

## Image theatre:

- offered the care home communities a powerful way to generate critical dialogue;
- Succeeded in opening up areas of contention and provided an opportunity for the community to explore and understand them;
- Highlighted the level of support many care home managers need if they are to involve staff in this way.



**Queen Margaret University**  
EDINBURGH

## Involving Older People Research Programme:

**Forum Interactive:** An examination of how effective a drama process - Image Theatre - can be in generating critical dialogue within a care home community to support practice development.

Dr Esther Walker, Liz Strange, Lynne McCallum, Rosemary MacDonald and Mary Wycherley.

The matter of involvement is particularly pertinent to care homes. In April 2008, the Care Commission in Scotland introduced a new grading scheme which requires care homes to demonstrate that they have involved relatives and residents in the evaluation and development of their service. With 'involvement' as a background context, we wanted to explore the value of a drama process called Image Theatre: Image Theatre provides a playful, non-threatening way for people to express and share views.

Thus, the aim of this research project was to discover how effective Image Theatre is at generating critical dialogue within the care home setting to support practice development.

**The Royal Bank of Scotland Centre for the Older Person's Agenda**  
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, Musselburgh EH21 6UU  
t. 0131 474 0000 f. 0131 474 0001 e. [copa@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:copa@qmu.ac.uk) [www.qmu.ac.uk/copa](http://www.qmu.ac.uk/copa)

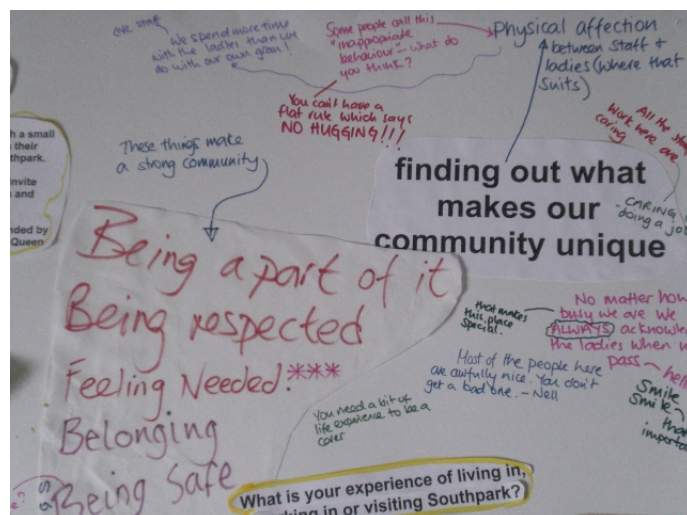
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We hoped to identify:

- how effective drama is in generating critical dialogue among the care home community (residents, staff and family);
- how it can be used to facilitate people to express and share their views and to understand one another's perspectives;
- how it serves as a method of collecting qualitative research data about personal experience.

## Design

A series of workshops was held in two self-selecting care homes with groups of staff, residents and relatives (supported where necessary by 1:1 discussions). The theme we chose to explore was “creating community” because it implies no expectation that people raise ‘problems’. The resulting photos, comments and drawings were then posted on a ‘Graffiti Wall’ which was displayed in a public place in the care home. Other members of the care home community were invited to add their own comments and responses.



## Results

In both care homes, the work succeeded in opening up areas of contention, providing an opportunity for the community to explore and understand them. It was clear that community members were unused to engaging with one another in this way. Important issues emerged (e.g. to do with team working, performance management, diversity, conflict management, the organization of care work, the quality of care, the level of social interaction).

In one of the care homes involved, stickers (stars and spots) were made available so that people could indicate their agreement (stars) and disagreement (spots) with comments on the Graffiti Wall.

After two weeks a large number of stars and spots had appeared, showing the level of response to the Graffiti Wall. People were creative in how they used the stickers to express their views. On several comments stars and spots appeared *on top of one another*. For example, one of the comments made was this: “at night we don’t have enough staff on and by the time we get some residents to bed they have fallen asleep in their chairs”. Two spots had been put on this comment (showing disagreement). Two stars had then been put *exactly* on top of the spots (showing strong support for the comment). Two spots had then been put *exactly* on top of the stars (showing strong support for the disagreement). It was evident that people were using the stickers to argue (silently and anonymously) with one another; and their appearance indicated the contentious nature of the related comments.

The extent to which the care home (principally in the form of the manager) was able to respond positively to the work highlights a key concern for the process of involvement itself: the expression and sharing of views inevitably creates conflict and a care home manager needs courage, commitment and skills to translate conflict into an opportunity for change.

## **Concluding remarks**

In this project we attempted to bring a democratic process into hierarchical organisations. The extent to which staff will be able to involve residents and relatives depends on their own experience of being involved in the decision-making process. Our findings show the level of support many care home managers need if they are to involve staff in this way.