

CASE STUDY

Victoria & Albert Halls | Alice Brooks, Instructor



Chair-based Exercise class with Alice



I am a retired Social Care Officer with 20 years of experience, soon to be 69 years old. I have also served as an Adult Education Coordinator, supporting individuals with barriers to learning. My educational background includes a one-year HND in Puppetry and Performing Arts, after which I wrote and produced an interactive family show accompanied by live music, performed at National Trust properties and community venues.

I spent 10 years as the 50+ Events Officer for Aberdeen City Council, where I designed and implemented the Over 50s Festival and 11 other annual programmes.

Last year, I retired to Ballater, a community with a significant number of retirees. Through my local church, I was approached by elderly ladies with mobility issues who requested that I organise seated exercise sessions for them. I volunteered to lead a 'Chair-Based Exercise' class at the Victoria & Albert Halls. With funding from Ballater Royal Deeside Ltd (BRD) and Ballater Academy, I completed a CBE course and received a certificate. They also covered the hall hire for 10 weeks. I offered my time freely, knowing that these classes would benefit both myself, given my own long-term health conditions, and the community. The 10-week course was deemed a great success.

Word of mouth led NHS Grampian's Mental Health Improvement and Wellbeing Service to contact me via the Hub. They referred a 78-year-old woman who was seeking to regain her fitness after an accident last summer.

Training with AllActive

The instructor training I received was excellent, conducted via Zoom. I felt confident that I could reach out to Liz and my tutor with any queries. Learning about the exercises, their pace, and repetition, and understanding their benefits for strength and flexibility was very rewarding.

Implementation

My experience working in Dementia Units made me realise that well-chosen, suitably paced music could be effectively incorporated into the classes.

The uplifting effect on attendees' mental wellbeing was evident, particularly during the sessions that included a 10-minute warm-up at the right tempo, 15 minutes of cardio at a slightly faster pace, and a 10-minute cool-down. Music had a noticeable impact on reducing anxiety, improving speech, and engaging the brain. One participant even forgot herself and started singing "That's Amore," saying it made her feel as if she were on holiday.



The first class had 25 participants, which then decreased to 18 and 12 in the following weeks. This included four volunteers and myself. We conducted the classes in a cosy, airy, carpeted room that allowed for approximately six feet of space between each person.

I carefully planned a social inclusion element to take place immediately after the exercise class, in the same room. This was particularly important for the elderly and disabled, as it might be the only exercise, company, and conversation they had that day. As a result, new friendships were formed.

Volunteers pre-set up two trolleys with tea, coffee, and biscuits, as many attendees had mobility issues. We arranged two six-foot tables and helped people walk forward to sit together. We sometimes assisted with adjusting shoes or bringing walking aids to the participants.

Benefits of CBE

The outcomes of the class were clear, with several notable benefits:

- Ages of attendees ranged from 69 to 98 years old
- Enhanced mental and physical wellbeing
- Improved mobility and performance in daily activities
- Increased independence
- Improved cognitive function

Participant feedback

Here are some comments from the participants:

Andrina, 89: "I enjoy our class so much; I like everything about it, and everyone is so nice!"

Lorraine, 83: "I like Fridays; good exercise, enjoyable with good classmates."

Dessna, 86: "I enjoy the exercise; Fridays are good!"



Roe, 80: "I enjoy the music and movement; Fridays are great!"

Aileen, 76: "I enjoy everything about the class; it makes me feel happy and relaxed. I am doing the exercises at home."

Eileen, 83 (Volunteer and attendee): "Very enjoyable, good to see everyone joining in and making new friends."

Sandy: "Had difficulty getting outside and into the car; now I find this a bit easier."

Christine, 69 (Volunteer and attendee): "Enjoyed the music; it made the exercises more enjoyable. I went at my own pace."

Val, Linda, and Gina: "The classes were brilliant; they were good for our joints and overall body. It did us a lot of good; we felt much better after the classes. At the end of 10 weeks, we felt we would like to stand up and dance to some of the music. It was nice to meet everyone and make new friends. You are a star! As are all the volunteers!"

Graham, 85: "A great training course which I enjoyed. I hope we can do it again sometime? Lots of laughs and good humour. I am sure I feel a lot fitter."

Edward, 89: "I am able to go at my own pace and use one hand if necessary. Great fun, music, and friends."

Additional comments

We concluded the course with a free 'Afternoon Tea Party' on 2nd August, which was enjoyed by all who attended.



August 2024