



Bright Shadow
Looking back on 2024



2024 at a glance

Serving Kent and Medway, we use the power of the arts and creativity to enable people living with dementia – and those who give care – to live happy, healthy lives.

Founded in 2009, we understand the impact of a diagnosis; yet our work fosters positivity: focusing on what we can do, not what we can't.

We celebrate the joy, imagination and resilience of every individual, regardless of our challenges. We believe in the power of creative expression to enhance lives, create meaningful connections and challenge stereotypes.

Bright Shadow is more than an arts organisation. We are advocates, champions and allies. We amplify the voices, abilities and unique stories of this remarkable community.

6,331

Contact hours with people living with dementia and supporters through Bright Shadow's creative programmes

1,101

Individuals reached across Kent and Medway through our creative programmes, research and advocacy work

401

Respite hours created by Bright Shadow, providing short breaks for supporters of people living with dementia

341

Hours of wellbeing check-ins provided by Bright Shadow's Zest Session Coordinators

25

Professional artists engaged through Bright Shadow's creative programmes

2

New trustees living with dementia recruited to our board, further embedding people with dementia at the heart of what we do

Our story so far

Creative Director and Chief Executive Clare Thomas shares Bright Shadow's unique vision

Bright Shadow is an innovative arts organisation. Our mission is to use the power of creativity to enable people living with or affected by dementia to live well and thrive: we use exceptional art and cultural practices to enrich the lives of people with dementia and of supporters.



We are at the forefront of local and national networks of expert arts providers working with people living with and affected by dementia. We have been pioneering high quality work in this field for 16 years, delivering highly person-centred work in people's own homes, care homes and in the community to people of all ages living with or affected by dementia.

People with dementia are a misunderstood, neglected cohort in our community. Despite the prevalence and rising awareness of dementia, deep-rooted fear, stigma, ableism and low expectations combine to compound the disadvantages, leading to a cycle of isolation, loneliness and accelerated decline. Alzheimer's Research UK states: "The diseases that cause dementia... can make it difficult for individuals to perform daily activities and maintain their independence. This can lead to a loss of identity and self-worth, as well as feelings of frustration, confusion, and anxiety."¹ At Bright Shadow we know it doesn't need to be this way. Our work promotes independence, sustains identity and relationships, strengthens families and communities and puts joy back into everyday life.

Our main areas of operation are East and Coastal Kent and Medway, where we target our activities in areas of multiple deprivation and/or with the highest prevalence of people with a dementia diagnosis. Our beneficiaries are disabled people and their supporters, who are isolated and lacking suitable specialist services. The number of people we reach grows as our creative programme flourishes: in 2024 it amounted to 196 direct beneficiaries living with or affected by dementia, an **increase of 62% year-on-year**. For these direct beneficiaries, we provided 6,331 contact hours and 401 carer respite hours, as well as reaching 6,331 individuals in audiences, including 1,101 in-person.

¹ 'The Impact of Dementia', Dementia Statistics Hub, Alzheimer's Research UK dementiastatistics.org/about-dementia/impact

Leading the way

As an organisation we are lean and effective, establishing innovative models that have profound impact on those taking part. We we aim to use the cultural platforms that we create to raise awareness, foster understanding, and champion the rights of people with dementia, including leading the work to build sustainable arts infrastructure for people with dementia in Kent and Medway to access high quality cultural provision, with all the [well-documented health and social benefits](#)² that it brings.

Our work is endorsed by the Kent and Medway NHS Social Care Partnership Trust Dementia Envoys³, a team of self-advocates keen to increase public awareness of dementia and contribute to the development of KMPT services by being a source of knowledge, advice and consultation.

In 2024 we were delighted to win a Kent Mental Wellbeing Award, and be finalists in the Kent Charity Awards for a second time. In previous years, we've also won: 2019 Thanet Community Award, 2018 Gerald Turley Recognition Award, 2017 Directory of Social Change Everyday Impact Award, 2016 Dementia Friendly Kent Innovative Team Award, as well as being finalists for: 2021 Kent Charity Awards and 2019 Dementia Friendly Kent Arts and Culture Awards. We provide creative training to care, arts and community organisations nationally.

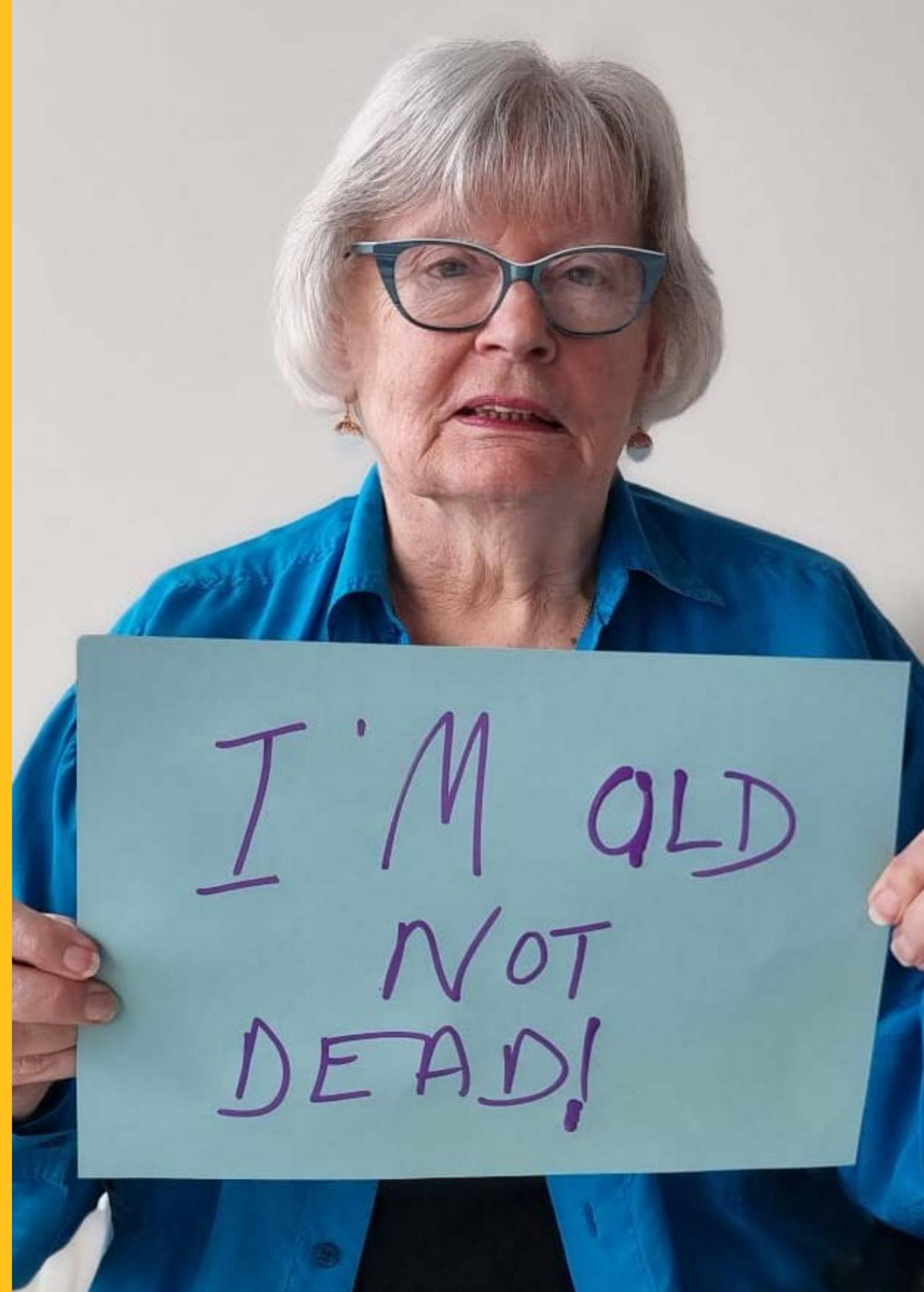
Our key aims for 2025

In 2025, we want to continue growing our unique approach to transforming the lives of people living with dementia, changing hopelessness and heartache into purpose and joy through creating art together.

- Create more opportunities to come together and share the achievements of our remarkable community
- Share our value system across Kent, Medway and beyond, modelling our dementia-positive approach and cultivating a change in attitudes
- Develop our support for artists, creating new opportunities for co-creation with people living with and affected by dementia

² Windle et al., 2018; Camic et al., 2014; Okada et al., 2008; MacPherson et al., 2010; Osman et al., 2016

³ 'Dementia Envoys', KMPT, NHS Kent and Medway





“What we have done in today’s session has really lifted the soul.”

