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GLOBAL
BRAIN HEALTH
INSTITUTE

**Brain Health & Housing
Seminar Series**

Creativity, Connection and Community



GBHI/Respond Seminar Series on Brain Health and Housing

The Brain Health and Housing seminar series is a joint initiative between the Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) and Respond, an Approved Housing Body (AHB) and service provider.

This series aims to advance our understanding of brain health as it applies to housing design, care provision and homeless services.

Conceptually, the overall intersection between brain health and housing can be divided into two interrelated meta-themes, that of the built (building, services, infrastructures), and that of the human (community, inclusion, social supports), with this series focusing on both these strands and how they interconnect.

Optimising one's environment, lifestyle and social community connection are both key factors in protecting brain health and preventing dementia, and generally contribute to individual and societal wellbeing. The value of approaching housing through the lens of brain health therefore, inherently touches on social justice, equity, community building and sustainable development.

Seminar 2: Creativity, Connection and Community

The second seminar in this series was entitled 'Creativity, Connections and Community'. Here speakers considered how the growing understanding of the life course risk factors for brain health, can be utilised to take an integrated approach to building design and planning to support brain healthy communities for all ages; how creativity can be used as a tool for building and sustaining brain healthy communities and; how the arts can play a major role in bolstering brain health through creating community and easing isolation and loneliness. The seminar was an action orientated session which aimed to discuss, generate and disseminate best practice in the field.

The seminar took place online on 22nd November 2021 and the contributors included:

Opening statements

Linda Doyle – Provost, Trinity College Dublin

Declan Dunne – CEO, Respond

Keynote presentations

Dominic Campbell – Director, Creative Ageing International & Atlantic Fellow, GBHI

Alexander Coulter – Director, National Centre for Creative Health, UK

Ray Yeates – City Arts Officer, Dublin Council

Panellists

Magda Kamzmarska – Teaching Artist & Atlantic Fellow, GBHI

Karen Meenan – Director, Lewy Body Ireland, PPI Communications Coordinator, Dementia Trials Ireland & Atlantic Fellow, GBHI

Jess Majekodunmi – Director, Human Resources Studio, Accenture

Tom Grey - Research Fellow, Trinity Haus research Centre, Trinity College

Closing Remarks

Brian Lawlor – Deputy Executive Director, GBHI

Moderator

Áine Kerr – Journalist & Co-Founder of Kinzen

Introduction – Setting the Context

This seminar focused on how creativity and the arts can be incorporated in building design and planning to facilitate and promote brain healthy communities, through creating connections and easing isolation.

It is recognised that the notion of home is much more than a building. Creating homes and communities requires a broad and interdisciplinary perspective as homes are many things including but not limited to, providing a place of shelter, culture, a place of being and a place of identity. Thinking about brain health and housing adds another layer to this definition of home and what it means to create sustainable housing that supports a wider range of needs. For instance, initiatives that support ageing in place and independent living often focus on introducing technology to promote autonomy which sometimes means the caring element is replaced with technology. As an example, when a technological solution is introduced to compensate for memory loss or assistance with bathing. However, these solutions also then replace remembering and indeed social interaction which are central to promoting better brain health. So, it can be argued that as one issue may be solved, another is possibly created, (thereby inadvertently following the law of unintended consequences).

Considering brain health within the area of planning and building homes and ensuring that we maintain creativity, connections and

communities, creates the opportunity to provide a more holistic solution by listening and incorporating these multiple/ interdisciplinary voices.

The benefits of creativity and the arts are wide reaching. The Creative Health Report launched in the UK Parliament in July 2017, contains some key messages. Specifically, that the arts can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support longer lives, better lived. That the arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care, ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health. In addition, the arts can help save money in the health service and social care. These points are demonstrated by these quotes:

"Arts engagement may be envisaged as a factor that can mitigate the effects of health inequalities while policies are implemented to eradicate their causes."
Creative Health Report

"People living in areas of higher deprivation are less likely to engage in community activities, but if they do engage it can have more benefits for their mental health than people in more affluent areas."

Dr Daisy Fancourt, MARCH Network

Summary of Ideas and Perspectives Presented

The main points and ideas presented by the contributors included:

Choreographing Spirits; Building Future Healthcare from Intangible Heritage; Ghosts and Miracles and Dancing: Dominic Campbell

Creative practice roughly aligns with a line of best fit however, any individual data point does not usually sit on the line. This means there will always be some variation to the delivery of creative practice within certain parameters. We currently live in a built environment and within care systems that were put together by previous generations. Over time, these have become misaligned with current needs and situations.

