



Learning  
for the Fourth Age

# Annual Report

## 2013 - 2014

# Providing learning opportunities for older people receiving care

*Learning for the Fourth Age (L4A) provides learning opportunities for older people receiving care. We focus on better quality of life, mental stimulus and delaying the onset of dementia by learning through activities, pastimes and roles, which bring pleasure and meaning. Learning Mentors encourage existing interests or developing new ones, with resources meeting support needs.*

L4A is a social enterprise providing learning opportunities to older people receiving care across in Leicester and Leicestershire. A not-for-profit organisation, we work with over 150 older people each week and have 80 volunteers at any one time. Any surplus created is reinvested in to our work with some of the oldest people across the city and county.

L4A is strongly established in Leicester, with a track record of providing high quality, personalised learning opportunities to older people receiving care. Our work makes a real difference to the quality of older people's lives and provides mental stimulus, for

example using new technologies, and getting engaged with absorbing practical activities, such as gardening, art and music.

Our Board of volunteer Directors remains strong, and contains founding members of the organisation.

"I look forward all week to her coming. Life here is unstimulating...I call her 'my sanity'; it saves me from being down in the dumps a lot or thinking am I going to get like everybody else. I'm very, very fortunate that I've got V." (Older person in care home talking about her learning mentor)



# Our Services for Older People

*L4A provides learning to older people living in care homes and nursing homes. We are always looking for more places to work with so if you are interested in our work and would like to see more of it in your care setting, please get in touch with us via [info@l4a.org.uk](mailto:info@l4a.org.uk)*

Our domiciliary service works with people who are living in their own homes, including in wardened and sheltered flats, extra care units or in the community. If you or your loved one is interested in learning at home, please contact our Domiciliary Coordinator, Clare Miles: [clare.miles@l4a.org.uk](mailto:clare.miles@l4a.org.uk) or call on **07964 091 693**.

L4A also runs development projects to pilot new kinds of learning for older people and innovations and innovative ideas in care settings, for fourth agers or with new groups of volunteers. Between June 2013 and May 2014, L4A has delivered two significant projects and received funding for smaller projects, such as from the Leicestershire and Rutland Community Foundation who gave us £2,000 to cover our volunteers expenses during 2014.



## Specs

SPECS (Silverdreams Project for Empowerment and Creativity in Care Settings) was a digital storytelling project that used new technologies and supported older people across Leicester and Leicestershire to tell their own stories by creating films of their memories. This rich and stimulating project was funded by the Big Lottery Fund and ran from September 2012 to March 2014.

“It brought someone new into my room – someone who was intelligent and bright, and who can talk to me about things away from [this home]. I find it so stimulating. It makes me think... other activities don’t make me think... I am very fortunate to have [the learning mentor]” (Care home resident)



## Community Links

Funded by Leicestershire County Council’s Innovation Bursary Fund, L4A was able to try and connect older people living in care settings to the community groups living around them. This successful project ran from April 2013 to March 2014 and aimed to break down the mental and physical barriers that stop care homes from being part of their communities. Please contact Fiona Smith on [Fiona.smith@l4a.org.uk](mailto:Fiona.smith@l4a.org.uk) or by calling **07933 109 630** for more information.

L4A has found that older people respond very well to the latest technologies, as usually they are intuitive to use with touch screens, are light weight and easy to hold, readily have enlarged text and pictures and are interactive, as well as the power of bringing the outside world to the older person in the care home. In particular, we have been using iPads, video camera glasses, a wide range of online websites such as those on genealogy and history. We also use books, films and all sorts of practical resources such as art materials, soil, bulbs and plants, posters, historic objects and craft materials.

# Impact & Key Achievements

*During 2013/14, L4A finished delivering the highly innovative SPECS project, which supported older people receiving care with digital storytelling work. Overall, this project supported 199 older people and provided a quarter of the volunteering hours generated by all 37 Silver Dreams projects nationally. Another way that L4A is putting work with older people across Leicestershire on the map*



L4A secured funding to continue the Community Links project, which lights up care homes by breaking down the barriers (both physical and mental) between them and the communities around them, particularly for older people with dementia. This work has been shown to reduce medication, improve sleep patterns and boost memory and recall for those who are involved, as well as to challenge stereotypes about care settings, the people who live in them and dementia. The work was funded for 12 months until March 2014 through Leicestershire County Council's Innovation Bursary Fund and will be funded to March 2015 by the Allen Lane Foundation.