– Creative programme participant, 2024

Our impact on wellbeing in 2024

- Bright Shadow impact data: wellbeing

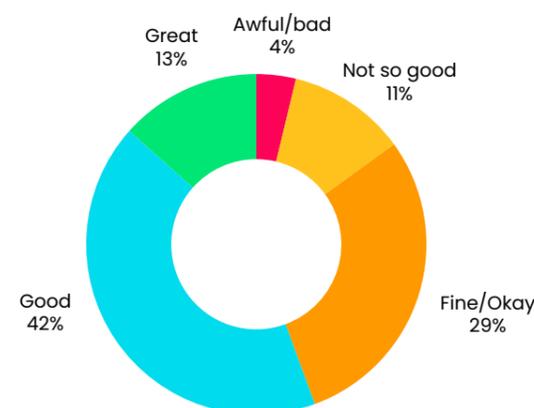
This year, as part of our National Lottery Community Fund grant, we’ve been fortunate to work with Annabel Jackson Associates to evaluate the impact of core elements of our creative programme. We’ve been taking a closer look at our weekly Zest Group sessions and our bespoke Zest at Home offering, in which we pair someone living with dementia with a Bright Shadow artist to deliver sessions in their own home.

Through this process, we have expanded on our existing wellbeing data. We’ve been asking participants how they feel at the beginning and end of group sessions since 2019, inviting everybody to select a word that best reflects their mood to measure the immediate impact of our unique creative sessions on wellbeing, as well as conducting surveys once a year. Now, not only can we update this large dataset with information from 2024, but we can add depth to these insights with feedback from redesigned, detailed surveys and in-person interviews with participants. We are delighted to begin reporting back some of these important insights.

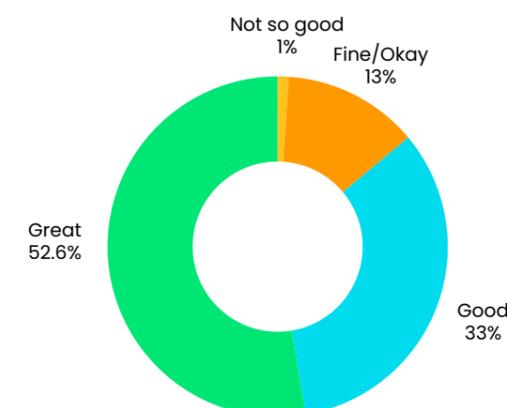
How do our participants feel?

By the end of each session, there is a marked increase in mood. These responses show a substantive change, which one senior dementia researcher described as remarkable: these significant increases in mood are rarely seen with interventions in dementia. The data shows a 54% increase in positive feeling, including an almost threefold increase in participants who feel ‘great’, a 90% reduction in negative feeling and, vitally, no respondent describes feeling ‘bad/awful’ after a session, showing just how effective our Zest sessions at uplifting wellbeing in people living with and affected by dementia. Indeed, we’re proud that **9 in 10 participants** feel ‘good’ or ‘great’ after Zest sessions.¹

Before session



After session



People living with and affected by dementia can feel scared and alone. 49% of people of all ages fear dementia more than any other health condition,² and when a diagnosis is received, this fear is too often compounded by isolation and loneliness. At Bright Shadow, we work tirelessly to change hopelessness and heartache into purpose and joy. Our extended survey sheds further light on the impact of our creative programme on wellbeing.

We know how hard it can be for people living with dementia and our loved ones to feel that wellbeing is supported, and in this data we can see that our Zest creative sessions have a significant part to play in this vital preventative health and wellbeing work.

¹ Figures based on a total of 1,496 responses between July 2019 and December 2024

² Dementia Attitudes Monitor – wave 2 (2021)

³ Dementia prevention, intervention, and care: 2024 report of the Lancet standing Commission.



“No one else is doing what Bright Shadow do... it’s what’s missing! I go to other groups but they’re not like this. I can’t explain it but this is so different. I’m doing things I never knew existed and we’re having such good times and that carries on after the group. You cannot know the difference you’re making...”
 – Zest Medway participant

New for 2024: Zest Medway and Dementia Chorus

In spring 2024 we launched a new Zest group for Medway, and the group has gone from strength to strength since. Autumn saw the launch of two new choirs, in Medway and Hythe. Here we offer a glimpse of the projects and the new partnerships that made them possible.