Additionally, we can sometimes prioritise context over quality. Our current healthcare system is primarily an acute system where you will receive good treatment for example, if you break a bone. However, the settings are not necessarily appropriate for mental health and living with conditions of older age. It is also based on some traditions that may now be outdated for certain situations including, that the responsibility for health is given over to a professional and it is gendered towards women picking up the 'invisible' care work. Therefore, it is important to pull back and take a different view.

We have come a long way in the objective to live better for longer by addressing very specific issues like having access to fresh water, eradicating communicable diseases and through better education. This is evidenced by the fact that:

- EU – 50% of population will be over 50 by 2030 and life expectancy at that age of further 40 years.
- USA – 20% of population will be over 65 by 2050.
- IRELAND – 65+ years will increase significantly 2016 - 629,800 to 2051 - 1.5million.

- The fastest growing group is 80+ years.
- High earners live longer.
- 1950's – 8 people of working age per retiree. By 2070 there will be 2 per retiree.

However, there are certain things with this aspect of living longer that we have to question and people are beginning to do that in very interesting ways. The Global Brain Health Institute for instance think about creative practice in terms of **'five pockets'**. These are outlined in the diagram below.

GBHI: The 5 Pockets Framework



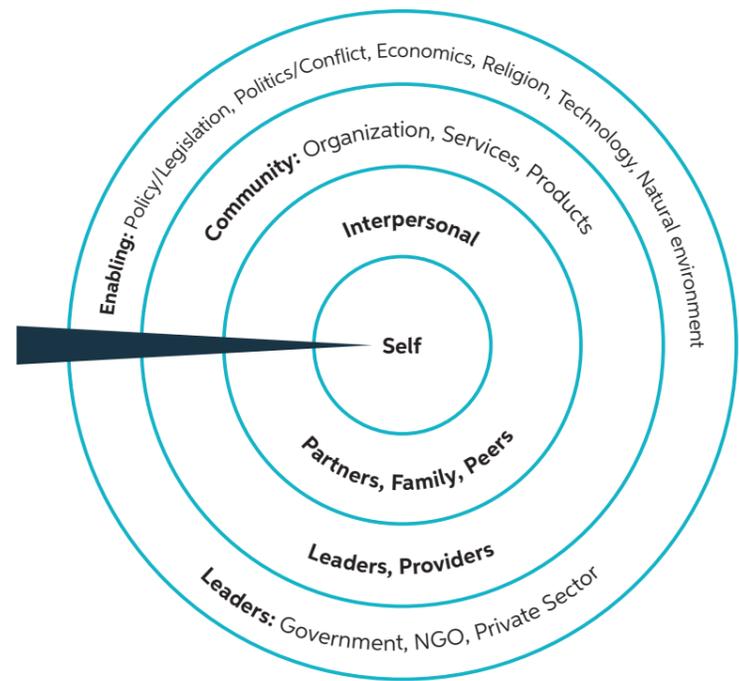
They think about how scientists, artists, communities, journalists and lawyers engage with creative practice through the stages of this framework.

In relation to the transformation point above, this asks how culture cuts across the individual, the community and the environment. The diagram below demonstrates that this is done through the creation of cultural normalcy.

CULTURE

Cross Cutting Factors*

- INFORMATION**
Knowledge
- MOTIVATION**
Attitudes, Beliefs
- ABILITY TO ACT**
Skills, Self-Efficacy, Access
- NORMS**
Perceived, Sociocultural, Gender



Physical changes to a building, simple upgrading through painting and using imagination like incorporating murals for example, can create a space in which people feel valued. This has been evidenced by the Irish Hospice Foundation through their **'Design and Dignity'** programme, which is creating spaces for conversations about death, dying, loss and grief in acute hospitals. In evaluating the project, it was found that the impact was felt as much with staff because the programme creates places that make it easier to have difficult conversations and creates spaces that people who work in those institutions are proud of. These changes in turn, change the culture of an organisation and changes the way it works.

However, what happens when we can change the culture of a healthcare setting, but it sits within an environment which is possibly negative to our own health for example because, the law doesn't support you or you have to live with a stigma associated with disease? One approach put forward is to build a republic that has care at its centre. This is done through acknowledging 'ghosts' and creating space for conversations; applying a process of iterative learning and valuing what has been built already; acknowledging that emotional circuits are aligned to decision making circuits in human brains and; accepting that we are part of the project and not separate.



Culture, Creativity and the Social Determinants of Health:

Alexander Coulter

As little as 10% of a person's health and wellbeing is linked to accessing healthcare. We need to consider the role of creativity, connection and community in mitigating disadvantage and whether this can be linked to brain health across the life course, along with how we can utilise community assets to mitigate against negative impacts of deprivation and health inequalities.

