

## Poetry and Creative Writing for Brain Health Webinar, Tuesday 7 June 2022

### AGENDA

12 pm **Veronica Franklin Gould**, President, Arts 4 Dementia

12.05 Chair: **Professor Lynne Corner**, Director of VOICE and COO at the UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) at the University of Newcastle.

12.10 **Professor Catherine Loveday**, Professor of Cognitive Science, University of Westminster.

12.20 **William Sieghart CBE**, founder of the National Poetry Day and Chairman of Forward Thinking

12.25 **Kate Parkin**, Regional Culture Health & Wellbeing Alliance champion and Creative Ageing Programme Manager, Equal Arts

12.30 **Daisy Barrett-Nash**, poet and community arts practitioner: Writers at Play: Poetry Legacy and 'The Art of Letter Writing' for Equal Arts.

12.35 **John Deutsch**, Writers at Play member

12.40 **Kadija Sesay MBE, FRSL, FRSA**, literary activist of Sierra Leone descent, poet founder of SABLE Litmag

12.45 **Cheryl Moskowitz**, poet, performer, novelist, creative translator

12.50 **Nabeela Ahmed**, writer, poet, storyteller, teacher, artist, whose creative writing programme at Bradford libraries aims to help South Asian women preserve their heritage.

12.55 **Justyna Sobotka**, Social Prescribing Network Manager, Healthy London Partnership

1 pm **SPEAKER DEBATE**

1.20 Chair's summary

1.30 **Veronica Franklin Gould** close

## **SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES**

**VERONICA FRANKLIN GOULD FRSA AMRSPH** founded Arts 4 Dementia in 2011 to develop weekly programmes for early-stage dementia at arts venues, training, best practice conferences and reports, with a website to coordinate arts opportunities for dementia in the community. Her inaugural programme, *Reawakening the Mind* (2012-13) won the London 2012 Inspire Mark and Positive Breakthrough in Mental Health Dementia Award 2013, with Veronica named T Sunday Times Changemaker finalist. On publication of *Music Reawakening* (2015), was appointed A4D president. Her regional guide, *Reawakening Integrated: Arts & Heritage* (2017), maps arts opportunities for dementia and aligns arts within NHS England's Well Pathway for Dementia. Her social prescribing programme (2019-21) opened with a conference *Towards Social Prescribing (Arts & Heritage)* for the Dementias (May 2019, Wellcome Collection). To address cross-sector issues raised, she piloted dance and drama social prescribing programmes to test the process and ran cross-sector meetings around the UK. Findings were disseminated in a conference and report '*Arts for Brain Health: Social Prescribing as Peri-Diagnostic Practice for Dementia*' (2021).

**PROFESSOR LYNNE CORNER, chair**, is Patient and Public Involvement Director, NIHR Newcastle Biomedical Research Centre She is also Chief Operating Officer at the UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA), Newcastle University and Director of VOICE, an organisation based at NICA. VOICE was established to harness the immense experience and insights of the public, identify and understand citizen needs and priorities, and work closely with research and businesses to develop evidence-based products and services to support health across the life course. Professor Corner is also Director of Engagement for the Faculty of Medical Sciences, and is a member of NIHR INVOLVE. She currently co-leads the James Lind Alliance Priority Setting Partnership for older people living with multiple conditions and is a member of the Academy of Medical Sciences Working Group on 'Addressing the global challenge of multimorbidity'.

**DR CATHERINE LOVEDAY** is a Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience at the University of Westminster. She has a long-term passion for understanding and supporting positive ageing and plays a central role in the "ageing well" programme for Age UK Barnet, where she is a trustee. Catherine's research focusses on the brain basis of both music and the nature of normal and impaired memory. She has a particular interest in why memories of music are so enduring and central to our sense of self, imagination, emotional state and social functioning. Catherine appears regularly as an expert psychologist in television and radio programmes, notably as the resident expert for BBC Radio 3's *Music and Memory* weekend, in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust and on BBC Radio 4's *All in the Mind*. Passionate about public engagement with science and appears regularly at festivals, as well as writing for the media, she is the author of *The Secret World of the Brain*. Catherine is a teaching fellow on the University of Westminster's BSc Cognitive Neuroscience programme. Her teaching interests lie in neuropsychology, neuroscience, neuropharmacology, cognitive psychology and psychology of music.

**WILLIAM SIEGHART CBE** has spent most of his adult life promoting poetry and its powers. He founded the Forward Prizes for Poetry, the UK's biggest poetry prizes, in 1991 and soon after, National Poetry Day which is celebrated in the UK every October. William has been dispensing poetry prescriptions since his Poetry Pharmacy began in 2014 listening to thousands of people's problems and prescribing them a poetic remedy. He has published many books, including *The Poetry Pharmacy* and *The Poetry Pharmacy Returns* in the UK and *The Poetry Remedy* in the US, and *100 Prized Poems – 25 years of the Forward Books*.

**KATE PARKIN** is the Creative Age Programmer at Equal Arts, a creative ageing charity based in the North-east of England. and Regional Champion at the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA). Kate is responsible for overseeing the organisation's training and arts and health programmes including the production of creative projects in hospitals, community, care and cultural settings. She has significant experience in establishing inclusive, dementia-friendly practice with and for people with dementia. She also volunteers as a Director of Wunderbar, a Newcastle based community interest company specialising in playfully disruptive performance and multi-disciplinary projects. Previously, from 2009- 2017, Kate worked as Engagement and Audiences Relationship Manager for Arts Council England. Kate has a strong background in participatory practice and has previously worked in public art, community arts engagement and theatre at Free Form Arts Trust, and Hoxton Hall Theatre in London.

**DAISY BARRETT-NASH** is a poet and community arts practitioner. She works with a wide range of community groups but her passion lies at two ends of the spectrum, with elders and with young people. Daisy works to integrate these groups, creating intergenerational connections in her projects. Daisy is currently the resident artist with Writers At Play, a friends of Equal Arts group for 55+ on zoom. In 2021 she supported the group to create a Legacy Poetry anthology. In 2022 they are embarking on 'The Art of Letter Writing,' connecting with three other community groups to share their creative writing through the lost art of the written and posted word.

**JOHN DEUTSCH**, Writers at Play. I like helping other people and have been an active charity volunteer, committee member, trustee and chair of the trustees of two charities. My wife Ann, an amazing writer and actress, wrote poems and plays. Each year she used to write a pantomime entirely in rhyming couplets. As she began to lose her grasp on words I started sometimes trying to help her find the right word. I came to appreciate her art and skill, and this led to me trying to do something similar out of homage to her. During lockdown I got involved in an online activity in which I was paired with a much younger person to exchange letters over four weeks. Through this group, I joined the Legacy Poetry online course.

**DR. KADIJA GEORGE SESAY, FRSA, Hon FRSL**, is a literary activist.. She was founder/publisher of SABLE LitMag (2000-2015). She has (co) edited several anthologies including *Dance the Guns To Silence: 100 Poems for Ken Saro-Wiwa* and is the series editor for the Inscribe/Peepal Tree anthologies which include RED and *Filigree* poetry anthologies. She established their programme Inscribe to work with Black writers on their professional development and they published her poetry collection, *Irki* (2013). She is co-founder of Mboka Festival of Arts, Culture and Sport in Gambia and founder of AfriPoetTree app. She has received several awards for her work in the creative arts including an honorary Fellowship from Goldsmiths College.

**CHERYL MOSKOWITZ** is a writer, educator and creative translator with a background in theatre and psychoanalysis. In 1996 she co-founded Lapidus, the international organisation for Writing and Well Being and taught on the Creative Writing and Personal Development MA at Sussex University for 14 years. In 2013 she ran a series of A4D poetry workshops for families with dementia and in that same year, led on the Visual to Vocal Dementia Research project with English Touring Opera and Dulwich Picture Gallery. Her poetry, fiction and academic writing are widely published in the UK and the US. She's an editor at Magma Poetry.  
[https://www.academia.edu/5700451/Poetry\\_and\\_Dementia\\_Illuminating\\_the\\_Present](https://www.academia.edu/5700451/Poetry_and_Dementia_Illuminating_the_Present).

**NABEELA AHMED** is a writer, multilingual poet, spoken word artist and storyteller. She writes and shares her work in English, Urdu and Pahari. Her poetry was the main feature of Keighley Arts and Film Festival in 2020. She teaches creative writing and poetry workshops. She has had poems published in England, America, Pakistan and India. Her self-published book, [Despite our Differences](#)

(2018) is available through Amazon. Nabeela is currently working on her novel.  
Social Media: FB: Nabeela Ahmed Insta: @nabeela\_\_ahmed Twitter: @n\_ahmed

**JUSTYNA SOBOTKA** is Social Prescribing (SP) Network Manager, providing Regional Learning Coordinator Support at Healthy London Partnership. Justyna's passion and career has focused on making the world a more inclusive and supportive place where people can thrive. She is a Psychologist by background and has worked with private mental health care providers, NHS, community and voluntary sector organisations and in academic settings. Drawing from her experience of developing a PCN SP service as a Link Worker (SPLW), she is advocating for the development of an attractive SP career path allowing link workers to gain professional recognition at every step of their career. Justyna facilitates SP Advocates programme and Peer Support sessions and organises Peer Learning events for London SPLWs. She manages the London SP Map, London Region SP workspace on the NHS Futures Collaboration Platform and creates HLPs monthly SP Newsletter.

