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Citation:

Carless, D and Douglas, K (2017) Art-based research as waves of embodied engagement: Reflections on Across the Tamar. *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*. ISSN 2040-2457 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/jaah.8.2.241_1

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Art-based research as waves of embodied engagement: Reflections on *Across the Tamar*

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Forthcoming in

Journal of Applied Arts and Health

Abstract

Across the Tamar began as a research project exploring the physical activity, health and lifestyle of women over 60 in Cornwall, UK. It evolved into a multidimensional, long-running art-based health research project incorporating songs, stories and poetry into live performances, an audio CD (Douglas & Carless, 2005) and series of YouTube films (Douglas & Carless, 2013, 2015). In this article, we share some dialogical reflections on our journey through the project to suggest that an important contribution of art-based research is to facilitate – or expect – *multiple waves of embodied engagement*. We explore three waves of embodied engagement that occurred during our work on the *Across the Tamar* project.

Introduction

In 2004, the year we both completed our doctorates, we began work on what became *Across the Tamar* – the first of an ongoing stream of art-based research projects we have completed. At the time, we did not anticipate that this project – our first commissioned research – would move into art-based territory. In fact, we were not even explicitly aware at this point in time that artistic methodologies were *possible* within health-related research, much less that they (tentatively perhaps) *existed* and would soon be extensively written about as legitimate and valuable ways of doing social research. We were venturing into unknown territory.

We had, however, both utilized within our PhDs methodologies that would now be considered art-based. Further, stretching back to our teenage years we both had experience in and passion for artistic forms of communication. Kitrina had been involved at school in acting, filmmaking and stage performance. Later, she continued her artistic practice through writing stories and poetry, visual arts and broadcasting on BBC Radio. David began writing songs when he was 19 and subsequently developed his musical work to include many live performances and recordings. For us both, these activities were valuable in themselves – but they were also essential ways of understanding and negotiating our own places in the social world. As we have previously noted (Douglas & Carless, 2008), however, such art-based ways of being and working were *not* valued within the social and health-related academic departments we (sometimes) inhabited.

The project that became *Across the Tamar* was initially a modest study commissioned by the Women's Sports and Fitness Foundationⁱ (WSFF) to better understand the physical activity, health and lifestyle of women over 60 living in Cornwall, the southernmost county in England. The county is relatively rural and sparsely populated. Many Cornish people retain a strong local identity and some proudly consider their county separate from the UK. Cornwall also has some socioeconomic issues: at the time, it had the second *lowest* average income in the UK, combined with the second *highest* average house price, due to a combination of declining industry and increased acquisition of second homes by people outside the county. Against this sociocultural backdrop, we were tasked with producing a written report on women's physical activity, health and lifestyles that included recommendations on how WSFF might advocate for their particular needs.

While the WSFF were supportive of a qualitative methodology, and had been impressed by the power of the poetry and stories from our doctoral research that we shared with them during an initial meeting, the project took place against a backdrop of political issues. One issue concerned the struggle for legitimacy experienced by a women's organization working in a sporting culture dominated by hegemonic masculinity and the so-called 'evidence-based' traditional scientific model. Although the WSFF could see that poetic representation, for example, was a powerful way to present research, they did not want poetry in the report as they felt it might compromise its authority and legitimacy. As our journey into the project unfolded, however, we both felt an acute need to extend and deepen our research through drawing on our artistic and aesthetic sensibilities in order to both *understand* and *represent* in other ways.

In this article, we critically reflect on our *Across the Tamar* journey. We suggest that one of the important contributions of art-based methodologies to health research is to facilitate – or, perhaps, expect – *multiple waves of embodied engagement*. To us, the dominant positivistic methodologies of health research lead towards *disembodied* engagement (e.g., distanced/'neutral' researchers, cognitive forms of analysis, logical/rational understandings, abstract interpretations, grand theory, publicly inaccessible representations). In contrast, art-based work necessitates extensive and ongoing embodied engagement to produce and communicate (for example) local knowledge, accessible and evocative outputs, rich and complex representations of lives, and emotionally compelling experiences for audiences. We discern three waves of embodied engagement integral to *Across the Tamar*:

1. Embodied engagement of researcher/s with the research setting and participants
2. Embodied engagement of researcher/s in sense-making processes
3. Embodied engagement with – and of – audiences

We suggest that, for an art-based research project to be effective, all three waves of engagement are likely to be required. In what follows, we consider each wave of embodied engagement in turn, dialogically reflecting on the *Across the Tamar* project.