Following the publication of the Creative Health Report in July 2017 by the All Parliamentary Group in the UK, there has been some recognition that social prescribing should be placed at the centre of the prevention agenda and that the arts is at the centre of social prescribing. There is a section on environmental adversity in the Creative Health Report that discusses how the impact of negative stress which debilitates and hampers human flourishing, has a negative effect on biological pathways and cellular function. Examples in the report given, include how data on more than 60,000 people demonstrated a direct link between psychological distress and cardiovascular disease and how adverse childhood experiences such as trauma and abuse, increase the likelihood of chronic illness and shorten life expectancy.

However, it also noted that the social determinants are mutable and poverty is not destiny. The report states, to quote Professor Sir Michael Marmot, 'that environmental enrichment has been found to improve cognitive functions such as learning and memory and increased willingness to explore'. There are instances of the arts contributing to improved environments and helping to overcome stress and the report also states that 'arts engagement may be envisaged as a factor that can mitigate the effects of health inequalities, while policies are implemented to eradicate their causes'.

In considering a whole system ecosystem or place based approach to communities and the conditions in which we are born, grow, work, live and age,

is complex territory. The challenge of bridging disciplines, evidence, methodologies, structures and language when looking at a whole system approach is daunting, but 'place-based thinking' is helpful in this. This is a phrase, that at least in the UK, now bridges cultural policy and health policy so from a neuroscience point of view, we know that the external environment and the way it interacts with inter-individual processes, is important.

A three-year program of research on mental health and social cultural and community assets led by Dr Daisy Fancourt at University College London, The March Network, has gathered evidence on how social cultural and community assets prevent the development of health conditions; help people manage and treat their symptoms and; assist in health promotion. Crucially, these benefits are felt by people regardless of factors such as their demographics, socioeconomic status and other health conditions and behaviours. However, people living in areas of higher deprivation are less likely to engage in community activities, but if they do engage it can have more benefits for the mental health and people in more affluent areas.

A UK Government report called 'Place Based Approaches for Reducing Health Inequalities', (September 2021) says that health inequalities stem from variations in the wider determinants of health and the presence of, or access to psychosocial mediating and protective factors and interventions that solely rely on individual behaviour change, are likely to widen inequalities given the complex causal pathway impacting on capability, opportunity and motivation to change. Thus, individual characteristics such as control, self-efficacy and resilience as well as, the social characteristics described as social capital, such as social networks, can protect health from the effects of stressors in some circumstances and thus, positively influence health outcomes.



Some practical examples of services delivering on these findings include an arts organisation based in London, who identified the home environment as key to a child's healthy brain development. They facilitate live experiences in London homes, including households in social or sheltered housing and dependent on income support with one or more children under five. An analysis of their impact showed a 64% improvement in the quality of household routines, a 23% increase in play at home and a 27% increase in singing with children. Similarly, the 'Songs and Scones' program which brings together older people who live on their own in the community or in care homes, for an afternoon of music, tea and conversation has shown positive outcomes, as singing is good for us including for respiratory health and social connection.

A quote from Grayson Perry the artist, summarises the benefits of these creative arts based approaches to maintaining connections and community:

Art helps us access and express parts of ourselves that are often unavailable to other forms of human interaction. It flies below the radar delivering nourishment for our soul and returning with stories from the unconscious. A world without art is an inhuman world. Making and consuming art lifts our spirits and keeps us sane, like science and religion helps us make meaning from our lives and to make meaning, is to make us feel better.



Creativity Disruption, Well Being and Risk: Ray Yeates

The Arts are divided into three main areas:

- **Practitioners** – people who practice one of the art forms as a vocation or livelihood e.g. musicians, actors, painters, visual artists.
- **Participants** – people who get engaged e.g. by joining a choir, but don't make it their livelihood.
- **Audiences** – people that sit and engage with the arts e.g. listening to music or reading a book.

The arts can provide an escape and can be used as part of survival strategies that can bring you to a place of e.g. safety or fun and provide the opportunity to express yourself in forms other than words. Thereby, artists 'disrupt' the usual processes often offering a different/better way of doing something that is fun and provides connection. This in turn promotes wellbeing.

An example is the statue of Irish singer Luke Kelly created by artist Vera Klute, located at East Wall in Dublin city. It is both liked and disliked equally and is one of the most commented on in the city and in doing so, it's creating discussion, debate and interaction.