## **Veronica Franklin Gould, President, Arts 4 Dementia**

Good morning. welcome to our Poetry & Creative Writing webinar to help Preserve Brain Health – in association with the Optimal Ageing Programme at the University of Oxford and Arts 4 Dementia.

The growing understanding we share today is that thanks to social prescribing – GPs referring patients for personal appointments with link workers for much-valued non-clinical support – their patients can now be empowered from the onset of symptoms of a potential dementia – to preserve their brain health.

Creative writing, the emotional imagination of composing poetry, your voice heard, - sharing words with a group of fellow writers enables individuals and their family partners to preserve their identity and sense of belonging. Especially, at this vulnerable time to engage in absorbing socially creative activity offers joyous protection against loneliness in the otherwise fear-filled months years leading to and beyond diagnosis of our most feared condition.

There are over 200,000 new cases of dementia in Britain - some 10 million new cases worldwide.

Social prescribing can help them, preserve their sense of normalcy, of cultural interests and achievement in the community for years longer.

We warmly thank our chair Professor Lynne Corner, Director of VOICE and Chief Operating Officer at the UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing at the University of Newcastle – and herself, for decades, central to establishing arts programmes for people for dementia.

Warm thanks too to our distinguished speakers for the knowledge you are about to share with our guests - from all over the UK, Australia, Canada, Egypt, India, Ireland Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, Uganda and from the United States of America – Chicago, Florida, New Mexico, North Carolina, New York, Ohio and Washington DC.

Each speaker today is going to talk on their specialism for five minutes and share further guidance and ideas, in an informal speaker debate chaired by Lynne.

We shall hear insight into the variety of creative writing opportunities through which people experiencing mild cognitive impairment can preserve their brain health in enjoyable and refreshing ways. - and the pathway to and from those opportunities, via the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA) and the Social Prescribing Network

Professor Catherine Loveday, Professor of Cognitive Science at the University of Westminster, whom you may often hear as the expert neuropsychologist on BBC Radio 4 's *All in the Mind*, will explain the scientific impact of creative writing in preserving brain health.

William Sieghart founder of the National Poetry Day and Chairman of Forward Thinking and the Forward Prizes for Poetry and author of *The Poetry Pharmacy* books in Britain and America will open the poetry conversation

Kate Parkin, Creative Age Programmer at Equal Arts and Regional Champion at the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance, will explain how the alliance enables poetry and creative writing facilitators to raise awareness of their programmes to the social prescribing network, or even directly to primary care and thence to participants – this is a key and valuable role. She will also introduce Daisy Barrett-Nash who has recorded for us her approach and the impact of her poetry programme for Equal Arts. – after which John Deutsch will explain the impact for him of writing poetry.

Dr Kadija Sesay a literary activist originally from Sierra Leone, founder of the Inscribe Black writers programme and founder and publisher of SABLE LitMag and cofounder of Mboka Festival of Arts, Culture and Sport in Gambia, will discuss her work with African writers .

Cheryl Moskowitz, writer, performer, educator and creative translator, and editor at Magma Poetry, cofounded Lapidus, the international organisation for Writing and Wellbeing, will present an intriguing range of poetry and creative writing for older people.

Nabeela Ahmed, a writer, multilingual poet, spoken word artist and storyteller, presents her creative writing classes at Bradford Libraries to help South Asian women preserve their heritage.

Justyna Sobotka, the Social Prescribing Network Manager at Healthy London Partnership, will explain the invaluable link social prescribers offer in raising awareness and referring participants to the poetry and creative writing sessions you offer.

Before handing over to our chair, Professor Lynne Corner, I should like to thank Amisha Parmer, who has kindly taken time out from her hospital work to run our recordings and with Nigel Franklin of Arts 4 Dementia to monitor the Chat. Their expertise is much valued.

Lynne, it is a great privilege to welcome you as chair today, introducing our speakers and chairing what promises to be a fascinating, fertile panel debate. Lynne warm thanks.



**CHAIR: Professor Lynne Corner, Director of VOICE and COO at the UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) at the University of Newcastle.**

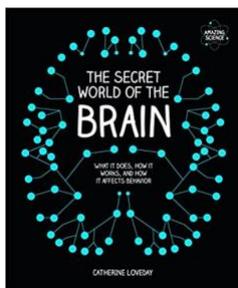
Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to be here, a great honour. I'm so happy to join you and congratulations to you and Nigel and others on a fabulous webinar series, exploring all aspects of that and brain health. I think it's absolutely fantastic. I am looking forward to exchanging such a wide range of views.

We have got some fantastic speakers to hear different experiences and perspectives.

I have a particular interest in brain health and brain capital; and, just by way of adding to Veronica's introduction, I think good brain health is essential to human flourishing. Despite the importance of maintaining and looking after brain health, we simply don't know enough yet about the impact of brain health disorders; and also how best to kind of navigate to brain health, resources and support and good brain health in our communities, our workplaces, and wider society.

So this is very timely and important. Of course, problems with brain health have increased during the COVID Pandemic and put the spotlight on this important issue. And with more people at an ageing population, both in the UK and globally, more people experiencing cognitive frailty and brain health issues, this is going to be so important in the future months and years, So we need, for sure, to know much more about what we can do to support people experiencing brain health problems, and what we can practically do individually and collectively to support and care for people, for those who are experiencing those kinds of early symptoms. And as Veronica said, it encompasses such a wide range of skills and issues – everything from emotional intelligence and the creativity to name such a few. There are so many different ways that we can look to creative writing and poetry as a range of resources and offers to really support and enable people to maintain that sense of identity, that sense of belonging and expression, in those very crucial early months and years.

So my pleasure to introduce really our first speaker, Professor Catherine Loveday from the University of Westminster. Katherine's a neuro-psychologist. I'm interested in memory music and neuro-development, and I'm sure many other areas Katherine, you can tell us about the author of *The Secret World of the Brain*. So a very warm welcome today and really look forward to hearing more about the neuroscience around this issue.



**Professor Catherine Loveday, Professor of Cognitive Science, University of Westminster.**

We live in a world that's steeped in language. We have spoken words. We're hearing speech, we read text and we have our own internal monologue as well. So we are steeped in language all the time and it's a really fundamental human capacity.

### **Language loss & importance of its preservation**

For that reason, when language is lost, it can be very distressing to people; and, it's been rated as one of the top measures – one of the top predictors of quality of life is when people, have language loss. So it's really important to try and preserve language. I want to try and talk to talk about language more generally. Veronica has asked me to talk about language in the brain and then I want to just say something about language and memory and how we can promote the language activity in the brain.

## **Complexity of language**

The first thing to say is that language is really quite a complex thing. To be able to either speak or understand language is really complex to the point that computer scientists still haven't got it right, despite many years of trying to get computers to produce language and understand language. I think that in itself tells us something about how much the brain is having to do when we engage in language in any form.

## **Speech - Losing and understanding speech**

What we know from neuro-psychological studies is that a lot of what we know comes from looking at what happens when somebody loses a part of speech. So if somebody no longer is able to produce speech, but they are able to understand speech, then what we can ascertain from that is that the ability to produce speech must be using a different part of the brain to the part of the brain that understands speech. Actually, this is how our understanding of speech started. It started with a case study. In 1861, a French doctor called Paul Broca found this patient who could no longer speak but could still understand. Many experiments followed. We now have brain imaging and all sorts of more complicated ways we can look at it. What we do know is that it's much more complex than that.

## **Receiving sounds and creating words and sentences**

If we think about what's happening in our brain, when we try to understand speech, we are having to receive sounds. We're having to put those sounds together. We are having to create words. We then have to string those words into sentences. Then we have to refer to our memory banks to work out what those sentences might mean.

## **Prosody and the musical ups and downs of speech**

There are all sorts of other things going on: The production of speech uses yet more parts of the brain, and also the things that people take for granted, things like prosody, the up and down of speech, and how we add, in a sense, the music to our words. What we know is that if people. I've very sadly had a friend recently, who's had a right brain stroke. Now people often think of language as the left brain, so if our left brain is preserved, we can still speak. But, actually, what you find is that some elements of language still get disrupted, and some words will be lost. Understanding those kinds of nuances of, of how language goes up and down.

