

Reflections after emotional visit to ERCF

07/08/2025

1. Description *What Happened?*

I visited the care home for an afternoon Brick building activity after being absent for three months. Areas of the building were undergoing renovations, so everyone was squeezed into the one space. A hand drill was going off, the room was noisy, and many faces were unfamiliar. I began the activity, but the group had difficulty focusing.

2. Feelings *What were you thinking and feeling at the time?*

I felt out of place and overwhelmed. The noise, new faces, and lack of focus from participants made me feel anxious and disconnected. It was hard to find flow or meaning in the session. I felt ineffective and ungrounded in my role.

One moment, however, stayed with me. MR was brought into the room, someone I had known before as fiery and argumentative, but full of life. I almost didn't recognise her. She seemed diminished somehow, quieter and more delicate than I remembered. But when she saw me, she smiled and said, "I've missed you," and opened her arms for a hug. She walked over to the LEGO minifigures and said she remembered me, and that she loved the LEGO. It caught me completely off guard.

Later, I was told her memory had been rapidly declining. She didn't remember her daily routines or her closest friend, yet at that moment, she remembered our sessions and her joy in creating. It felt deeply moving, painfully sad, yet bittersweet.

3. Evaluation *What was good and bad about the experience?*

Challenging: The lack of engagement and chaos in the care home environment was uncomfortable. The session felt flat, and the space didn't support meaningful connection. I felt uncertain about my role and whether my presence had value in the moment.

Positive: seeing familiar faces and realising how small and self-focused my own concerns can feel when placed alongside the lived experiences of our elderly. Being remembered and recognised by several residents' experiencing memory loss was incredibly humbling.

4. Analysis *Why did things happen the way they did?*

The session was hindered by environmental factors. However, more importantly, I underestimated the emotional intensity of returning after a long absence. While the group had shifted, I hadn't prepared myself to meet them where they were.

MR moment of recognition showed that creative experiences can linger in deeply personal ways. It reminded me that this type of engagement doesn't always yield visible or immediate outcomes, sometimes the most important moments are unexpected and gentle.

5. Conclusion *What could you have done differently?*

This experience reminded me that reflection can come through in quiet moments, not grand ones. I need to enter these spaces with less assumption, more softness, and allow things to unfold in their own rhythm.

Even if the session felt uncomfortable, even if it didn't 'work' in a traditional or expected sense, something important still happened. That is worth sitting with.

Perhaps the strength lies in the ability to stay with discomfort, to resist the urge to impress, to perform, or to generate 'fun'. Being present, grounded, and able to connect, even in small fleeting way, is what matters. Sitting alongside the reality of ageing and mortality, without rushing to distract from it, is sometimes the most valuable thing we can offer.

I have been eager to move my practice to children; maybe this is a misplaced goal, and I need to stay within the area of grief and loss with our aging population.

6. Action Plan *If it happened again, what would you do?*

For future projects, I should consider:

- The importance of a quieter space for creating calm session.
- Create activities that allow for a gentle re-engagement, without the pressure to perform or produce.
- Prioritise being present over being productive. Let presence itself be the offering.
- Trust that small moments of recognition, memory, or stillness, are valuable, even when they are quiet or fleeting.
- Resist the instinct to 'rescue' the spaces from discomfort. Instead, honour it. let the discomfort of ageing, memory loss, and quietness be part of the creative space, not something to fix or avoid.