

Caroline Baker, group leader for the RYCT project over many years, writes about the Training and Apprenticeship scheme

By Caroline Baker

Facilitating 'Remembering Yesterday Caring Today' for 12 years affirms for me the real strengths of the programme for people with dementia and their families. Over the last two years, working with 4 groups of apprentices (2013-14) has brought a new and beneficial dimension – not just to the apprentices themselves – but to the scope and benefits of the whole programme.

Recruiting potential apprentices in 4 London areas has attracted people with a high level of varied skills including experienced visual artists, health workers, group facilitators, dancers, a music therapist, a heritage manager, an oral historian, a drama facilitator, and education and social workers.

Apprentices have often been able to work on a one-to-one basis with a person with dementia and their carer, building up the relationship over a number of weeks. Outcomes have varied: in Westminster, each apprentice works with a couple to produce an artwork that reflects key memories shared; in Camden, apprentices and couples worked together on 2 celebration community events, meeting fortnightly while continuing to build relationships and foster support networks.

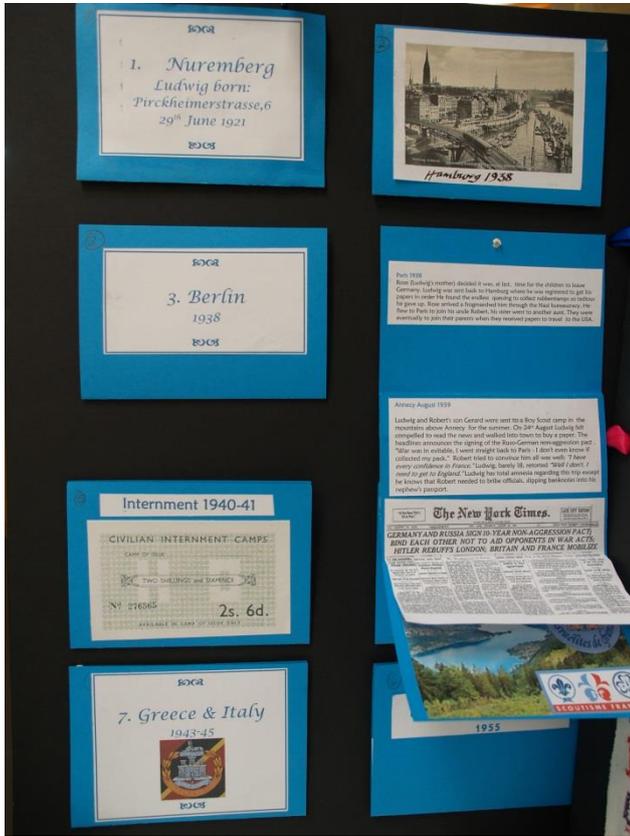


Facilitators involve apprentices in pre-session preparation – setting up the room and space for activities, planning activities around the day's chosen theme before the couples arrive and then participating in activities with the people with dementia and their carers

Each session is followed by a one-hour debrief. Here apprentices can raise issues, make observations and reflect on RYCT with experienced leaders. Debriefs are inclusive, everybody has a different

experience to share. Hearing from 8 apprentices means we enrich our knowledge of the couples and we can all respond more successfully to the needs of the individuals in the group as well as the whole group. Apprentices substantially contribute to reflecting on each session through written notes, couples

record sheets, and completing checklists which ensure that we are meeting all the requirements of the project.



Enrichment of the RYCT programme during these apprenticeships occurred due to high skills level of apprentices, their commitment to working with people with dementia and the powerful experiential learning process on the RYCT programme. Observing, reflecting, questioning and then having the opportunity to facilitate a large group, with guidance from experienced leaders, provides unique training. Apprentices see the positive responses of people with dementia and their family member to the creative activities and reminiscence. Apprentices participate in developing the group and building individual relationships. Experiencing creative celebration of long-term memories within an enjoyable and supportive environment provides powerful learning.

Apprentice’s responses:

The environment of the sessions soon felt cohesive, inclusive, and very important to both participants and

facilitators. (Lucy, South Greenwich Apprentice)

We draw out and develop what we have discovered about individuals to enrich the experience of the whole group. (Julia, Camden Apprentice)

.....great potential exists for making / fostering meaningful connections and relationships, and enhancing /maintaining quality of life. (Jo, Camden Apprentice)

.....activities stimulate laughter and fun, the shared activity is both bonding and socialising as well as triggering recognition and stimulating memory through action.(Daniela , South Greenwich Apprentice)

.....it offered me the opportunity to build a framework around what I already knew as well as learn many more new techniques and have a deeper understanding of why and how reminiscence works.(Maria, South Greenwich Apprentice)