An in depth external evaluation of our work was carried out by independent evaluators, Dr Trish Hafford-Letchfield of University of Middlesex and Dr Peter Lavender, a research fellow at NIACE. They found that our learning interventions “make a significant difference to individuals’ wellbeing, bringing new ideas, improving understanding and maintaining a positive outlook. L4A is creative and ground-breaking in non-formal learning.”

During 2013/14, L4A volunteers provided over 14,500 hours of volunteering time to fourth agers living across Leicester and Leicestershire.

# Finances

*During the year, L4A's budget was closely managed and controlled in order to get maximum benefits for older people from our income.*

L4A made a surplus of £3,870 based on the Charity Commission Guidance on Statement of Financial Activity (SOFA). This, added to income not spent & brought forward from last year, takes the overall position to £30,122, which means that L4A starts the year with just short of three months' of operating costs as cash reserves. This is less than the six months of general reserves as L4A's current reserves policy aims for, in order for our charity to meet potential unexpected drops in income. L4A has no other reserves for specific purposes.

We depend on payments by care homes for L4A's services which enrich residents' lives, as well as payments made by individuals and their families. We are grateful to various charitable foundations and Leicestershire County Council for grants which are essential to our financial sustainability and for ensuring we continue to develop and innovate. Each year, it is challenging to earn and attract sufficient funding to be viable and enter the new year on a reasonably sound financial footing, and this year was no exception. With more income, L4A could expand to meet the needs of more older people and grow the number of our trained volunteer mentors.

For a donation or gift of:

- £650 - L4A could offer learning sessions each week for up to 10 older people for three months
- £1,300 would cover regular support, safeguarding checks and travel expenses for 10 volunteer mentors for six months
- £2,500 will pay for tablets such as iPads, learning materials and resources for a year for one care home
- £9,000 a year can pay for a part-time administrator and coordinator for volunteers
- £20,000 would enable L4A to work intensively for a whole year in a care home connecting them into their own local communities and services, with benefits lasting way beyond the year.

If you would like to give financial support for L4A's work and discuss please contact us - we would be very pleased to hear from you.

**Email: [info@l4a.org.uk](mailto:info@l4a.org.uk)**



# Volunteers

*Huge thanks to the team of volunteer learning mentors and for your commitment to your own training, and dedication to giving personal, thoughtful and valued learning opportunities to older people.*

Over 14,500 hours of volunteering were provided throughout the year by L4A volunteers for the benefits of older people in Leicester and Leicestershire, including on the SPECS project.

The external evaluation highlighted the important benefits that volunteering also had for all of our volunteers and we have continued working to diversify our volunteer base so that we have volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds. If you are interested in volunteering with us, please email [info@l4a.org.uk](mailto:info@l4a.org.uk) for more information. We would love to hear from you.

“Younger learning mentors referred to achieving feelings of empathy and personal growth, all of which contributed to their motivation and thus their own wellbeing.”

“For those learning mentors still studying, the experience had unexpected benefits – encouraging some to change their future career intentions, life choices and courses as well as employability. We encountered changes in career intentions, course intentions, changed family behaviours, changed work behaviours, and reflective comments on end of life experiences that were clearly life changing for mentors.”

## **- Learning in Later Life External Evaluation 2014**

All of our volunteers receiving an induction, training and ongoing support from us and we also carry out DBS checks, take up references and insure all of our volunteers to facilitate learning for older people.

“I’ve really enjoyed helping out here because I feel like I’ve made their day a little bit better. I think the older people love the atmosphere – you can tell, they’re all laughing and joking and getting involved – it’s nice for them as well.”

*Matt, reflecting on his role as a volunteer with L4A*

# Staff

**Dalena Christian** worked for L4A for a short time during November 2013. She had just qualified as an Occupational Therapist and had previously volunteered with L4A in Melton. She was offered a full time post in Peterborough and left to pursue Occupational Therapy within the NHS.

**Annette Day** was another of our volunteers who took up a post with L4A in November 2013 on the SPECS Project until it ended in March 2014. Annette was a part time Project Coordinator who worked covering all of our care settings, enabling older people to find, engage and explore their creative side. Annette now works in a care home in Lincolnshire facilitating activities for older residents and training the staff team there.

**Julie Hodder** was our SPECS Project Coordinator until September 2013 and led our work with care settings to support older people with digital storytelling over the course of a year. Julie left L4A to work for the British Lung Foundation.

**Melissa March**, Chief Executive, continues to lead the team in Leicester and Leicestershire. Over the past year, she has managed the changing shape of the organisation well and been successful in maintaining and innovating the range of services provided to older people through attracting funding from care settings, local authorities and grant making bodies.

