

**“I learned that
stories are a
powerful tool**

Perspectives

**A how-to guide for
engaging art and
design schools with
people living in care
homes through
intergenerational
storytelling and
co-design.**

**Health
Design
Lab.**

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CARR**
UNIVERSITY
OF ART + DESIGN

Perspectives



A how-to guide for engaging art and design schools with people living in care homes through intergenerational storytelling and co-design.

Colophon

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Table of Contents

Introduction	8
Foreword	9
Program Background	10
Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University	12
Purpose of this Guide	14
Basic Program Summary at Emily Carr	17
Key Themes & Methodologies	18
· Story-telling & Story-listening	18
· Co-Design & Inclusion	19
The Research Study & Program Benefits	23
Program Set-up & Getting Started	28
Finding a Care Home	28
Scheduling	29
Selecting Participants & Creating Groups	30
Finding the Right Space	32
Care Home Orientation	34
Dementia & Perceptions of the Care Home	35
Preparing to Start	38
Method Story & Breakdown of Visits	40
Stage 1. Introduction & Preparation	41
· Visit 1: Icebreaker	42
· Visit 2: Relationship Building	44
Stage 2. Co-Design & Content Generation	46
· Visit 3: Content Generation	47
· Visit 4: Content Generation	50
Stage 3. Production, Review & Sharing	53
· Visit 5: Review	54
· Visit 6: Sharing & Celebration	56
Program Conclusion & Next Steps	58
Program Photos & Publication Examples	60
Appendix	74
1. Program Materials	75
2. Design Curriculum Materials	77
3. References	84
Notes	89

Introduction



Foreword

Donna Levi, Perspectives Co-Lead and Recreation Therapist, UBC Purdy Pavilion

Two years ago I was forwarded an email by my care home manager which offered an opportunity to connect the people living in our home with an intergenerational, co-design, storytelling program organized by Emily Carr University's Health Design Lab. With too much on my plate at the time, I quickly read the program description and sent the email to saved mail.

Over the next few days, I had a gnawing sensation that led me to re-read the email and an intuitive understanding that we couldn't pass on this opportunity for those living in our care home. I knocked on my manager's door and shared with her "I think there's something here. We can't turn down this opportunity to make these connections with Emily Carr University students." And so began our Perspectives journey that has impacted the lives of 24 people to date in a great way.

I challenge any Recreation Therapist to tell me that this isn't a dream come true – an opportunity to have approximately 18 students guided by their professor arriving six times over three months with carefully designed activities and all required materials, designed specifically to get to the core experience of each person living in care and to guide them to a place where the person would shine and feel pride in their story, culminating in a beautifully printed booklet (the story of the person living in care), which would then be gifted back to that person.

I had the privilege to witness this program run twice over and to discover first-hand what a research study later indicated: an opportunity to share one's story contributes directly to heartiness, happiness and good health. Not only were

participants motivated and engaged in each session, those who participated in the program began to take more interest in other care home activities and in community life. The booklets were cherished by the people living in our care home and proudly shared with family, friends and staff. I witnessed the magical relationships that were built each session and the joy it brought to those who participated from our care home and the students involved.

I can't help but feel that this program needs to be recognized as Therapeutic Recreation best practice. Meaningful activity that enables people living in care homes to shine and to feel connected to their community; a legacy tool that helps care home staff better understand who the people living in the care home are and what they themselves cherish and chose to share; a program that runs with voluntary human resources (skilled professors) and their students; and all at no additional cost to the care home. At a time when resources in healthcare are limited, this program is truly a silver lining.

My hope is that you will come to understand the merits of this program, that you will step forward to initiate your own Perspectives program and provide people living in a care home near you with the benefits of opportunity for increased connection to their community, increased self-esteem and meaningful engagement that has long-term impact. In the words of one participant, "I can't believe that these young people travel across town just to hear our stories. We must have something important to say!" (Perspectives Participant from Purdy Pavillion, 2019).

Program Background

The Perspectives Program builds relationships and inter-generational exchange between people living in care homes and design students through the co-design of publications featuring the stories of people living in care. The process takes place over a 12 week semester and includes six, one-hour sessions involving small groups of students and people living in care sharing stories together, leading to the production of printed booklets featuring those stories. This mutually beneficial program creates an opportunity for people living in care to share their stories while simultaneously creating a rich learning opportunity for students. We have heard from families cherishing these publications after their loved ones have passed and from students who have new perspectives on their own lives and the elders who have shared their wisdom with them.

