

## **ARTS & HEALTH SOUTH WEST PRIZE 2015 SHORTLISTED CASE STUDY**



**Name of organisation:**

Az2B Theatre Company

**Title of project/programme:**

Grandma Remember Me?

**Dates of project/programme**

30th September - 1st December 2014

**Summary:**

Az2B Theatre Company, based in Penryn Cornwall set up in 2012 with the aim "to make a difference and act as a catalyst for change."

The play, 'Grandma Remember Me?' is their first production, written from personal experience by Artistic Director, Belinda Lazenby. It tells the story of a grandma who develops Alzheimer's disease and the impact this has on the whole family.

After three phases of development, it was taking out in 2014 on a national & international tour to outstanding reviews. It has been embraced by a diverse range of partners and used as a creative innovative training tool to raise awareness and support understanding around dementia.

**Synopsis:**

"Grandma Remember Me?" is written from the perspective of a young child, Lilly, whose Grandma develops Alzheimer's. It explores their changing relationship from Lilly's initial recognition that there is something wrong with her grandma, through the unfolding challenges and final acceptance and understanding of the disease.

Grandma Remember Me? looks at the wider impact of dementia on family and the need for support and understanding within our communities. It explores the importance of memories and relationships within our lives and how to keep and treasure them. It is a piece of high quality theatre, very powerful, realistic and deeply moving.

The play raises awareness and understanding of Alzheimer's Disease, supports early intervention and diagnosis and shows it is possible to "live well" with dementia.

The play engages on an emotional level and reminds us of the person behind the disease.

### **Overview:**

It was predicted that 850,000 people in the UK would have dementia by 2015. It is such a relevant issue, yet there is still a great deal of stigma and misunderstanding associated with it. Many people go undiagnosed and there is a clear need for more awareness around the subject.

We decided to approach this issue from a different perspective, to experience the journey of dementia through the eyes of a child, exploring the wider impact on family.

Having developed the play we recognised that it could be used in a variety of ways, particularly as a creative, innovative training tool. Initial aims were to raise awareness and understanding around dementia, support early intervention & diagnosis and show how it is possible to "live well with dementia".

"Grandma Remember Me?" lasts one hour, has 3 actors and 3 different types of puppets. The actors John Barber, Clare Kerrigan and Belinda Lazenby are all seasoned professionals bringing personal family experiences of dementia into the roles they play.

The play covers the journey from the early stages of memory loss, through the progressive development of Alzheimer's disease to grandma having to go into a home due to medical needs. We see the wider impact of Alzheimer's from three different perspectives: those of the child, the parent and the grandparent.

GRM was taken out on a national and international tour from 30th September – 1st December 2014 to a wide range of venues and used in a variety of ways that were equally inspiring, challenging & thought provoking.

### Booked for education and training:

Universities: Health, social & child care staff & students, nursing & medical staff, paramedics, stakeholders & university fellows, using the play as an innovative training tool and different engagement strategy to understand the impact of dementia.

### Councils:

Birmingham Care Development Agency used the play as part of their Dementia, Depression & Diabetes Initiative, targeting vulnerable citizens (unpaid carers, social care service users) to access learning & development. Derbyshire in partnership with Alzheimer's Society were seeking to inform & educate about dementia targeting communities across Derbyshire. East Riding of Yorkshire Council were highlighting the impact of dementia & promoting their services across the county.

### Teacher Training:

A new potential audience sector, used to look at the issue of child carers.

### NHS Trusts:

Sandwell used Forum Theatre, challenging the lack of dignity within dementia care in local hospitals, promoting compassionate values. Ben Parfitt targeted health professionals to improve best practice across the West Midlands.

### Community Groups:

Butterflies Memory Support Group: Used the play to raise awareness and understanding, reducing stigma around mental health issues with Primary School

Children & the wider community

Tavistock Dementia Action Alliance:

Supporting the Dementia Friendly Town Initiative. (Cancelled due to venue issues)

Church:

Educating around dementia, supporting community outreach work.