**Clare Miles** continues as the Development Coordinator for our domiciliary service. This work has continued past its funded period of March 2014 because of the huge, life changing impact that providing learning to those receiving care at home is having on older people's lives.

**Fiona Smith** is our Community Links Development Coordinator who has piloted ways of connecting care settings to their communities both by bringing the community groups in to the care homes and through taking residents out to enjoy local activities. This work has integrated older people with their neighbourhoods and has proved particularly beneficial for those with dementia.

**Denis Tanfa**, Project Worker on SPECS until March 2014, continued to support older people in care settings to engage with the latest technologies, particularly capturing their stories and histories using video tools.





# Working together with Partners

*We sincerely thank all our partners and supporters. It is no exaggeration to say that we could not have achieved so much without your generosity of time and resources. You have been enabled us make a difference to older people during the year, as well as giving volunteers training and support, often helping them learn new skills too. There are too many partnership organisations to mention them all, but they include:*

Agnes House  
Aigburth  
Brook House  
Collaborative Business Support  
Community Opportunities  
De Montfort University  
DMU Square Mile  
Guthlaxton College  
Lester Hall  
Hunters Lodge  
Holloway House  
Leicester City Council  
Leicestershire County Council

Our External Evaluation team, Dr Peter  
Lavender Niace, and Trish Hafford-  
Letchfield, University of Middlesex  
Seed Creativity  
Scraptoft Court  
Scalford Court  
South Leicestershire College  
Syston Lodge  
The Big Lottery Fund  
University of Leicester  
Vernon House  
Voluntary Action LeicesterShire  
William House



# The Board of volunteer Directors comprises:

**Alan Tuckett**

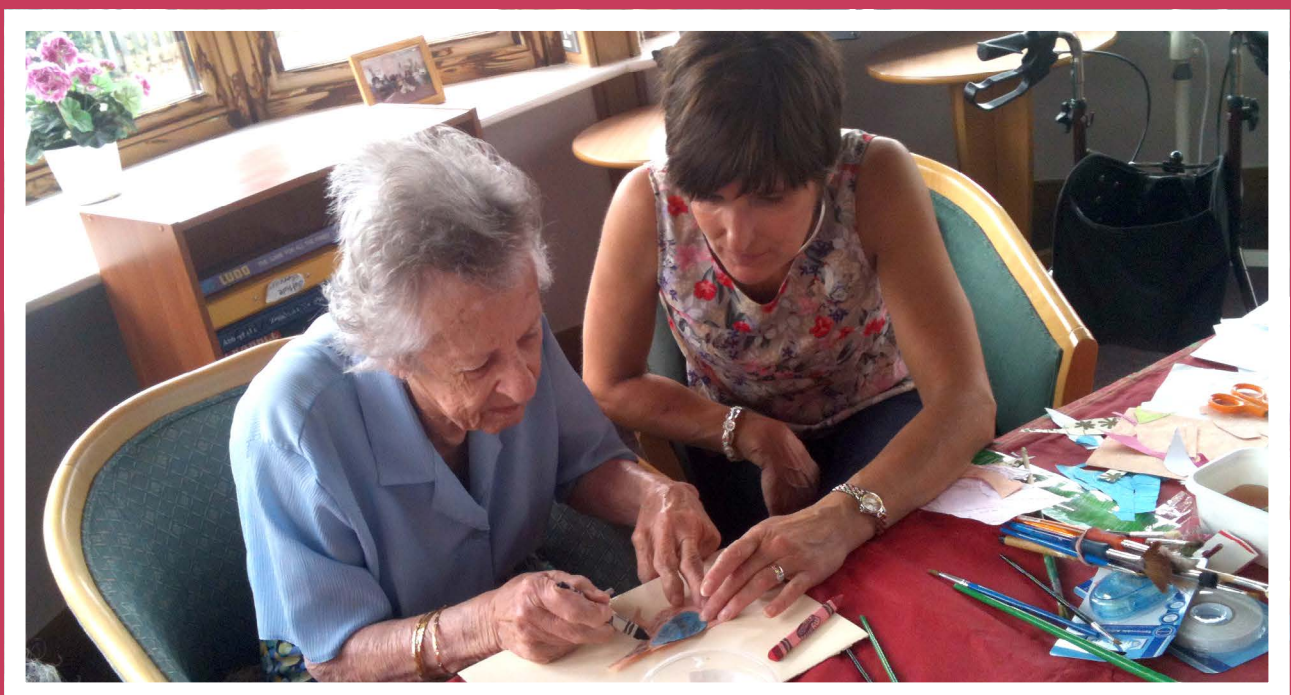
*(until September 2013)*

**Nick Meyer**

**Rob Hunter**

**Melissa March**

**Toni Fazaeli, Chair**



# Case Study



## Harry

Harry was in his late 80s, had recently moved into a retirement complex and where his wife died. Harry has reduced mobility and, therefore, requires some help with things like shopping. He is really grateful for his family's help and support with such tasks but also would like to be independent and not feel like a burden.