Embodied engagement with research setting and participants

Some art-based researchers conduct a piece of research but invite artists to create an artistic piece from the research (e.g., Bagley & Castro-Salazar, 2012). Our approach, in contrast, has been to immerse ourselves in all stages of a project from collection of empirical materials, through the creation of pieces, to performance or dissemination of those pieces. Later processes of artistic creativity and performance seem inextricably linked to our embodied engagement with the research setting or context *and* the participants. Could we produce emotionally powerful, evocative pieces *without* personally experiencing this embodied engagement with people and place? As we have observed elsewhere (Douglas, 2012; Douglas & Carless, 2012; Carless & Douglas, 2016), something important unfolds through and beyond the embodied act of ‘being there’ in an interdependent relationship with people and place. That was certainly the case during the *Across the Tamar* project...

Kitrina: During the project we spent a lot of time hanging out, going into coffee shops and tearooms, watching what people were doing there. Sometimes asking someone, ‘Can we sit down and talk with you?’ By being there we absorbed, in an embodied way, an understanding of the environment. What it was actually like to sit on the bench outside the supermarket that some women talked about. *We sat on that bench ourselves!* We saw the comings and goings of the day, felt the changing temperature during the day on our bodies, how it can change so quickly in Cornwall. And we saw all the different groups of people coming through – the tourists in summer and hardly anyone in winter.

David: The bench was a great illustration of the strong sense of community women talked about – people waiting on the bench with someone else’s shopping, or waiting with someone’s dog while they went into a shop. We couldn’t have got that if we hadn’t been there.

Kitrina: It gave us an organic understanding of how this place works.

David: Even if women were skilled at telling us about their lives – and some of them were great storytellers – something more happens when you realize, ‘Oh yes, *that’s* the field that she walked through. That’s quite a way down to the town.’

Kitrina: Just walking to the village hall, when we interviewed the woman who lived only round the corner, there was no pavement. Cars would be rushing round the corner, there were no street lights. How does someone manage that? When it gets dark at 4 o'clock in the winter.

David: I hadn't understood that before. Even though I'd been to Cornwall, I'd always had a car or van. So I hadn't appreciated the local-ness of it. I'd heard about bus cutbacks on the news, but being there I experienced how if you don't drive, you *are* cut off now. So being down there ...

Kitrina: ... sensitized us ...

David: ... and allowed us to get behind the public stories of Cornwall as this ideal holiday destination. To get a feeling for what it might be like for an older person living there.

Kitrina: We also shadowed people in different places – people we met in the community center coffee morning would invite us to their homes and we'd get to see the day-to-day difficulties they face. Another woman showed us places that were significant for her – she talked about the folklore of the area, the local myths, the spirit of the place. That was all very much part of it as well.

David: I get the sense that by us being around – because it was small towns or villages – people got to know us a bit. They might see us in the community center, a café, the library, or bump into us in the street. So they were more willing and open to talk about their lives – we're not strangers asking them about their lives from a distance but, in a small way, we were part of the community for six months. The woman who said, 'If I got by on two slices of bread a day, you'd be the last to know. *Unless I choose to tell you.*' If we weren't actually around their neighborhoods, they could very well say, 'Who the hell are you? Why should I talk to you?' I think we got a bit of credibility by being in the mix, so to speak, known not only by them but also known by their friends.

Kitrina: When women invited us into their homes, we'd witness their lives as a history displayed through their homes – the type of housing, the photos on the walls, the furniture. They'd make us tea, bring biscuits or cake out – it was a time of communion. They knew we were there as researchers and, yes, we had an agenda which we were open about, but we

remained very tuned in to where they wanted to go with this. We were visitors in their homes and we acted accordingly. I remember one woman who started talking in her kitchen about the birds outside the window then moved on to tell us about her son moving away and her not getting to see him. That was a low part of her life. Then we went back into the lounge and she had all her music there that she'd recorded and she spent ages telling us about that, and even played us some pieces. These were things that were important to her. Not things we were researching. But we were interested because they were part of her life. All that took a long time, but it all told us about her life, the pace she lives her life and how she interacts. So we went into their worlds and were respectful of that way of being, for that moment, in their house.

David: That was the woman who later told us quite a troubling story about the difficulties she faced living alone, her depression, which she wouldn't have shared if we hadn't taken that time.