## **Metaphor and understanding the abstract use of language**

Even things like being able to understand metaphors and being able to understand language use in a slightly more abstract way. All these different functions are using different parts of the brain. What we now know is that some of those things are really specific.

## **Speech production through various brain parts**

So the production of speech tends to be isolated in one part of the brain, usually on the left, but not for everybody. Also, recognizing individual words. That again is a localized function

in particular parts of the brain. But actually most of speech is involving all parts of the brain. It's a really distributed function. All those other things that I talked about, like understanding metaphors and understanding the tones that people use, all of those are tapping into many different areas of the brain.

### **Language and memory**

Language is also very neatly tied up with memory. In an experiment many years ago to try and prompt memory in somebody using different languages, we worked with a case study who spoke four languages. He was in his nineties. We tested his memory for his life, in those four different languages. What we found was that depending on what language we used, we would access a different part of his life. So when we used the language that he had learned in his very early years, it would access that part of his life. If we used a language that he had learned in his thirties or forties, he was talking about things that happened late in his life. There was really important messages here because, there's also evidence that shows that when children learn languages, when we look at children's memory, their memories are tied up with what words they knew. So children can't produce such complicated memories from their early years because they didn't have the language to be able to explain them. So language and memory are really, really tied up with each other. I think the sort of take-home messages from this really are that first of all, that language is stimulating many, many different areas of the brain.

### **Creative expression when components of language are lost**

The second thing is that we can lose some components of language and still have others. What is important about that is that sometimes for example, people might become quite poor at grammar, or they might lose certain words or certain elements of speech. But, actually, in some ways, what that means is they produce sometimes more creative and different language. So simply for example, where people no longer have access to particular words, what will happen is that they often have to find new words and be more creative and find different ways of doing it. If they kind of lose the rules of grammar, then actually they can use language in a more artistic, creative way. But we're still so full of meaning.

### **Multilingual memory access**

The final key point I wanted to make is around this idea of language accessing our memory. There are speakers and delegates here who work specifically with people who are bilingual and I think this is really important. We know that, to some extent, bilingualism is a protective mechanism and there is good evidence that people who speak more than one language seem to have a degree of protection against memory loss. But I think it's also really important to recognize that by using language in different ways, we will be accessing different aspects of people's autobiographical memory. And if somebody is bilingual or even trilingual, if one language doesn't work, then using another language is going to be activating different areas of the brain and certainly different parts of the memory system.

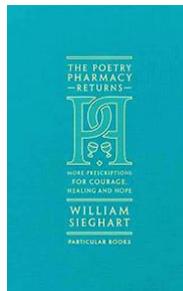
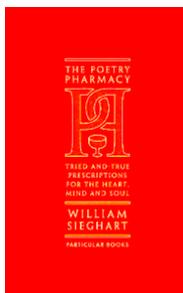
So I hope that's given a little bit of an overview of what's going on in the brain. It's obviously much more complicated than I can say in a few minutes, , but I hope that's just given a little bit of a flavour and some food for thought.

**LC, chair** Thank you, Katherine. That was an absolutely fantastic introduction. I think it's fascinating that we can access different parts of people's life through different languages and how important that detail is for us, for caring for somebody and to be able to understand the practical ways that we can develop support. I also loved the way that you emphasized retention and the positives of actually emphasizing what's retained, not just what's lost. Perhaps we can pick that up again in the discussion at the end, I thought that was really super introduction.

**LC, chair** It's my pleasure now to introduce our second speaker today William Sieghart who is the founder of National Poetry Day and chairman of Forward Thinking. He's published many, many books, including *The Poetry Pharmacy*. A very warm welcome. Thank you so much for joining today and I'm fascinated to learn more.

### **William Sieghart CBE, Founder of the National Poetry Day. Chairman of Forward Thinking**

Thank you very much, Lynne. Hello, everyone.



#### **The Poetry Pharmacy**

I started The Poetry Pharmacy by mistake. I was asked when I went to a literary festival and I was giving a talk about poetry if I would sit and attend and listen to people's problems one-on-one and try and prescribe a poem for the anxiety that the person who was coming to tell me their worries, had. That grew and grew and grew and I ended up

writing a couple of books. The Poetry Pharmacy: Tried-and-True Prescriptions for the Heart, Mind and Soul and The Poetry Pharmacy Returns: More Prescriptions for Courage, Healing and Hope

#### **The right poem at the right time normalises the difficulty**

Over the last seven or eight years, I must have listened to around 1,500 people's problems, one-on-one, and tried to find them the right poem for the difficulty. It's taken off completely unexpectedly. I suspect it's because most people have a need for poetry. They turn to poetry, perhaps better expressed, in times of need. But they don't really know where to look. If they find the right poem at the right time, it will give them a sense of complicity with how they feel, expressed rather more elegantly than they can express themselves. It makes them feel that they're no longer alone, that they're not mad. And that if the poem was

written hundreds of years ago, then we've always felt like that, it kind of normalizes the difficulties.

### **Poetry learned in childhood stimulates sense of the present, of identity for people with dementia**

I've also done a lot of readings and talks about poetry and the healing power of poetry to all kinds of groups, including people with dementia. One of the most intriguing things for me about talking about poetry to them is that the moment I read or recite a poem that they might have learned in their childhood, instantly they are very present. And the carers often email me after the talk to say they were present for a long time after I was gone. That connects really with what Katherine has just said about language and age.

For National Poetry Day some years ago, we worked with one of the universities on a study on people's sense of personal identity. One of the things that really struck across all generations was how the poems that people learned off by heart as a child were very much part of what made up their sense of themselves.

So that's where I come from. I'm not a trained professional. I just come from a poetry background. But I've been keenly aware in the 30 years I've been involved in poetry just how striking the connection is between poetry and mental health. I've had the extraordinary evidence in a way of being able to, when I find the right poem for the right moment for the right person, they seem to get out of the chair and a foot taller. So I'm just here today to listen and to learn, but also to say to any of you out there, if there's anything I can do to connect, to help you. I'll put an email address out on, the chat. And I'm more than happy to share any of my work or my experiences with you.

**LC, chair** Thank you so much, William. The fact that you've listened to 1500 people's problems makes you, a bit of an expert in this. What I loved about that was, the point you made about finding the right poem at the right time. and for me, speaks to kind of personalization of this agenda, that there isn't one size fits all. It's a deeply personal journey. It's a deeply personal experience; and it changes over time. That's so important.

#### **CHAT**

**William Sieghart** Hello everyone, I'm William Sieghart, author of The Poetry Pharmacy. Happy to connect and help if I can. I'm at [william@thepoetrypharmacy.com](mailto:william@thepoetrypharmacy.com)

**Professor Catherine Loveday** Thanks William! Lots of parallels between poetry and music in terms of the emotional impact and access to memory

**Rashpal.Bhogal** How would you find the right poem at the right time?

**WS** Rashpal. I've written two books covering 100 or so anxieties with a different poetry prescription for each one. **Rashpal.Bhogal** Thank you William **Pamela Thompson** Thank you William

**Ann Diment** William, lovely to hear about your fantastic work. I took part in Word Play poetry sessions during lockdown and commissioned a Word Play group in the NASP Thriving Communities Somerset project. We had a participant joining from her hospital bed and it was such a moving experience. I'd love to learn more about how to share your work as a socially engaged artist and facilitator, I'll contact you via the website.

**WS** I think it's also worth saying, and I know that Veronica is very keen on the writing of poetry to help bring that language and so on. But I've also done a number of talks to carers

and carers' networks just about how reading the right poem at the right time to somebody can really be helpful to. So don't, forget that side of it.

**LC, chair** Absolutely. I think the two sides of the same spectrum, aren't they? So perhaps we can pick that up again in the discussion at the end, because I think that that right poem at the right time really resonated with me. So thank you so much, for that introduction, that's lovely.

**LC, chair** Now we turn to Kate, I can see you're smiling at the screen, Kate, from an organisation that I've known for many years. Kate Parkin is the Creative Ageing Programme Manager at Equal Arts, which is based in the North-east of England. She and also has a regional role. So Kate, tell us a little bit more about the work that you lead. And I know that you're also going to introduce Daisy Barrett Nash as well.

**Kate Parkin, Regional Culture Health & Wellbeing Alliance champion and Creative Ageing Programme Manager, Equal Arts**



I work for EqualArts, a leading creative ageing charity based in Newcastle, but we cover the country and further afield as well. We deliver projects for older people. Typically, those at risk of socialization, isolation, living with dementia and with longer term health conditions. We work about 50/50 with people living independently at home. I've just come from a session this morning where we're doing clay-making with a group that have had just recent diagnosis of dementia, at Hatton Gallery at Newcastle University.

