

**Grey Matters** is a performance group that developed from the participants meeting through **Growing Bolder** – a ten-year participatory arts programme for older people based in and around the Mansfield district and initially developed by New Perspectives, Mansfield Museum and Mansfield Palace Theatre. Grey Matters has nine members who meet regularly to write and create performances.

## The Participants

Grey Matters is now an independent group. Present at the meeting researched were Joy aged 69, Janice 61, Ann 73, Barbara 65, Maggie 61 and Maddie 75, who were all planning the groups' next performance. All had been regular attenders on the workshops offered by the Growing Bolder scheme and had been involved in many arts activities.

## Expectations and Reality

*"I heard about it from the theatre programme that came through my door. It must have been the millennium and I thought, this sounds really interesting, because it was all so arty. So I came to a day when all the tutors had their little stalls out and they were telling us what they would do. And I met Cathy Grindrod (poet and workshop leader) and the course was just so brilliant. We booked her in and then we just had to book another one in from her. It was just her enthusiasm for it."*

*"I saw an advertisement in the local paper for Growing Bolder which was starting up and wanting new members. It said 'do you want to do something new and interesting with your life'? It just came at the right time when I was bored sick of my life as a wife etc and I came. I didn't think I would come, as I had been so isolated, yet I came and joined the group and I thought this was brilliant!"*

*"I suddenly realised this is my life. And I thought – go on do something get on with it, don't just sit around. I saw a drama course advertised in the local paper and Margaret was on it and she said –hey – come to Growing Bolder and that was it."*

*"I didn't know what to expect. I just thought it sounds like fun and we've had some fun and we've learnt a lot."*

All the participants agreed that the courses had exceeded their expectations – with one or two notable exceptions: *"We did something around a Chekhov play that was crap. The tutor came in and said we are going to do the Cherry Orchard because it is my favourite play. I haven't got copies so you will have to share the book. I thought, 'per-lease Mrs!'"*

## Enjoyment through engagement

*"We did an intergenerational project that was brilliant. I think when you are older you are not so frightened of being looked down on."*

*“Facilitators have enjoyed working with us because we are fun and feisty. One director said he’d never met women like us. Because we were out there and gobby and we really went for it - so maybe it’s like self-selection, the people who are going to enjoy it go.”*

*“I’ve enjoyed it all and particularly being educated. I’m not very clever but this lot (the rest of Grey Matters) use words and I write them down and think I’ll use that!”*

*“I have particularly enjoyed things I would never have done. The breezeblock sculpture, the stained glass windows, the ceramics - because they are not things you could do at home. I can go away and read, or go to the theatre, but these are not things that I could have done without Growing Bolder.”*

*“I’m not one for the arty farty. Yet I’ve done things that I wouldn’t have done and thoroughly enjoyed.”*

### **Evaluating the impact of participating**

*“Since I’ve come, I’ve come out of my shell quite a bit. I’ve surprised myself that I could do writing or poetry and that I could actually use this brain. It’s been absolutely brilliant and we are very sorry to see it (the Growing Bolder project) shut down.”*

*“I was quite a shy retiring person before I got into this...but this has really changed my personality. I am so much more confident.”*

*“This idea of confidence. It does give you confidence. I’ve never been in any group before where I have immediately felt OK. Normally you have to spend that little bit of time getting used to people and getting used to putting your own voice forward, but here that never ever happens.”*

Members of the group have been inspired by particular tutors:

Poetry with Cathy Grindrod: *“It’s changed my life –made me think more and made me appreciate modern poetry. It’s something that I hadn’t done before and I just think she is fantastic.”*

Drama with Becky Matter: *“She brought the child out in us all – we did things that we never thought we would. You didn’t feel a fool”.*

Drama with David Longford *“He inspired me. He set up the drama group and he told me to believe that I could go on a stage and perform on a stage. He inspired me to go on to community theatre.”*

Engaging in arts activities has also improved well-being:

*“It makes me feel happy. I think great! It’s today”*

*“Even if you come feeling a bit depressed you think great – I feel better...”*

They all feel participating has inspired them to try new things:

*“And the point is we are still looking – we are looking all the time to progress”*

Members now want to take a show to the Edinburgh Festival and on a world tour:

*“I’m sure America would welcome us. The Zimmers went to America why shouldn’t we?”*

*“We now think – yes we can do ANYTHING!”*

*“I think we have been very fortunate to have Growing Bolder. There must be a lot of people out there who haven’t had that opportunity and really it has been magnificent. It has been life changing.”*