Care Home:

Targeting staff, visitors and residents' family members, highlighting the impact of dementia.

Politicians:

Performing for the APPG on dementia, highlighting the wider impact of the disease and informing policy.

India:

Targeting 2 x educational venues. Using the play to both educate and explore cultural differences around dementia. We were initially there to support ADI with their conference but ended up performing at the National Drama School in New Delhi to over 900 people from the local community as part of an International Theatre Festival for Children as well as in schools.

Theatre:

General theatre audience coming to see high quality theatre.

We also had an additional performance at Hull Royal Infirmary for a dementia awareness day, highlighting best practice and dementia friendly environments.

As can be seen, "Grandma Remember Me?" has been used in a variety of ways, many of them unanticipated. The power of the play is in its ability to engage the emotions, promote empathy which impacts change. We change our behaviour when we care and theatre is a perfect medium for this.

Strong partnerships have been developed with a variety of different organisations:

Councils, Learning & Development Agencies, the NHS, PCT's and CCG's, Care Organisations, Charitable Trusts, Politicians, the Alzheimer's Society and ADI, Schools, Colleges & Universities, Health, Social & Childcare Agencies, Teacher Training Colleges, MP's and representatives from the House of Lords.

Many of these partnerships are ongoing and mutually beneficial, and many have asked for "Grandma Remember Me?" to come back. Due to its success, we have also been inundated with requests for a second play, looking at the later stages of dementia. We have just submitted an application to the Arts Council to support us in the development of "What Do You See?" which (if successful) will explore the issues of dignity of care within our care homes & end of life palliative care.

The play has surpassed our own expectations. We wanted to raise awareness, but it has taken off in ways that we hadn't anticipated. When Sarah Newton (MP for Truro & Falmouth) brought the play into the Houses of Parliament the first time, she said:

"It is vital that we raise awareness of dementia and its effects in schools, the health service and the general public through this interesting, entertaining and moving play"

This is the type of feedback we regularly got throughout the national tour:

"I saw this play today and all I can say is "wow". It really opened my eyes into what families go through and I have worked with dementia for a number of years.... I have never had something hit me emotionally in a while and I wish I could have seen this play years ago when I had no experience. I think it would benefit and make carers see more of an insight to the care they give and how to help families too! Wonderful play! Hats off to them involved, lovely people." (Kathryn Briggs)

Alongside the understanding of the disease itself, we also had a more personal message we wanted to highlight, that despite the disease, it is still possible to maintain an emotional connection with the person you love.

We want to make a difference and act as a catalyst for change. We believe "Grandma Remember Me?" is doing just that.

### **Innovation:**

"Grandma Remember Me?" is a powerful, high quality piece of theatre, which inspires, challenges & informs. It has been embraced as an innovative, educational training tool by a diverse range of services and is making a difference in a variety of ways. 90% of people bringing the show in, have never booked a show before, for many, it is the first time they have used theatre to educate or train. Initially nervous, post show delighted and wanting more!

Our evaluations confirm the value of using theatre as a creative vehicle to raise understanding & impact change.

Health professionals said they were "overwhelmed" at the feedback given to them, that their expectations had been "surpassed" and the play had created "a lasting impression" Mark Williams BCDA said "It was more than what I had hoped it would be; our feedback has been amazing". Theatre can fire our imagination, engage our emotions and develop empathy in a way traditional education is not able to do.

Az2B takes the "theatrical experience" into the community, with sets designed to be both adaptable & portable, travelling with lighting & sound equipment.

Performances have taken place in schools, colleges, universities, community centres, village halls, churches and theatres to more unusual venues such as museums, an old dairy, an old cattle market, conference centres, care homes, hospitals, corporate offices, a football stadium and the Houses of Parliament.