**Care settings**

We also deliver in care settings., We run projects such as HenPower, which is hens and creativity coming together in care settings across the country and increasingly in other countries as well we also have a HenPower app in Australia .



**Regional Champion, Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA)**

Aside from my programme manager role, I'm also a volunteer, unpaid champion for the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance, fondly known by the sector as CHWA.

**Free cross-sector membership**

Membership is free to all, so anyone here can join it's for the creative sector, the cultural heritage sector and for health professionals, so from GPs, we have probably more dementia based, essential services in Sunderland, but also for artists. creative facilitators and those with lived experience. We have about 5,800 members across the country, about 200 in the North-east. We have people with lived experience, mental health survivors who join as well. There are meetings three or four times a year, and we offer conferences, national

conferences. The aim is that we provide the four cornerstones of CHWA: partnership, equity, advocacy, and research.

### **Partnerships**

It's about creating partnerships between, particularly between the health sector and the creative sector and artists as well, so everyone can talk to each other, share ideas and work in partnership, which was very fortuitous when it came to the Arts Council England and the National Academy for Social Prescribing. They setup a partnership project program called Thriving Communities, which was a social prescribing programme, which fits neatly within the work of CHWA. It was a great way of really building those partnerships because people are seeing people in meetings. It was a great way for everyone to come together.

### **Equity**

So it's also about really addressing in terms of equity, championing and advocating health and cultural inequalities and work around policy change and building a shared community of practice, essentially. That's it in a nutshell.

### **Awards**

There are awards as well as to promote your work as artists, as cultural organizations, health partnerships, up on the CHWA website,

### **CHWA Creative Health Quality Framework, CIC, NPO**

We're setting up a quality framework with Creative Health at the moment to explore that wider quality framework. CHWA is now a fully-fledged, independent community interest company and has just applied to the Arts Council to become a National Portfolio Organisation. We'll find out in September or October 2022.

### **Become a Member**

You can join on the website. Anyone can join. It's great for artists to connect, especially with the cultural organizations, the health sector, but also to be part of that wider conversation to really affect change and to support better practice – for all.

### **Writers at Play: Equal Arts Creative Writing – online in the UK and USA**

Now I'm going to introduce someone we work with at Equal Arts. One of our other projects, as well as pottery, is creative letter writing. We have a creative writing groups, one of which is called Writers at Play. They are based both in England and in the U S. It is currently an online group, so it works well if I find the right time that connects with us participants. It is an older adults group led by poet and creative facilitator Daisy Barrett-Nash. So I'm going to pass on to Daisy to talk about the group, the work of the projects and a little bit about the impact. Thank you.

CHAT

Rashpal.Bhogal Hi Kate do you cover Hertfordshire

VFG Here are links to [CHWA East of England champions](#) and [Hertfordshire Culture & Wellbeing FB](#)

Qet Nefert Hi Kate can drama therapist be a volunteer?

## **Daisy Barrett-Nash: Writers at Play, Poetry Legacy and 'The Art of Letter Writing' for Equal Arts.**



Hello everyone. My name's Daisy and I am a poet and creative arts practitioner. I'm the founder of [Legacy Poetry](#), which is an organization that assists elders in creative writing, documenting their life story and creating purpose in later life.

### **Writers at Play**

I'm the resident artist at Writers at Play. Writers at Play are a Friends of Equal Arts group, funded and supported by them. We run creative writing workshops weekly on Zoom for people aged 55 plus. Last year, Writers at Play took part in Legacy Poetry, and we created a Legacy Poetry Anthology full of their poetry, documenting their lives and imparting wisdom to the younger generation.

### **The Art of Letter Writing**

This year, we are embarking on a project called 'The Art of Letter Writing', which Equal Arts received funding for. It is really exciting that we get to embark on that together. Art of letter writing is a project to connect intergenerational community groups through creative writing letters. We're going to be sharing poetry and short stories that offer snippets of their lives that will be included in an anthology and performed at a celebratory event at the end of the year. All the community groups involved will be able to come and actually meet their pen pals face-to-face or video-to-video on Zoom.

### **Purpose**

Equal Arts, currently working on the theme of Purpose within their organization. So we're putting that theme into our work too. They've been writing practice letters around purpose and what that means for them in later life and how creativity plays a part in that. Over the past year they have become artists in their own right. and have come to acknowledge and accept that they are artists, especially at the celebratory event for Legacy Poetry last November. - I believe that that is then offering them a purposeful pursuit in creating, which is to share their work on a professional level and know they are offering a meaningful contribution to this landscape.

### **Writers at Play group poem on Purpose in Later Life**

Here's a snippet of [the group poem](#) that they wrote recently on Purpose in later life and how creativity plays a part in that.

*Maybe that's why we like writing.*

*We're not analysing, we're noticing, reflecting.*

*It changes your vision.  
When you slow down,  
you can be in the same space  
and see something or not see it.  
The purpose is an acceptance of things.  
Freedom is realizing your purpose  
is what's right in front of you  
and not this big thing.*

We also have some testimonies from the group to show how much they've got from this experience:

*I've met online several wonderful people.  
I find it very fulfilling.  
Apart from growing in my writing creatively, I feel like I'm part of the family because there's so much love in this group.  
The time Wendy and I spend with folks that are happy for a change who liked to laugh - think of all the laughing we've heard today.  
They all produce wonderful stuff and try to me convince me that mine is as good as theirs  
Brain stretching and our group feels like family.  
I've lived in small towns much of my life. This writers group makes me feel like a world traveller though.  
Writing with this delightful group from your country and mine  
I've learned something of the satisfaction that my late wife must got from the huge quantities of plays and poems that she wrote  
This group has been helping me overcome my procrastination, I've put off writing my memoirs for far too long.  
I found another voice in this group by writing and listening to other people.  
Sharing our thoughts, feelings in ourselves.  
It's proved to me that you're never too old to learn something new.*

As you can see, every elder in the group gets a lot out of these weekly workshops, and the becoming a community of people who are really close friends who have never met in person. It's adding such value to their lives. So from this social experiment I've found that bringing elders together, creating a sense of safety and community and most importantly, having a sense of purpose to their creative writing, preserves brain health and general mental wellbeing.

Thank you, everyone for listening. And if you have any questions or enquiries about new projects, email me on [info@elderslegacypoetry.co.uk](mailto:info@elderslegacypoetry.co.uk). And to join Writers at Play, if you are 55 plus, then email [kerry@equalarts.org.uk](mailto:kerry@equalarts.org.uk).

CHAT

Rashpal.Bhogal Love it  
experiences absolutely beautiful

Pamela Thompson Awesome I love it - finding their voices and sharing

**LC, chair** Thank you, Kate, and thank you for introducing Daisy. Just so many powerful themes that we can pick up in our discussion. I love that sense of sharing our thoughts and feelings in ourselves. That was really wonderful.

**LC, chair** And now John Deutsch whom you saw in Daisy's talk, is a Writers at Play member, and is going to tell us a little bit about his wife and who by all accounts sounds to have been an amazing writer, actress, and a little bit about the impact that poetry, creative writing is having for him, and his experiences. So John, welcome.

### **John Deutsch, Writers at Play member.**

I've already learned a huge amount from what we've heard. I would certainly like to amplify what Daisy has put together. I'm a member of the group that she runs and she really is a wonderful leader. She doesn't tell us what we've got to do, she makes suggestions. She says things like: think of a song that's always been important to you and then write a poem, include an extract from the song in your work and so on. So she just gives you ideas, and all of us come up with our own completely different interpretation of those ideas. That was clear in that film. We as members always appreciate each others' work. I really do feel what I do is rubbish and everyone else's sounds brilliant. But when I read mine they seem to have a similar opinion of mine as I do of theirs, so it can't be as rubbishy as all that.

### **My wife Ann wrote poems, plays and pantomimes**

My wife led me into writing. Ann wrote lots of poems and plays. She was very active in her church where the vicar was keen on drama. Ann wrote plays for performance there; she acted in her own plays and many others. Every Christmas for about seven years, she used to write a real old-fashioned type pantomime all in rhyming couplets, always full of laughter. The cast used to ask me to go to every performance because I'm good at encouraging the audience to laugh at anything I find funny. I got more and more in awe of her skills.

### **My own writing – computer software**

I wrote computer software all my working life. I'm still doing it. That's a way in which I'm preserving my brain health by carrying on doing mental work that I've always done. But I'm now doing creative writing as well which I think is improving it even more. I've never written anything creative before. We used to have fun writing limericks together, too rude to repeat in public. Some of you may have heard of the Cambridge bookshop song – this is to the tune of Freres Jacques made up entirely of the names of Cambridge bookshops of the 1950s. Together we produced a similar thing based on Northern Line tube stations.

### **My writing – poetry**

I did write one poem myself triggered by my sadness about my wife's illness because she was beginning to have not much brain health.

