together with people, it was great. It doesn't even need words.'

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