"I congratulate Az2B for this fantastic, innovative, entertaining and moving performance which is another example of Cornish creativity at its best." (Sarah Newton MP)

### **Participation:**

As "Grandma Remember Me?" is a play, there are no interactions as such. What we do offer immediately after the performance is a Q&A session, which, we believe, is as important as the play itself. The play draws out many emotions from the audience and the Q&A provides a forum with which people can off load feelings, share experiences and ask questions to inform understanding. It offers an opportunity for immediate verbal feedback and has been instrumental in our understanding of the impact the play has had on people.

Examples of frequent comments & questions:

"I'm struggling and I need some help, but don't know where to go"

"What do they do at memory cafes?"

"Was it written from personal experience?"

"People with dementia scare me, I don't know what to do when they get angry, what should I do: (frequent question from health students)

"Thank you for helping me understand, I didn't realise how much it affected families."

"My mum's got Alzheimer's, will I get it? Is it genetic?"

"Is there a cure?"

"My dad talks to invisible people, they upset him. What should I do?"

The Q&A is also an opportunity for us to share the amazing work that is happening around dementia. We talk about: singing for the brain, poetry & reading, dancing workshops, gardening, inspirational you tube clips, the importance of dementia environments, dementia friends training and dementia friendly town initiative.

There is wonderful support available for families, they just need to know it's there!

### **Outcomes:**

Our mission statement is "to make a difference and act as a catalyst for change" The impact "Grandma Remember Me?" has had across a diverse range of sectors has been outstanding.

Outcomes achieved:

1. Shown the value of the Arts within the Health Sector, using the play as an innovative training tool which informs curriculum delivery. Many universities are now including the play within their own dementia curriculum. As a result, we have committed to taking the play out for the next 2 years. One university, having seen the play, said they were assessing how they could use the arts across the whole of their curriculum.

"Such an excellent medium for teaching and learning about dementia. Huge emotional impact." (lecturer)

"Brilliant & powerful delivery of a very difficult subject. Far better to raise awareness in this way than power point presentations!" (student)

"This should be mandatory training!" (student)

"This is a real gem, a powerful insight into the world of dementia from all kinds of viewpoints."

2. Influenced policy:

"This should have been performed at the G8 Summit on Dementia" (Baroness Greengross, Chair APPG on Dementia) In a following radio interview she said "we must never underestimate the wider impact dementia has on family, particularly children" I believe this comment was informed by having seen our play.

3. Validates the carers' experience:

"I saw this play in Chesterfield, Derbyshire. Being married for 40 years to my wonderful husband John, I was devastated & locked in my own cell of grief & self-loathing. I had allowed my husband to be put in care. This play helped to set me free to live my life and learn to love myself again. What a wonderful play. Thank you from the bottom of my heart." (Mrs Beryl)

"This play made me realise I am not alone." (carer)

4. Supports young people to understand dementia and de-stigmatises mental health.

"Maybe if my mum had seen it she would have let me see my nan." (age 8)

"Fantastic, informative, moving play. Thank you" (student)

5. Raises general well-being:

"Absolutely stunning! So, so powerful, thank you! I'm ringing my nan. You've reminded me of the importance of living in the moment & enjoying life!"

6. Developed partnerships and put Az2B on an International platform. Initially invited by Dr Jacob Kuriakose (Chairman of ADI) to perform at the 17th Asia Pacific Regional Conference in New Delhi, we ended up performing to 900 local residents at the National School of Drama, as well as local schools.

Evaluations are key. On booking, each promoter is asked "what their outcomes and expectations are" so evaluations can be specifically targeted to see if these needs are being met. They are also invited to share their own formalized evaluations with us. There is a Q&A after each performance for immediate verbal feedback. An evaluation book, post it notes and evaluation postcards are available for written feedback by the audience and there is immediate discussion with promoters, followed by emails and phone calls.

As can be seen from the quotes, the impact on people has been incredibly powerful.

### **Learning:**

The main challenges have been getting people to initially book or see the play, and raising finance.