*DARLING ANN, WHERE ARE YOU?*

*Darling Ann, where are you? Oh dear, where have you gone?  
Sometimes you still recognise me, I am your husband John.*

*Sometimes in me you see your brother, be it Roderick or Bill.  
Our children's names you don't remember. The sadness makes me ill.*

*From that dreadful man Alzheimer One day a summons came.  
Why did you have to follow? Why must you play his game?*

*Words used to be your treasure. Poems and plays galore.  
Sadly now they all desert you, Your writings come no more.*

*Things get harder day by day, But yet we'll soldier on.  
You are still my lovely Ann, And I'm your loving John.*

John Deutsch, 2012 - Fifth verse added August 2014 just after our golden wedding

### **Writers at Play**

Early in the first lockdown I joined an online project in which a group of older people exchanged letters with a group of much younger people. We did not know whom we were paired with until the end of the project. Someone involved with that group happened to mention Daisy's online Legacy Poetry project. I attended a session to find out more about it. Right from the start I absolutely loved it and wrote several poems during the project. My colleagues on the project produced many brilliant pieces of work

### **Teaching an old dog to learn new tricks – preserves brain health**

I found huge satisfaction in learning some new skills. Yes you can teach an old dog new tricks. It keeps me stimulated and I'm sure that it helps preserve my brain health.

### **A mark of respect - protecting against loneliness**

I also feel that trying to do a little of what Ann was so good at is out of respect and reverence for her huge skills. Nearly everything I've written is largely about Ann and doing this somehow eases as my sense of loss and loneliness. We were married for 54 years very happily. She died almost four years ago now. How do you ever get over it?

Thank you very much for having me.

**LC, chair** John, I love the fact that you're preserving the legacy; and I think it's lovely that you've got that opportunity as you said, to improve and preserve your brain health. Perhaps in the discussion we could talk a little bit more about how you can tell it's improving your brain health, because I think that's a super important part of how we can evidence the impact of this important work. So thank you, John very much.

### **CHAT**

Pamela Thompson Thank you John Rashpal.Bhogal Thank you John

**Lorraine Mponela** Thanks John for representing us.

**Kate White** Thank you John for your emotional openness. Loss and its impact of an irreplaceable person lasts all our lives.

**LC, chair** Our next speaker is, could you say- who is a poet founder, publisher of SABLE Litmag, has published several anthologies. So a very warm, welcome. I'm really super keen to hear about your work and your perspective. Thank you so much for joining.

**Kadija Sesay MBE, FRSL, FRSA**, literary activist of Sierra Leone descent, poet founder of the **Inscribe Black writers programme** and of **SABLE Litmag** and cofounder of **Mboka Festival of Arts, Culture and Sport in Gambia**

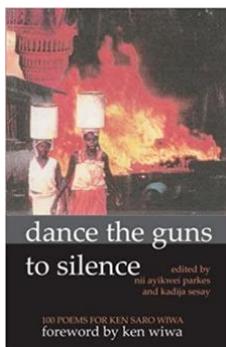
Oh, thank you. Yes. It is interesting. If I talk for too long, just tell me to be quiet because I get very excited about what I do.

### **Anthologies for writers of African and Asian descent**

I do edit a lot of anthologies mainly for writers of African and Asian descent. So I call myself an anthologist as well. I love doing that. And I do work for an organization called Inscribe that is attached to Peepal Tree Press in Yorkshire and they publish Caribbean writers. So I work with Inscribe, specifically with black British and Asian writers and help them to develop their work and get published. But yes, anything poetry-wise around the world is quite fun for me.

### **Counteracting Writer's Block**

What I thought I'd like to do today is just to introduce a couple of things that I use with people to stimulate them, because I really don't believe in this thing called writer's block. I



think maybe tutors make it up just to make some money or something. People don't have writer's block. There's so many different things that can make you want to write. And love writing.

### **Dance the Guns to Silence 100 love poems in memory of Ken Saro-Wiwa**

I once did an anthology with a friend called Nii Parkes, he's a Ghanaian writer, Dance the Guns to Silence (2005) - it was to remember the Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa. And it was like a hundred poets from around the world. We just said to everybody, Write a love poem. Everybody writes a love poem. Everybody falls in love with somebody or something at some stage in their life. What about love? There you go. You can write a poem So to me, everybody can be a poet if they want to.

**Visual Verse online creative magazine – one image, one hour, 50-500 words, the picture is the starting point, the text is up to you**

So, one of the anthologies, and this is actually not an anthology. It's not mine, but it's one I think is quite wonderful. It's called Visual Verse. And so the first of every month they put up an image, it could be a really weird and fantastical image, or it could be a really classical image. But what they do, is they commission two or three writers to write to that image, and that will be up to the first fifteen days. Then they invite anybody else to write as well. It could be a poem, it could be fiction, it could be anything. But you only have an hour and you've got to do between a minimum of 50 to 500 words, but you've got to stop after that time.

So that just makes you get down and write immediately. And it makes you really think really widely because it might be an image you don't even like, but that is the image for the month. Write something! You can say anything out of that. I just think it's such an inspiring way to get yourself into just taking yourself out of a space that you don't want to be in at the time. And the opposite focusing in on something as well to focus your mind. But also, that image might bring out some really strange, interesting things you hadn't thought about for a long time or that you didn't want to think about. That is what is so challenging about, it because it's not something that you would absolutely expect.



**Khadija Saye exhibition *In This Space We Breathe* (2021, British Library).**

One of the images that they used, I think it must've been in 2021 – you lose focus of time with this pandemic - they wanted people to write about this image by a Gambian artist called Khadija Saye who died tragically in the Grenville Tower fire. She was about 25 years old and she created this absolutely fantastic series of photographic images and they're all based on her culture. When you look at them, the images are so simple because - it's a very complicated old photographic process - and she's in the photograph with one object. This object is usually a cultural object that links to either how her life or her culture or something like that. So we were asked to write about. That was the image for the month. And they just asked me out to supplies to write it. And I was actually working on the exhibition in the British library *In This Space We Breathe* (So that was fantastic to me. And they're just this things gelled.

*TURRA'NDOOR*

*Kadija Sesay*

*(for Khadija Saye)*

*They haunt me! Your eyes  
that expose much more than flesh.  
Aren't you scared, namesake?*

*Dress, lips, ears, eyes — closed  
under sacred words sewn up.  
Yet you see, everything.*

*You have seen, but do not want to see.  
Gis nga waye gumbo*

*You wear tééré like  
a scholar hides precious words  
in miniature books.  
Body, nose, cheeks — Black.  
You see colour we can't see.  
You are still, namesake.*

*Speak the unspoken; show the unseen.  
Wahh lou kendoul wahh, won'neh lou ken gissoul*

### **Workshops at Grenfell Tower, for people of diverse cultures, help with grief and trauma**

In terms of people who came from different cultural backgrounds who were coming to England, we learned so much doing workshops with people who were at Grenfell, just to even find out what links them to those images in all particular cultures. People say, oh, yes, we use that as well, but *this* is how we use it. These were all things I was learning as the workshop tutor. So it is wonderful because then I could then share it with other people. So people might want to look at that and just see, what was this young woman Khadija Saye was about - and the whole thing around Grenfell Tower and about writing.

Ever since that tragedy happened, they've been having creative writing workshops at the Grenfell Tower in that area, and they often welcome people. They welcome people to join with them, to share as well. So that is also really great for people who maybe going through grief and trauma of different types. So that's why I just really love using these different elements and these different things that people have created for poetry.

#### **Invitation to join Kamitan Arts and the Poetry 4 Grenfell family this and every Thursday 4-5:30pm**

We invite you to join Kamitan Arts and the Poetry 4 Grenfell family this and every Thursday 4-5:30pm  
@ the Tea Gardens\* Lancaster West Residents' Association  
Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team  
leading up to and post the Grenfell 5-year Anniversary,  
"Memoirs of Loved Ones: Forever in our Hearts" Poetry Workshops for all the FAMILY

Connect with the healing beauty of nature  
Collect flower petals to decorate your poems  
Reminisce on fruitful memories and creatively share

This is a safe supportive space and opportunities to recite at local stages and community sharings will be available but not compulsory in the creative healing process

**#Intergenerational #Artists #Singers #Poets #Musicians Welcome!**

### **Afripoetree app - about poets of African descent in video, audio and text**

I've created an app called Afripoetry with a lot of information about Pan-Africanism, which I'm really into, but African poets, African poets in the diaspora. Well known poets and not so

well known poets. And you can experience it. Through either audio and video and just reading poetry as well. There's lots of different ways to experience a poet and learn about other poets. So thank you for listening.