- An extra special thank you to Global’s Make Some Noise for unexpectedly providing additional funding to bring Bright Shadow’s Zest Groups to Medway (pictured left) for two years. Join us on Tuesday mornings!
- We’ve also brought a new choir to Medway with Bright Shadow artist Emily Watts and renowned vocal coach Mark de Lisser (pictured far left), thanks to funding from Power of Music, managed by the National Academy for Social Prescribing
- Our Dementia Chorus (pictured below left) launched in Hythe as part of an exciting new partnership with Age UK Hythe, Lyminge and Folkestone. Join us on Wednesday afternoons!





Zest Goes Green returns for a thrilling third year

In June and July, we hosted our most ambitious Zest Goes Green yet in community gardens across Kent and Medway. Through our theme, Gardens of the World, we danced, sang and made our way across the globe with the help of exceptional artists and fantastical flora.

“You bring the world to us and it is just wonderful.”
- Zest Goes Green participant



“I love it outside. The sun! The trees!”
- Zest Goes Green participant



With each session themed around Gardens of the World, participants began by creating textiles using the powerful history of indigo. Next we danced through the Himalayas, before hailing our fellow garden-goers with pregones. After a little samba, in week five we travelled to Zambia, drumming everything from djembe to gumboots. In our final week, we travelled back through our gardens of the world, celebrating the connections we made along the way.



2024 highlights: Zest at Home

Zest at Home is a series of bespoke creative sessions in your own home, for people living with dementia in Kent and Medway who are unable to access our group sessions, are isolated, experiencing a crisis or a sudden loss of communication skills. Sessions are fully funded, and offer a vital and unique lifeline for people with dementia and loved ones.



It gave us enough of a break that we could forget that [...] things were getting quite difficult. The one-to-one sessions gave us an outlet and a relief. We both relaxed with the music and with getting to talk to someone.

– Zest at Home participant



2024 highlights: Sharing our stories

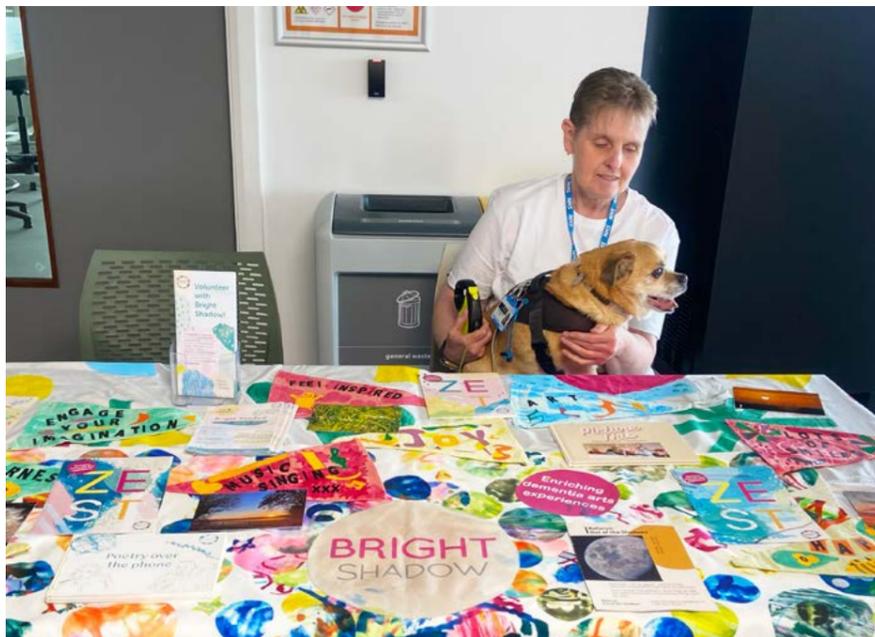
This year we shared our unique approach to enriching dementia arts experiences with researchers, the wider community, and other people living with and affected by dementia. We also developed new platforms together, to extend and strengthen the ways people with dementia are involved in our organisation.