"Alzheimer's and puppets" isn't a strong selling point. Once people actually see "Grandma Remember Me?" and experience the emotional impact for themselves, then they understand the power of the play.

It is this visceral experience and the empathy it generates which influences behavioural change. Having seen it, promoters are clear how they can use it, be it to support carers at a memory café, launch a dementia friendly town initiative, or show it to chief executives to generate future funding for creative training opportunities.

Raising finance is an issue, particularly in today's climate. We have been fortunate to have the continued support from the Arts Council and to have additional support from other funders along the way. The tours are non-profit, our rates £750 for one performance or £1,000 for 2 x performances (same venue same day) We aim to keep prices low so we can engage the maximum number of people, but it is an ongoing challenge.

We have learned the power of evaluations, which have been fundamental to the continuing success of the play. They feed audience development, they give us specific data and supporting quotes which evidence how the play is making a difference to people's lives and impacting change.

Audience feedback informed some script changes, eg: on the subject of care homes one said "It took me ages to find one good enough" An honest comment which we decided to include.

## **Critical success factors:**

Main achievements:

- The impact the play had on carers, validating their experiences, relieving guilt and enabling them to share their feelings. Many told us this was the first time they had been able to talk about it.
- Being able to signpost people to services. Some people, on point of diagnosis, have not been given any support at all: "these memory cafes you talk about in your play, are they real?"
- Supporting early diagnosis through the play and personal discussions afterwards, encouraging people to see the doctor.
- Helping students & staff remember the person behind the disease and showing the importance of life histories.
- Making training dynamic & fun! A theatrical experience!
- Supporting young peoples to understand what dementia is and enabling them to continue to have a positive relationship with family members who have dementia.
- Showing how it is possible to "live well" with dementia.

We are proud of these achievements.

Further work from the project:

- Our audiences have asked us to produce a 2nd play showing the later stages of dementia, exploring issues within care homes and end of life palliative care.
- In discussion with Surrey & Border Partnership NHS Foundation Trust for a possible project exploring mental health in young people.
- Forum Theatre with church groups exploring dementia within faith.
- Forum Theatre with Sandwell NHS Trust exploring lack of dignity within dementia care in Birmingham Hospitals.
- Future project with Marie Curie Palliative Care Institute, Liverpool exploring attitudes to death.
- BCDA have asked for a play looking at dementia within ethnic communities.

## **Funding and Resources:**

The play has had 3 previous phases of development. Initial research and development, supported by the Arts Council, FEAST and The Works. A short Spring Tour in March and May 2013, sponsored by Cornwall Council and NHS Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust, the Arts Council, The Works and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales Duke of Cornwall. Evaluations were outstanding and identified a variety of groups who wanted to use the play as an innovative and impactful way to train and educate people about dementia.

Based on these evaluations, a 2 week national tour was undertaken in December 2013 developing the idea of using the play as an innovative training tool to support awareness and education around dementia, supported by the Arts Council and some sales.

Demand for the play increased and it is this tour which we are presenting for the AHSW prize. From 30th September – 1st December 2014 we took the play out on a 7 week national and international tour. This was supported by a £14,800 grant from the Arts Council and we raised £30,302 in sales – our total income being £45,102 and expenditure £45,279.

The tour was "not for profit" seeking to use the power of the arts to educate and inform in a creative, inspirational way. We have consciously targeted promoters who buy the show in and offer it free or at low cost. This means as well as supporting education and training, we are also supporting vulnerable groups providing artistic opportunities and engagement to those in need. 0th September - 1st December 2014

## **Image titles and credits (L-R)**

- **Title:** Grandma Remember Me? Image  
**Copyright/credit:** Erwin Van Wanrooij
- **Title:** Ben & Lilly  
**Copyright/credit:** Ian Cocklin
- **Title:** Dad & Lilly  
**Copyright/credit:** Ian Cocklin