**LC, chair** Kadija, thank you so much. That's absolutely fantastic. I thought that was just wonderful to hear the experiences. You raised a really important point, which again, we can pick up about how the power of creative writing to ... as a tool. I think you said it was to support mental health, grief, and trauma. And it comes in different shapes and forms for different people at different times, but it just shows the interchangeability of that and how important it is. We'd love to pick up on that in the discussion at the end. Thank you very much.

CHAT

Rashpal.Bhogal Sounds amazing Kadija

Rashpal.Bhogal 😊 response to Poetry & Grenfell workshops invitation

**LC, chair** Our next speaker is Cheryl Moskowitz. Cheryl's a poet, a performer, novelist, creator translator and has worked on poetry workshops and dementia for many years; and is also an editor of Magma Poetry. So a very warm welcome, Cheryl. I am intrigued to learn more.

**Cheryl Moskowitz, poet, performer, novelist, creative translator with a background in theatre and psychoanalysis**

Thank you so much. It's great to see so many of you here. I am a poet and a poetry practitioner. That's to say, that I facilitate poetry sessions in the community, but I work with a wide variety of groups, most of whom would not call themselves poets. I work in schools in prisons, in hospitals and hospices, with homeless refugees, and on projects with several mental health charities, including Arts 4 Dementia, which I loved.

CHAT CM ([Poetry and Dementia: Illuminating the Present](#))

My own experience as a poet is that poetry helps me to integrate my thoughts and to make connections when I feel a bit discombobulated or disconnected. I'm particularly drawn to working with people who are experiencing a similar kind of disintegration, whether it's physical, mental or emotional. In fact, I would say in the course of most of our daily lives, we all fit into that category in one way or the other.

Lynne suggested that we might try to identify three key points in what we want to say. So these are mine:

1. Poetry is a bonding activity.
2. Form can be a good container.
3. In poetry as well as in life, we could do worse than situate ourselves entirely in the present.

I'm going to start with a quote relating to that last point and the quotes from an essay by the novelist and poet D. H. Lawrence entitled *Poetry of the Present*. Lawrence says:

*The poetry of the beginning and the poetry of the end must have that exquisite finality, perfection, which belongs to all that is far off . . .*

*But there is another poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web. The waters are shaking the moon.*

And I love especially those last two images, that idea of strands intermingling into the web and waters shaking the moon. I never know quite how to describe what happens in one of my sessions, but I would say that there's definitely an intermingling of everyone's thoughts, ideas and preoccupations; and however random or chaotic, we managed to merge these collectively into one beautiful collective whole - much like a spider weaving, a web.

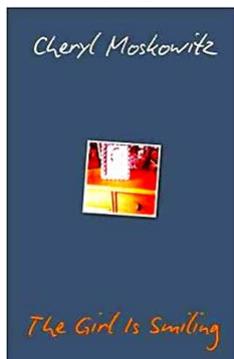


Veronica wanted me also to say something about my work as a creative translator. And in fact, I've been trying to do that all morning as I had to record a video earlier to send to a school in advance of a creative translation session. I'm going to be doing with them later this month.

Creative translation of poetry from other languages doesn't require the participants or even the facilitator to be a linguist. It's actually more about having an exquisite curiosity in something that you don't quite understand. The process of creatively translating a poem is one part detective work equipped with clues like glossaries and rough little translations to the text being looked at, but one part alchemy, which I think comes into every poetry session, which comes about by paying close attention to the feel of something and trying to recreate that in whatever way might be possible through words, whatever

words one has to hand. So finally as a way of explaining a bit more about my first and second point, that poetry is a bonding activity and that form can be a good container,

### Leaving



I'm going to finish with a poem of my own that I wrote after spending time with my father from whom I'd been estranged for most of my life and managed only to reconnect with him toward the end of his, when he'd been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. The 'you' in this poem is my husband who actually came with me on this particular visit. But in the poem I described the process of writing a cinquain together, which is a form I often use when working with groups. So I might be able to say a bit more about how I've done that in different workshops in later when we have discussion, But now I'll leave you with this poem:

#### *Leaving*

*You came with me to see my father. 'This is your son-in-law,'  
I told him. He looked mildly pleased as though having something  
in law made the visit all the more significant. The sun was*

unusually strong for November and the season's colours were everywhere. 'Let's write a cinquain!' I suggested, thinking we might capture the scene and that a poem of five lines and twenty-two syllables might still be within reach if we all worked together. The first line should be our subject, two syllables long. 'What shall we call this? I held up what the vine maple had dropped. 'Leaf,' he said. 'Oh yes,' I said, 'but we need one more syllable.' 'Leaves' he said, his intelligence outmatching the form. 'Brown leaf?' I offered. His was better. The second line is four, it should tell us what it looks like.

He looked at me quizzically. What else was there to describe? 'It's curled,' you said 'and dry.' Coming to my rescue just when I was about to fall, headfirst into my father's void. 'Oh yes, curled and dry, and look! There are veins just like on your hands.' My father stretched out his fingers and gazed at the underside of his wrist and the back of his hand, following the trajectory. Dorsal digital veins, blue rivers coursing Basilic and Cephalic routes. Something flickered, a doctor's curiosity, and for a moment, that was all the description necessary. Six syllables for the third line, something to do with purpose. My father looked incredulous.

A leaf is just a leaf, surely. Nothing more. I was harrying and he did not want to be harried. 'An action?' I coaxed. 'It blows in the wind,' you said and right there, that's why I married you. Swooping in like Superman to save me. Yes, yes. The wind blows, the leaf falls and there we have it, six syllables. Two, four, six... and now, eight. At the sound of counting my father finds renewed interest, something he'd once been good at. Eight syllables to tell us what the subject feels like. My father nods his head and breathes out a sigh that sounds almost like laughing. You suggest 'sad' and I say 'wistful,' and we both think about how we will leave here soon. The last line is an echo of the first, two syllables. The sun has changed its position and now we are sitting in almost complete shade.

My father pulls his cap on over his head and you release the brakes to push the chair on ahead. I wait to write the whole thing down for him and place it with the leaf in his room where he can see it.

Leaving' by Cheryl Moskowitz, by permission of the author from *The Girl is Smiling*  
Cheryl Moskowitz, Circle Time Press 2012

Here is the cinquain:

*brown leaf  
such dry curled veins  
falls from trees when wind blows  
a bit sad, wistful, autumn starts  
leaving*

Thank you.

[cherylmoskowitz@me.com](mailto:cherylmoskowitz@me.com)

**LC, chair** Well, that was absolutely beautiful; and I can see from the reaction of people on the screen that was incredibly powerful. I loved your three points. I think coming back to that, to talk a little bit about the bonding activity. I really liked the *stimulate in the present* because I think that's a perennial debate for people with cognitive impairment. I am going to ask you a little bit in the panel discussion about *a good container* and so on. I loved also the point you made about using whatever words come to mind. And again, I guess that's back to the present. So I'm really look forward to picking that up. Thank you so much, really lovely.

**LC, chair** Next Nabeela Ahmed is a writer, a multi-lingual poet - coming back to that point that Catherine made earlier about the multilingual nature - and also a storyteller who teaches poetry and creative writing.

**Nabeela Ahmed, writer, poet, storyteller and artist, who teaches creative writing for South Asian people at libraries in Bradford. (contact: [nabilahmed2@gmail.com](mailto:nabilahmed2@gmail.com))**

I am Nabeela Ahmed, a multilingual poet and writer based in Bradford and I am going to talk to you about a creative writing class I'm teaching at Manningham Library.

### **Ten-week writing course at Manningham Library**

Originally the course was funded by a new publisher, Fox and Windmill. They supported the first the next ten weeks; and after that Bradford Libraries supported it. We have been running since October. Each session on Saturday runs for two hours, from 10 to 12 in the morning. I try to cover three kinds of themes in it:

#### **Nurturing**

I like to go for something that's nurturing because as writers and poets and writers, we are very critical of our own work, whether our work is good enough. I always incorporate an element that nurtures us as humans, as writers.

#### **Skills for a range of writing**

The second element I try to incorporate is to do with skills and craft. Because it's creative writing, in my group I've got people who are writing novels, who write short stories, who are writing memoirs, playwrights, who are going to write a monologue, all genres from sci-fi to comedy. So we've got the whole range of writers. I try to take in different types of work. Luckily, they're all open-minded so will have a go at whatever I bring.

#### **Improving, experimenting with form, theme, dialogue – and language**

We'll have a go at improving our character, improving the theme, improving dialogue, all kind of writing. We'll have a go at six-word stories or writing piece of flash fiction, writing in various languages, experimenting with lots of different forms and themes.

### **A longer theme over six weeks**

Over the next six weeks, we'll focus on a longer theme. We decided on the pieces of the work that we're going to be focusing on. It's going to be a longer piece. It's going to be one piece we'll be concentrating on each week. At the end of six weeks, we'll have hopefully a chapter written, 60 minutes, a monologue, a first chapter of a memoir, for example. So at the end, we've got something to showcase.

