



Care Home as Cinematic Community

*Summary of a research project about
enhancing social connectivity in care
homes through film*

With thanks to the Carnegie Trust who funded the project and all the care home residents and staff who spent time with us and welcomed us so kindly into their communities.

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Cover image: Publicity photo of Rita Hayworth and Fred Astaire from *You Were Never Lovelier* (1942)

Back image: Studio publicity photo of Carmen Miranda

What was our research about?

When people move into a care home, they can feel lonely and disconnected from friends and family. However, research shows that being part of a group and enjoying activities together can be good for how a person feels. We wanted to find out if watching films together could help people feel connected to others.

Who are we?

We are a group of University researchers. Ana is a lecturer in Film Studies and is interested in how films make people feel. Jenna is an occupational therapist and is interested in how activities improve people's health. Thilo is a psychologist interested in the social aspects of health, and Gavin is a podiatrist with lots of experience of working in care homes.

What did we do?

Ana and Jenna visited 2 care homes during June-July 2016 to watch films with residents, staff and relatives. We watched 3 films in each care home over the course of 6 weeks. We let residents choose the films they wanted to watch. All of the films that were chosen were classic films, starring people like Fred Astaire, Rita Hayworth, Doris Day, Carmen Miranda, Marilyn Monroe and Rock Hudson.

Ana and Jenna asked everyone in the room if it was okay to take notes. They observed what people did while watching the film and wrote down, for example, if people were laughing or singing along. After each film, Ana and Jenna talked with everyone about what they thought of the film. Ana also talked to staff to get their opinions about watching films in care homes.

What did we find out?

- *Films are experienced with the senses*
Residents, relatives and even staff sang and clapped along with musical numbers. Some got up to dance.
- *People are different in how they watch a film.* Some people enjoyed talking with others during the film, whilst others liked to watch in complete silence. Some people took a wee nap and others walked in and out of the room throughout the film.
- *Classic films keep people entertained.* Even if people lost attention or did not follow all of the dialogue, everyone enjoyed seeing familiar stars and watching musical numbers.
- *Watching films is not just about remembering the past.* It is about enjoying the present too. Watching the films uplifted people's moods and

residents enjoyed chatting about the plot and characters.

- *But remembering can be part of it.* The films prompted happy memories, e.g. going to the cinema on a date. But it was also upsetting to remember loved ones who had passed away.
- *Connecting with different generations is positive.* The residents enjoyed asking Ana and Jenna about their lives. In turn, Ana and Jenna learnt a lot from the residents.

What does this mean?

Our research project offers some important suggestions for using films in care homes:

- Recognise that there is no right or wrong way to watch a film. People don't have to be paying attention to every second of the film to enjoy it.

- People have different attention spans. The structure of classic films make them particularly good at keeping people engaged.
- Remember that older people enjoy learning new things and also have a lot of wisdom to offer younger generations. Films are a good prompt for discussion.
- Have conversations about the film that enhance the present, not just the past.
- If films bring up difficult memories, make residents feel safe and comfortable. Allow people to feel sad and don't gloss over difficult topics.

What are we doing next?

We would like to do a bigger study to find out how film screenings can be made even better for residents, and work out how to make sure film screenings have a positive effect on loneliness.

Would you like to find out more?

We would be happy to come and talk to care homes about our work. Please contact Ana:

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