Maintaining a personal identity and having opportunities for self-expression are two of the many challenges facing people living in care homes. It's not unusual for someone in this position to feel like they've lost their independence, that their best days are behind them, and that they've nothing left to contribute. Because of this, they feel like their stories are coming to an end; this is called narrative foreclosure.

The purpose of Perspectives is to create an infrastructure for meaningful intergenerational exchange and social interaction between students, people living in care, their families and care home staff through both the story gathering process and the process of distributing their stories in final, printed publications.

This program gives voice to people living in care homes, providing an opportunity for creative and emotional expression, stimulation of positive memories and engagement in a unique and

meaningful activity that can reopen their stories while acknowledging their value and what they can contribute.

Simultaneously, it offers students learning opportunities in storytelling, co-design and participatory design research. When talking about their experience of the program, students frequently comment on the bond they've created with people living in care being the most valuable element, rather than focusing on the printed publications [1]. They become “active citizens” [2], uncovering the potential of care as a function of design [3], while finding their own “social happiness” [4]. They develop their voices as communicators through the exploration of issues concerned with social innovation rather than the consumer marketplace [5]. Perspectives asks students to “de-centre” themselves within the design process, centring instead the people living in care and making space for their voices [6]. In centring these voices, the students take the role of facilitators in the design process, sharing tools and their knowledge of design while acknowledging people living in care as the experts of their own experience, in turn prioritizing their intentions over those of the designer [7]. While the focus is amplifying the voices of people living in care, students are reminded that, in order to create a safe space to share stories, they must be prepared to first open up and share something of themselves. In return, they will receive someone's life experience while creating bonds and even new communities that previously didn't exist - communities of students and people living in care homes [8].

This exchange between generations and often vastly different backgrounds is a core element of the program, with many students and people living in care often speaking of how valuable they

found the opportunity to learn from one another. One student said, “The most memorable and rewarding aspect of this project is that we get to listen to the different life experiences from each person living in care, learning from them and getting life advice from them.” The learning isn't restricted to just the students, with people living in care commenting that the students were “refreshing and invigorating” and had given them “insight into what makes young people think.”

This program was inspired by the Zeitgeist Kollektiv, a public editorial design and storytelling project within the care home system in Zurich, led by the designers Carolyn Kerchof and Martina Regli [9]. Emily Carr University, led by Jon Hannan and Caylee Raber, has created their own version of the program, bringing together third year Communication Design students and people living in care homes. To date, the program has been run five times, with different student cohorts participating over five different academic semesters, at two different care homes.

Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University



**Caylee Raber, Perspectives Co-Lead and Director,
Health Design Lab, Emily Carr University**

While Perspectives is facilitated by students, the overall program was also conceptualized by academics, designers and researchers working within the Health Design Lab, a research centre at Emily Carr University. Having observed challenges and opportunities within the seniors care space through past projects, we identified that there was an opportunity for design to further support common goals in many care homes: how might we learn from people living in care homes so that we can provide better care and how might we provide increased social engagement and opportunities for meaningful contribution within limited recreation therapy budgets?

The program is our design response (one of many that's needed) which addresses a number of the challenges presented by long-term care. It looks at the broader community in which care homes are situated and identifies existing resources which can be combined in new ways for social innovation [10]. It's a strategy which looks not only at how one group in the community can serve another, but how multiple groups (students and people living in care, but also universities and care homes) can serve, and ultimately benefit, each other.

The Health Design Lab has played a role in conceptualizing, piloting and validating the

Perspectives program over the past two years in collaboration with Communication Design faculty, Jon Hannan and the Ian Gillespie Faculty of Design + Dynamic Media. Course-based projects like Perspectives are made possible at Emily Carr University by the curriculum structure which emphasizes practice-based approaches to learning that link to faculty-led research and external partnerships.

Inspired by the original Zeitgeist Kollektiv in Zurich, we adapted the program to suit our curricular and local needs, and we hope this guide will encourage others to do the same. Our vision is a range of Perspectives programs being offered between care homes and schools across communities, each achieving their own benefits and impacts related to intergenerational exchange, storytelling, and community-centred learning.