### **Feeding back**

In the third section we always feed back. Because the most precious thing as writers is to actually get some feedback on our work. Did people understand this or that player, or this or that part? Did they like it? Did something completely confuse them? That's a really precious time. We have guidelines around that, that people have to be kind and supportive. The feedback has to take you somewhere. So there's always a section where we will share a portion of our work. We take it in turns in the group; and then the rest of the room gives feedback – ideally written notes, so when you go home you don't have to remember everything that everybody said that you could possibly improve on it.

That's how I structure the sessions. In the middle, I always give a break. It's a kind time. People have become friends, so they have a catch-up.



### **Arts outing**

At the end of the last ten-week session. For the last one we went to Haworth and we held our session on the [Brontës moors](#) and had a meal afterwards. So we try to fit in the artist's date in our sessions.

For the last session on this one, I am hoping to go to Saltaire to visit the [Hockney gallery](#). He's got a new exhibition with the trees. We could do some writing there with the trees and perhaps showcase them.

### **Multilingual poetry workshops across Bradford**

I also teach multilingual poetry workshops and general poetry workshops at libraries across Bradford. And within those, it's a case of accessing all the languages, all the different dialects that you speak, to be able to create something that's going to be wholesome and not trying to force something into a language and words that don't fit it or you need so much explanation

**LC, chair** Thank you so much Nabeela. That was absolutely fantastic. And again, so important to emphasize the need for culturally appropriate opportunities too, for people to

express. I know that we can put details of the creative writing programs that Nabeela runs in the webinar report and share details of the chat as well today. So thank you Nabeela.

CHAT

ParveenKhan Nabila is brilliant, I love her work

**LC, chair** Now our final speaker today is Justyna, who is the Social Prescribing Network Manager for the Healthy London Partnership. We started the webinar with an introduction about how important social prescribing was to support, both the creative writing opportunities for individuals, and communities to access. So, really looking forward to hearing from you Justyna about the important work that you're facilitating and leading.

### **Justyna Sobotka, Social Prescribing Network Manager, Healthy London Partnership**



Thank you, Lynne. I'm the Social Prescribing Network Manager for the Healthy London Partnership, which is an organization that provides leadership and support to London system, including an NHS England Integrated Care Systems, Primary Care Networks (PCNs). We work to spread and scale personalized care, including social prescribing (SP). My role is to coordinate the London Social Prescribing Network. We have more than 400 social prescribing link workers (SP LW) across London already, based in PCNs across the capital.

I trained as a psychologist and was a SP LW back in 2019, when SP was introduced to PCNs, and now advocate for the development of SP across London, also developing pathways and career pathways, for link workers. I facilitate peer support sessions and peer learning events for London social prescribers. I also facilitate London SP Advocates programme, manage London SP workspace on the FutureNHS collaboration platform, which is the platform where SP LW and other stakeholders can share resources.

### **Raising awareness: sharing links to creative writing programmes with link workers**

This is quite crucial to get all your links - from all organizations that support creative writing and poetry, so we can actually place that in shared directories or with within our networks.

If you are London-based and are happy for SP LW to refer to your services, that would be nice if you sent details to my personal address and I will make sure that we share this with SP LW across London. It would need to be pan London - if your service covers specific boroughs that may be tricky, but if you are offering pan London services, I'll be really keen to get this information to all the link workers.

So what I'd like to focus on now, for those of you who may unfamiliar with SP, I will quickly explain what SP is, then I will focus on how it works across London and how you can get in touch with your local SP service. LW were present in the community setting for many years, but in 2019, the NHS introduced them to GP surgeries and PCNs.



## Why SP was introduced

One in five GP appointments focused on wider social needs rather than acute medical issues. So in areas of high deprivation many GPs reported that they spent significant amount of time with people who have problems with that or with dealing with consequences in poor housing, stress, loneliness or physical inactivity. Traditional health interventions were not the most appropriate or effective response for supporting people in those circumstances. So SP was introduced as a remedy for that, and to present the NHS and local authorities with an opportunity to help people make use of the existing community services, activities, resources, facilities that are already available to help them manage to overcome social factors. LW are a key part of their multidisciplinary teams, within PCNs, within GP surgeries or voluntary sector organisations that actually provide a support to people.

### **SP Referral Criteria – long-term medical condition, mental health needs, loneliness or isolation, complex social needs, legal advice**

The main referral criteria for SP usually is that the person presents one or all of the five main core referral criteria: The first is that the person has one or more long-term condition, need help with mental health, feels lonely or isolated, or have complex social needs that affect the person's wellbeing. There are also some specialist SP LW in some boroughs, including mental health LW, some LW specifically support children and young people. So they are targeting the younger population. Some support patients with cancer or some provides social welfare, and legal advice.

### **SP referral pathway**

So referrals to LW can be made from a wide range of agencies, including pharmacies, hospital discharge deans, other health professionals. But most referrals are made either through GP surgery, or self referral. These are two main pathways. If you are interested in getting in touch with a LW because you need SP, you are most likely to be successful in accessing SP through referral from your GP. Some services across London also accept self-referrals. So then you can use one of our resources [see CHAT on next page] to identify your service and then get a self-referral.

### **SP conversation**

How the SP LW usually works: the person has about one-hour holistic session with the LW. It's like a conversation where the LW's task is to identify what matters to the person they are speaking to. Then they try to match what the person is interested in or what the person needs to increase their wellbeing with the offer that they have. So, as we were talking about creative writing and poetry - that sort of activity or art classes, walking groups, free programme for new parents, legal support. debt advice, housing advice, very many different activities that LW have access to because they are also Community Builders (see page 80).



### **The London Social Prescribing Map – raising awareness**

One of the projects that I am involved with has been creating the London SP map. This map presents the overall SP picture in all of the London boroughs. That would include SP providers in certain areas and also all individual SP services in London. You can get contact information to the manager or to the website; and you can quickly check who is a SP provider in your borough and gets contact details that will enable you to access this. I would be really happy to share their details and if you'd like to learn more about what we have, here are links and of course, I should be happy to answer your questions .

**CHAT: Justyna Sobotka** , [j.sobotka@nhs.net](mailto:j.sobotka@nhs.net)  
Healthy London Partnership [video about Social Prescribing in London](#):  
More about the [HLP Team](#) HLP [projects](#):  
Sign up for our [London Social Prescribing Newsletter](#)

### **LC, chair**

Thank you, Justyna. That's fantastic. It is just so important that people do understand the process of social prescribing and how to access it; and then also that we can make links between different communities so that people can get the right support at the right time, which is a theme that's come up throughout the talks. So, thank you to all the speakers for your contributions today. Time now for a discussion between the speakers.

### **SPEAKER DEBATE**

**CHAIR: Professor Lynne Corner, Director of VOICE and COO at the UK National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA) at the University of Newcastle.**

I'd like to pick up a first point from Catherine's after that fantastic introduction to some of the neuroscience around language and talk a little bit about that issue, Catherine, about emphasizing retention, not loss because dementia and cognitive decline is often a narrative of loss. It's often a very felt experience of loss, but in terms of language, can you talk a little bit more about the importance of emphasizing retention?

### **Professor Catherine Loveday**

I think that with any sort of cognitive function. So, I mean anything from language to memory, to our understanding of the world. There is never this blanket loss – I worked with people with brain injury and all sorts of strokes etc. and it's never a blanket loss. So the key thing I think for me as a neuropsychologist is to find the bits of the system that are still working and okay. How we can emphasize those and work with those.

What I'm picking up from everyone today is about finding what is personally relevant to people. So one of the ways to really emphasize the skills that people do have, is to find an in

to them, what is personal personally relevant? So, right at the beginning we heard about finding a poem that absolutely works for somebody. Then that becomes a vehicle for people to tap into the areas of their language system that are still working; and all these different sort of types of allowing people to express themselves, I think, as many modes of expression, as much freedom as people can have.

It's almost like when we use language with young children, one of the things that some people tend to do is correct children. But what we know from the evidence is that the best thing to do is not to correct, it's just to work with and to support. Sometimes it's to model other things, but usually if someone is communicating, that's what matters. It doesn't matter how they're doing it or what words they're using or what order those words come in, we should respond to it as a form of expression. That allows people to then have the confidence.

So a lot of this comes down to confidence and by giving people the confidence to express themselves in whatever way is comfortable. Tapping into those areas of the communication system that's still working, we give people the best chance of being able to use language and communication for as long as they possibly can. Some of that is about the things that we've talked about, which is to use people's preferred language and to make it as accessible as possible.

**LC, chair** Thank you, Catherine. That's beautifully put, because I do think that emphasizing, just as a tool in a way for carers, as well as the people with lived experience, in terms of no one quite knowing what to say sometimes. But enabling people to express what they're feeling is just so important.

That leads to something that William said, which I wanted to pick up on – and it came through in the chat as well - about that the practicalities of navigating to the right support at the right time and William, there's a question in the chat about: How do you find the right poem at the right time. Can you tell us a little bit about from your experience.

### **William Sieghart**

I suppose I've learned from listening to so many people and working out which poem seems to have the biggest impact on people. And ironically, the most popular complaint, if that's the right word for it, that people bring to me is loneliness. And the shortest poetry prescription I've ever discovered, it is two lines about loneliness by the Persian poet [Hafiz](#) from 700 years ago where he says:

*I wish I could show you when you're lonely or in darkness  
the astonishing light of your own being.*

and I suggest to people that they stick that on their mirror and learn it off by heart and just look at it every morning as a way of getting started.

Though I don't want to push my Poetry Pharmacy books, that have in all I think 110 conditions with a poem, and I've written a few paragraphs about why the poem might help

that particular condition. Those are two source materials where you can actually connect whatever the anxiety to a particular poem that I'd found and they have been tried and tested on people and in terms of all the people I've listened to.

**LC, chair** Brilliant. Thank you, William and to Catherine and to all speakers. This issue about improving and preserving brain health came through, especially from John, you put it beautifully about learning new skills and how it kept you stimulated. Can I ask a little bit about how can you tell? Can you talk a little bit about what, what do you look for to evidence this, because an important part of social prescribing is the evidence-base around how you can tell and see the impact and feel the impact that creative writing and poetry is happening. So what do you do with your particular work to capture that. Can I start with you, Kate.

**Kate Parkin**

We capture impact, it's more about feedback really in a variety of ways. But what we do with all our sessions, we make sure that we have an online, very simple system, which everyone can access, artists as well. On our website, we give them all a login. at the end of the session, that can just feed back or if there's an thing that they need to feed back or they have any considerations or concerns. Often we have everything. *'X looked very thin at today's session. He left early which is very unusual.'* So. we would follow those up.

Also we look for feedback from care staff. So we get that 360 as well as residents, if we are in care settings. We really try and use observational evidence - that's a good way of using the feedback form as well for artists, for staff and for family members to capture that without having more intrusive questioning.

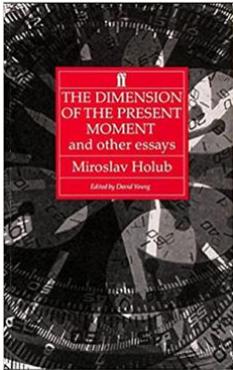
We have learned our lesson because in one of our projects where we're using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales (acronym WEMWBS), and it felt at times we were asking too much of people and it took away the quality of the session. We were going backwards because we're asking them how they felt at the beginning, how they felt at the end.

So we try to do more observation. We also use lots of imagery. We do films – that's a great way of capturing people's journey. Also the work itself: we ask artists at every session to take photographs. We don't have to be highfaluting. We put those up on a closed group. We have two, an outer Facebook page and a closed Facebook page for artists and for care staff and it's about sharing practice to say 'this works', 'love this', inspiring ideas and also getting the feedback from those participants. These are probably our most successful ways.

**LC, Chair** Cheryl, the point you made about situating in the present, I guess that is echoed in what Kate just said, that it's not about before and after necessarily. It is about that moment, in the present. Could you say a little bit about that, because that was a theme that resonated through all the presentations.

**Cheryl Moskowitz**

Absolutely. I think the measure for me as a facilitator is engagement. What I had to examine was how quickly in everyday speak we fall back on referring to the recent past or the future - what are you going to do later? Or what have you been doing today? - and actually to retrain myself in terms of the language that I use within the context of a workshop to be entirely present is an almost instant way of increasing the level of engagement, because it's



a stress reducer. Because we can all be in the present and sometimes the present is only a very short thing - The wonderful poet, Miroslav Holub who was also an immunologist, wrote an essay called *The Dimension of the Present Moment* (1990) and he decided it was only three seconds long, but that's enough to just be there in the moment. Also, I think the present is where we are always all together in. and anything that deviates from the present separates us.

**LC, Chair** That's fabulous. I think that the message that I've taken from today about retraining to be in the present is actually a really powerful point. I think it was Daisy who said about brain stretching - I loved that concept as well, but through creative writing through poetry, you can really re-imagine what we can be. It's such a powerful way to express what different people are feeling at different points in the journey and that sense as well, I think, which I always take from any work with brain health and cognitive impairment is the personalization of it in that everybody's journey is so different and we need a range of tools, a range of ways to be able to capture and respond to that at different points in the journey and to be flexible in our approach.

I just want to say thank you to you all today. I have learned so much and have thoroughly enjoyed the session. I think for sure there is power in poetry and in a range of creative writing opportunities. And what I've taken from today is that need to connect to different skills, different organizations and capacities together so that a person with dementia, people living with brain health issues, to know how to navigate to that, because for sure there are some fantastic examples of best practice and some of the words were uplifting in terms of the sense of enjoyment and the laughter that we can take and the resilience that can come from creative writing and for poetry. So thank you so much. I've learned so much. I hope you've all enjoyed it. I've been inspired by the range of innovative ways that people are using creative writings in different communities to really stimulate and to help people to manage what can be a very difficult journey and experience. But in terms of the emphasis on preserving brain health and in stimulating people's ability to can do – not can't do. I think it's something that I will really take away. So thank you so much for sharing all your different perspectives and experiences today.

**Veronica** Thank you, Lynne. We were indeed fortunate to have you as our chair with all your experience and our excellent and generous speakers sharing wide-ranging practice,

ideas and guidance . If there is anything you would like us to follow up on and share in the typescript, we'd be delighted to do so (hoping now that you will find links within this text). There has been much food for thought and emotions. It's been an honour to have you all. You will be warmly welcome at our next Arts for Brain Health webinar will focus on cultural diversity in the arts. You've given us a very good start today. Thank you very, very much.

## CHAT

**ParveenKhan** west sussex, crawley, UK. I am the Bilingual Memory Navigator at Carers Support West Sussex. I support south Asian families dealing with dementia. [Parveen.khan@carerssupport.org.uk](mailto:Parveen.khan@carerssupport.org.uk)

**Kate White** Hello Parveen I was just on another webinar where your excellent work was being mentioned!! Outreach in Crawley thank you.

**Anna D Atkinson** I'm delighted to join you all and learn from you.

**Rashpal.Bhogal** Hi my name is Rash and I am a Dementia support worker, working with The Alzheimer's society.

**Ann Diment** Hello everyone. Delighted to join this session today, I'm a socially engaged artist, poet, podcast host and wellbeing practitioner who has just completed delivering the Thriving Communities Somerset social prescribing project. I met Veronica when I was speaking at the social prescribing show at the Southbank centre in March, and am looking forward to learning more about evidencing the wellbeing benefits of creativity on the brain. This is what we achieved in 10 months here in Somerset using spoken work, arts, singing nature and activity based social prescribing activities <https://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/projects/social-prescribing>

**Kate White** 1Thank you to everyones contribution - so moving and stimulating.

karine.neill@nhs.scot Thank you Great to be able to hear all these valuable and passionate speakers in a field I work in within Scotland. inspiring and lessons for future. Karine Neill [Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust](#). (THAT)

**Qetnefert** Thank you to all the guest speaks, the webinar hosts and organisers. Three words to describe this wonderful event. Humbling, Enlightened and Insightful. Your work is very important throughout the world.

**Abi Bown** Thank you everyone - great work is being done by all 🙌

**Kadija George** 13:21) @William, the name of the poet that you recited on loneliness please?

**Kate White** Capacities and mutuality: Reimagining Dementia: A Creative Coalition for Justice is a campaign about creativity and new possibilities for people living with dementia [www.reimaginingdementia.com](http://www.reimaginingdementia.com)

**Professor Catherine Loveday** 1Thanks so much to everyone for a very inspiring session. I wish everyone well with this brilliant work.

**Pamela Thompson** Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is yet to come, enjoy and embrace the gift of the present moment

**Sandra Ireland** Thank you for such an informative and inspiring session!

**Kadija George** Thank you for great chairing Lynne

**ParveenKhan** I learnt so much and inspired by everyone that there is beauty in this world.

**Kadija George** Ditto Parveen.

**Forget-me-not Chorus** Thank you very much everyone

**Mary Hearne** 1thanks so much for today's session

**Rashpal.Bhogal** Thank you to you all, its been inspiring and informative, there are so many mental health issues that have been highlighted during the pandemic and so much positivity to impart.

**Sung-Hee Pak** Thank you for this wonderful gathering!!!

**Prof Lynne Corner** Thanks all so much for joining and contributing today - have loved hearing about all your wonderful work - it is so inspiring!