This year, we hosted the first of our Open Forums, aiming to better understand what our community wants us to focus on, to identify ways in which we can tailor and expand our offering, and to understand barriers to inclusion we may not have recognised. The results go on to inform our organisational strategies. Themes of advocacy, autonomy and choice, connection and creativity, knowledge exchange and meaning-making emerged as particularly important.

In June, we continued investigating meaning-making when Citizen Artist Gill Ashington and Communications and Data Manager, Rebecca Truscott-Elves, shared Bright Shadow's vision for changing attitudes towards people living with dementia through building innovative, playful and creative spaces together at Canterbury Christ Church University's Impact Kent Conference.



Joining researchers, advocates and representatives from across Kent, including Abbey Physic Garden, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury Food Bank, Kent Wildlife Trust and University of Kent, we took part in talks and workshops built around address local challenges in building just, fair and sustainable communities.



“Finding creative communities helps people to cherish every moment, and realise there’s every point in going on. When people work together, it makes a huge difference in outcomes, because everybody matters.”

**Gill Ashington,
Citizen Artist**



In the autumn, we were honoured to be invited to speak about the power of everyday creativity at this year’s Living Well With Dementia Show. Each year, Kent’s Dementia Action Alliance organises the showcase, which brings together organisations from across Kent and Medway, alongside people living with dementia and supporters.

It was a joy to join this year’s speakers, with our trustee Dr Rasa Mikelytė presenting alongside Tracey Shorthouse, NHS Dementia Envoy and Bright Shadow participant. Building on our core creative programme, our inclusive governance and Open Forum we are seeking to expand our collaborations with researchers and health, social and arts organisations to take this vision to the next level, creating a collaborative approach to cherishing everything this community has to offer.

- Find out more about our data and impact work on our website: brightshadow.org.uk/impact

A snapshot of our creative programme in 2024

A journey through
our dynamic
creative
programme in
2024: from
gardens to tin
chapels, from
singing to screen
printing: this year,
we've had a
whale of a time
creating beautiful
moments to
cherish.





“Zest involves you as the participant 100% in the project, you break from the norm with your sessions by working with such a diverse range of artists and opportunities. I particularly enjoyed your hip hop and DJing sessions. Zest opens you up to new things and gives you a break from what is going on at home”

– Zest participant

Awards season at Bright Shadow

This autumn, staff, volunteers and trustees from Bright Shadow had the privilege of attending two awards ceremonies, recognising our contribution to the effective delivery of health and wellbeing services across Kent and Medway.

As the only arts charity represented at both ceremonies, we are honoured that our collaborative, values-led cultural practice with and for people living with dementia and supporters is being recognised as contributing to positive mental health outcomes for all involved.

Most recently, at the end of October, Bright Shadow artist Miriam Simmons, Creative Director and Chief Executive Clare Thomas, and Bright Shadow participant and newly appointed trustee Dawn Horne, attended the Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards, organised by Mind in Bexley and East Kent, where we were awarded the Disability Service Award for our work in the Folkestone and Hythe District Council area and were delighted to receive the overall Kent Disability Champion Award 2024 as well.



“It’s crucial to recognise the outstanding work being done in mental health and wellbeing. The Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards are our way of celebrating those who have been instrumental in driving progress in mental health and wellbeing across the region.”

- Simon Dolby, Chairman of the Kent Mental Wellbeing Awards judging panel

As the inspirational Dawn proves to us all, living with dementia, with all its very real challenges, should not mean your mental health and wellbeing is diminished. Yet all too often society writes off those with dementia, and fails to provide the support required for this cohort of disabled people to thrive, consigning an estimated 30-50% of all those diagnosed to also develop depression.

Bright Shadow's Zest groups, wider creative programme and advocacy work provides a real alternative to the status quo and we are so thrilled to have had a light shone on this, and importantly, the often misunderstood experience of living with dementia.

In September, we were finalists at the Kent Charity Awards 2024 in the Best Use of Volunteers Charity of the Year category. Two of our wonderful volunteers, Picture This volunteer Sahara Weeks and trustee Dawn Horne, attended with Finance and Operations Manager Niamh Barnard, Creative Director and Chief Executive Clare Thomas and Bright Shadow artist Liz Jennings.

It was a great endorsement of the dedication of everybody in the Bright Shadow family to be recognised for our inclusive approach to volunteering and the amazing role our dedicated volunteers play in supporting people living with dementia to achieve and enjoy life to its full potential.







Get in touch

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