Harry was a Headmaster for many years and served in the Russian Convoys during WW2. He specifically wanted to learn to use email and to order his supermarket shop online. He contacted L4A to enquire about our

work and we met with him, assessed his needs and wants, and matched him carefully with a one-to-one learning mentor who supported him weekly to learn to use a computer.

Harry is keen to learn and keep occupied, to keep as independent as possible for as long as possible; and is enjoying the possibilities the computer is opening up for him. Having gained confidence with email and shopping online, Harry is exploring other possibilities such as writing documents and finding information on the web. This has included the very recent information available to former servicemen on medals being awarded over 60 years after WW2 to those who served in the Russian Convoys. He has now received a medal from the Russian Government and has been able to apply via the internet for his award from the British side too. Harry is clearly enjoying the learning partnership and the benefits it is bringing. He shares photos and emails with his family on a regular basis and looking forward to exploring more about IT and computers in the future.

“My father, Victor, is a resident at this home and since he's been involved in this project I've noticed a big difference in him. I think this is a wonderful project, please keep it up if at all possible. It's doing my dad the world of good; it's just what he needs to keep his brain working. He's very involved in it and loves every minute of it.”

**Anne, daughter of Victor (89), talking about his involvement in the Community Links project**

“When I started volunteering here, I didn't think it was going to be like it has been, in fact it's been so much better... It's so great to come here every Thursday and to see what we do put a smile on people's faces. It's been such a massive reward for both myself and everybody that I know who's doing this.”

**Heather, sixth form student and volunteer, talking about her role as a volunteer with L4A**



# External Evaluation

*An in depth external evaluation of our work was carried out by independent evaluators, Dr Trish Hafford-Letchfield of University of Middlesex and Dr Peter Lavender, a research fellow at NIACE. Some key quotes and findings from the evaluation to highlight include:*

“There are significant benefits. L4A creates successful learning partnerships with traditionally neglected groups of older people in poor health and with limiting disabilities”

“L4A has developed methods that engage older people in one-to-one learning, in couples and in groups, with some taking up lead roles, eg facilitating music appreciation, art and computing.”

“We saw rich examples of learning experiences... Within care homes, older people had made significant progress, found new skills and knowledge and had become more confident.”

“These make a significant difference to individuals' wellbeing, bring new ideas, improving understanding and maintaining a positive outlook. L4A is creative and ground-breaking in non-formal learning.”



# What are older people learning with L4A?

“We saw rich examples of learning experiences.... Within care homes, older people had made significant progress, found new skills and knowledge and had become more confident by:

1. **Learning new things (eg painting)**
2. **Keeping the body active (eg knitting): learning for health (eg armchair exercise)**
3. **Learning what's going on in the world (eg discussion of news) learning more capability**
4. **Keeping the mind active (eg discussing topics, books ‘Tess of the d’Urbervilles’)**
5. **Stimulating the process of learning (eg through arts-based learning)**
6. **Reflecting on a life well spent (through reminiscence using films, biography, storytelling).**
7. **Helping maintain independence (eg better social contact, making new relationships)**
8. **Developing skills and knowledge for survival (eg online shopping, emailing relatives)**
9. **Learning to understand and build relationships with other people in relation to age and ethnicity, and particularly being in contact with younger people**
10. **Learning about oneself in later life and how to connect, contribute, feel productive and promoting resilience where there are adverse health conditions.**

These make a significant difference to individuals' wellbeing, bringing new ideas, improving understanding and maintaining a positive outlook. L4A is creative and ground-breaking in non-formal learning.”

# Future Prospects

*Looking forward, L4A plans to continue our renewed focus on Leicestershire and work with others locally to have shared and joint benefits for some of the oldest older people living in the area.*

Because of their hugely positive benefit for older people, we want to continue with the three existing complementary services: working with care settings; working with older people living in domiciliary settings; and working to develop and deliver on innovative projects linking with community groups and using new technologies.

Following our seventh successful year, we also plan to apply to become a registered charity so that we can more firmly establish ourselves in the charity sector. Looking forward, we can build on the positive findings highlighted by the in depth external evaluation of our work.

For more information about any aspect of our work, please contact us by emailing [info@l4a.org.uk](mailto:info@l4a.org.uk)