Being involved in creativity is a natural reaction and in times of need, the arts become more important. Being deprived of the arts therefore, cannot be justified. An important in relation to this, and worthy of note, is that for example, 20% of people who currently living in Dublin, are not from Dublin. Yet this significant proportion of the population is not reflected in the arts like in art galleries or on stage, and this needs to be considered.

Creativity is expressed in various ways. One analysis is that this related to different personality types e.g. there are realists, pragmatists and idealists. Often artists are synthesists. These personality types don't like formal structures that are deemed to be uninviting and limit creativity. Therefore, if your systems are very focused on rules and regulations and procedure, it's very difficult for creativity to flourish and for artists to approach or become involved. Traditional funding and development structures need to be adapted to facilitate this to encourage more creative work to take place.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

Social connection and using the arts and creativity to express yourself has proven benefits for brain health and wellbeing. Investing in play and creativity for young people at a very early age actually promotes their cognitive development. If this stage is missed, it can be argued that in older age, these same people are less economically productive. Therefore, investment in creative health provides long term cost and economic benefits as well as, providing the related health benefits specific to the individual.

Isolation harms and connection can heal. Social connection in your community and home can protect the brain and protect your brain health. The arts could help build a new 'republic of care' and how we must embrace creativity and the arts for health.

Care is often provided based on the buildings and institutions of the past. The culture of care settings needs to be changed and made fit for purpose and relevant for current needs. For example, a Health Service Executive or other Primary Care Centre could be open early morning and late into the evening when it could also be used as a creative care centre.

Arts in particular can provide a solution to address the health of those who are disadvantaged.

Arts and creativity can help provide us with finding that expression, which helps us work through grief through trauma.

Develop a system of care that can work the multiple platforms and processes of delivery whether it's housing, a formalised health care system, public health or through an arts office. People should be supported to sustain their own health and the health of their neighbours and communities.

Buildings and communities can sometimes be the cause of sickness. They can be contributing stressors and therefore, they need to be adapted and changed to promote positive health benefits.

Develop a model of place-based approaches that incorporate and recognise the importance of the voluntary and community sectors.

We need to help foster the conditions for creative health to become integral to health and social care and wider provisions. A first step could be to extend the provision and practice of social prescribing.

The arts don't currently represent the diversity of our current populations and this should be addressed.

Rigid frameworks, rules and regulations don't provide the right environment for creativity to flourish. Systems for funding and care and support provision need to be adapted to enable and foster creativity which also encourage more artists to become involved.

Buildings and housing should be planned, designed and built to foster creativity and connections. These ideas are tried and tested and not new. For example, the Port Sunlight Garden Village in Cheshire UK built in 1888, which provided soap factory workers with good quality housing and facilities that included an art gallery, allotments for growing vegetables and a concert hall.

Adapting the physical environment is important, as people often rely on environmental cues to support them physically, emotionally and cognitively.





References

Material here is based solely on the seminar presentations and discussions.

More Information

For more details about the GBHI Respond partnership and Brain Health and Housing seminar series please visit: www.brainhealthandhousing.ie



About Respond

Respond, a construction-led Approved Housing Body and service provider, has been working all around Ireland for over 40 years. Our vision is that every family and individual in Ireland will have high-quality housing as part of a vibrant and caring community. Housing and decent accommodation, in the areas where people want to live, are central to improving people's lives and enhancing the health and well-being of society.

17,008 tenants live in 7,761 properties across the 26 counties that we either own or manage. Respond also provide a range of services for families and

individuals within our communities. This includes emergency accommodation with 24/7 support for families who are homeless in six Family Homeless Services, three Day Care Services for Older People, 15 Early Childhood Care and Education, Family Support and Refugee Resettlement services. Our aim is to provide person centred services to support people to achieve their goals and reach their full potential.

www.respond.ie



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About the Global Brain Health Institute

The Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) is a leader in the global community dedicated to protecting the world's aging populations from threats to brain health.

GBHI works to reduce the scale and impact of dementia in three ways: by training and connecting the next generation of leaders in brain health through the Atlantic Fellows for Equity in Brain Health program; by collaborating in expanding preventions and interventions; and by sharing knowledge and engaging in advocacy.

We strive to improve brain health for populations across the world, reaching into local communities and across our global network. GBHI brings together a powerful mix of disciplines, professions, backgrounds, skills, perspectives, and approaches to develop new science-based solutions. We focus on working compassionately with all people including those in vulnerable and under-served populations to improve outcomes and promote dignity for all people.

GBHI is based at Trinity College Dublin and the University of California, San Francisco. To learn more about GBHI, please visit us on gbhi.org or follow us on Twitter @GBHI_Fellows.

Notes