Purpose of this Guide

Jon Hannan, Perspectives Co-Lead, Assistant Professor, Communication Design, Ian Gillespie Faculty of Design + Dynamic Media, Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

As art and design educators, we're always looking for ways to engage our students in socially-innovative practice, but meaningful ways to do so are often hard to find and difficult to accommodate because of institutional priorities, ever increasing workload and perhaps a certain amount of fear. The fear of not knowing what we're doing, where to start and even that we could potentially make the situation worse through unthinking, misguided design [11]. It's always easier to dig out that reliable old studio-based project than think of ways for our students to engage with complex societal issues, but perhaps we have to be bolder and have conversations about how we introduce design students to complex issues and stop just making "stuff" [12]. Leading Perspectives for the first time was one of the most daunting and fear-inducing experiences of my near ten year career; there were just so many unknowns. But it's become the highlight of my academic schedule and a class I loath to let anyone else teach.

The intention of this guide is to discuss many of the challenges we faced, provide an academic framework or "method story" of how we embraced teaching and co-designing in long term care and give educators an entry point into this area, in the hope they'll build on our experiences and discover their own methods [13]. The guide starts with the *Program Set-up & Getting Started* section, which outlines things to consider prior to the implementation of the program. This may include connecting with care homes, logistical considerations, scheduling and recruitment details. It also defines the necessary steps to prepare people living in care homes and students before

the start of the scheduled visits when participants meet for the first time. It concludes by touching on key themes and methodologies that inspired and influenced the development of Perspectives.

Written from the perspective of a third year Undergraduate Communication Design class, the *Method Story & Breakdown of Visits* section covers the three stages of the program, including pedagogical approaches and things to consider when working in the context of long-term care. Utilizing Emily Carr University as the main source of examples for this How to Guide, this section provides detailed curricular suggestions that are relevant to a Communication Design program; however, we encourage users of the guide to adapt and modify based on the specific needs of their own communities. While the publications created at Emily Carr are the obvious material outcome of the program, the process of making them also creates space for less-tangible benefits and *things* to be created: assemblies and infrastructures of engagement that enable legitimate participation from people living in care homes while fostering intergenerational exchange and endless creative possibilities between students and people living in care [14].

This section also gives detailed instructions on how to plan and theme each of the six individual visits to the care home, describing activities and also observations made by the Emily Carr team. It also suggests ways to wrap up the program, with thoughts on how to sustain its positive effects for people living in care and students after it has ended. Throughout the guide we have endeavoured to give detailed information on how we did things

at Emily Carr in order to supplement the more instructional information, as well as to provide context for events.

The guide also includes an appendix with the class syllabi used during the program. Additional information, examples and updates about the most recent versions of the program can be found on the Perspectives website at perspectivesprogram.ca.

As I write this, we're about to run Perspectives for the fifth time. We're returning to the first care home we worked with and it feels like a homecoming, though the materials bear little resemblance to that first incarnation of the project. That's because we've learned lots of lessons along the way; new things have been introduced and other things have been dropped. This program was conceived because of a nagging, guilty feeling that we could positively contribute in the area of long-term care, but we didn't know what form that contribution would take. Now as we prepare to run the program, we're excited to catch up with staff and people living at the care home and hear what's been happening in their lives. It feels like we're working with our friends, and we feel very privileged to have that opportunity.

“I learned not only about them, but also about me - my skills, my life, and where I can go next.”

-Student

Basic Program Summary at Emily Carr

Perspectives at Emily Carr brings together a class of Communication Design students with people living in care homes and takes place over a semester long course. During the 12-week period, there are six one-hour visits between students and people living in care. The first four weeks prepare students and care home participants for the program. During the following eight weeks, students visit the designated care home to share stories and co-create materials with participants that will later form the publications that are celebrated and disseminated in the final session.

Participants are made up of a class of 18 third-year students enrolled in a course focusing on design for social innovation and approximately 15 people living in care from a local care home

who have expressed an interest in being part of the program. The students and people living in care are divided into groups each including two to three students and two to three care home participants. These groups remain the same for the duration of the program. Sometimes, though, one of the care home participants may be absent due to a conflict or illness. The program has been intentionally set-up to allow for this flexibility. All of the activities are collaboratively coordinated and supervised by a care home staff member and the Emily Carr teaching faculty leading the class.

The following diagram defines the role of each participating stakeholder during the program:

