



Resilient Museums: The Catalytic Effect of COVID-19. Interview to Carolyn Halpin-Healy

Carolyn Halpin-Healy is Co-Founder and Executive Director of Arts & Minds, an organisation that partner with ten NYC museums and the Smithsonian to provide museum-based programming for people with dementia and their care partners, designed to counteract isolation and reduce caregiver burnout.

After inviting Carolyn, in July 2020, for a training day with the educators who are part of the MTA Network, we meet her again at the Resilient Museums conference.

We asked Carolyn Halpin-Healy to tell us about Arts & Minds approach.

We recognize dementia as a social justice issue: our approach supports human dignity, pushes back against ageism and contributes to a more dementia-friendly world. Arts & Minds prioritizes Black and Hispanic/Latinx communities where rates of dementia are disproportionately high and we are dedicated to working in underserved communities.

Designed to counteract isolation and reduce caregiver burnout, Arts & Minds programs have been shown to improve well-being by bringing people together for creative and uplifting experiences. Arts & Minds is a winner of the 2015 Rosalinde Gilbert Innovations in Alzheimer's Disease Caregiving Legacy Award, recognized specifically for valuing diversity.

How has Arts & Minds responded to the lockdown due to the pandemic and how participants responded to Arts & Minds proposals?

In March 2020, the emerging COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for Arts & Minds to immediately change its programming platform. Due to risk of transmission and museum closures, in-person meetings with participants were not possible. Anticipating the New York City lockdown, Arts & Minds began an entirely new virtual initiative in mid-March, now called "Arts & Minds @home|Arts &



Minds en casa.” For the last year, our programs have been successfully delivered to participants living in their homes via video conference. In addition, the pivot to online programming has catalysed development of an on-line training course that will help museums reach more people with dementia in their communities. Online programs have realized a potential for engaging participants where they live, eliminating geographic barriers and challenges of travel outside the home due to physical disability, access to transportation, and behavioral challenges, which many participants face even in ordinary times. This experience has shown that the demand for online engagement will remain even when the pandemic subsides and we are once again able to enjoy group visits in museums safely. We anticipate home-based virtual programs will become an enduring part of the Arts & Minds portfolio of activities.

What is the relationship between museum programmes for people with dementia and health and social services in your country?

The relationship between the museum, health and social service sectors in the United States varies from place to place and is not at all uniform. It is fair to say that museums and other arts organizations have taken the lead on programming for people with dementia and their caregivers. Dementia advocacy organizations are increasingly aware of the benefits of arts programming and they help Arts & Minds and our museum colleagues reach people living with dementia. Not many members of the medical community are aware of museum programs for people with dementia. A major research study is needed to understand the value of such programs, but it has been difficult to secure funding for this. In short, we do not yet have an effective system for referring patients to museum programs, but the Arts & Health field is working towards better coordination among the sectors.

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