Kitrina: We spent a long time with her and it was difficult leaving. But every house we went into told us a different story. I don't believe you could have written *One Step at a Time* without spending time in Marjorie's house – climbing that set of stairs, seeing how she struggled up those stairs.

David: So it is partly the talking – us being able to hear what they have to say and becoming a container for those stories. But it's not just the talk. With Marjorie, it was being there and seeing the dark stairway to her upstairs council flat, her polio, the photos of her grandchildren on the wall. We were literally surrounded by her family as we talked.

Embodied engagement in sense-making processes

Doing art-based research we have found the processes of making sense of, distilling, or re-presenting our collected empirical materials to be radically different to the 'data analysis' processes we might employ in other studies or see in qualitative methods texts. In previous work (e.g., Carless & Douglas, 2009; Carless, 2010; Douglas, 2012), we have considered and tried to articulate aspects of our own creative/artistic processes. One recurring theme in these processes – whether writing a story, poem, song or performance – has been the way art-based approaches allow us to access insights – or knowledge – that seems to be located, in some

sense, within our felt bodies. In our experience these kinds of insights, or forms of knowing, tend to be muted, lost or de-emphasized when we engage in other forms of analysis. In ‘accessing’ these ways of knowing as a way to generate understanding, it is the *doing* of art-based practice that is critical for us. Likewise, for Barone and Eisner (2012, p. 48) a valuable aspect is the *work* of art – i.e., the act of doing or making art – while for Blumenfeld-Jones (2002, p. 90), ‘understanding will only flow from your doing.’ Pelias (2008, p. 188) puts it nicely: ‘Unlike traditional scholarship where the body seems to slip away, performers generate and present their insights through the body, a knowing body, dependent on its participatory and empathic capacities and located in contested yet potentially liberating space.’ This perspective mirrors our own – that for artists and performers the location or focus of the *doing* is very often the body. This kind of process can lead to discovery, revelation and even sometimes transformation...

Kitrina: We both have a playfulness to us – I don’t think either of us feel bound by particular methodologies – that we have to do things *this way*. We have these words and images in our notebooks and we’re just trying to make sense of them. I remember Nell wouldn’t let us use a tape recorder, and I’d never done an interview without a recorder before. So I had all these scribbles in my notebook. She’d spoken so beautifully and the things she talked about were so relevant to our research that it just seemed to form a poetic stanza quite easily.

David: The words were very evocative, lyrical – memorable fragments.

Kitrina: We were in her home, sitting at her kitchen table, letters and books piled up, dog in the corner, pot of tea, stove warm. She’d shown us these things. We’d seen her cycle off out of the village. We’d driven up that steep hill to her house. All of that prepared us for how we might understand this woman’s life.

David: I remember getting the contract for this project – feeling relieved, as it was money I needed to live on. By the ‘analysis’ stage I was feeling quite anxious – as I often do in research projects – wondering do we have something worthwhile to say here? We have all this material but what are we actually going to write? How can we distil this to an executive summary and recommendations? So I felt we did a lot of ‘headwork analysis’ – how do we evidence the themes? I knew the art-based pieces weren’t what we were being paid to do, but I couldn’t stop myself! You were encouraging me to do it anyway – the first song, *Our*

Dancing Feat, I wrote when we were back down in Cornwall. I had that inkling, or throb, or whatever it is, that something's missing, that there's more to this than these themes. I don't know what it is yet, but I've got to go fishing, I've got to go seeking, I've got to search. I knew I'd got as far as I could by sitting in front of a laptop, wracking my brains. I've done that. And that's fine. But there's something more. For me, picking up a guitar takes me away from the way of being that I tend to go into when I'm sat at the computer, through habit I suppose. Playing a guitar, I follow habits that take me in totally different directions.

Kitrina: I think what you did beautifully with the song *Meet me by the Lake* is, it's someone in her 80's, but she's not a lay-down old woman. She's feisty and a bit cantankerous: 'I'm gonna do things my way!' *Our Dancing Feat* is very different, that's a sweet song. To my mind, you would have been in a different embodied place to when you wrote *Meet me by the Lake*, with its stropy, feisty feel. What was it that spurred that very gentle, touching, reflecting mood?

David: I think it's that thing Ruthellen Josselson said: becoming a container for the Other's story. They were both powerful, evocative accounts. How the women described dancing moved me. *Meet me by the Lake* is such a great counter-story – she's 83 but she is gonna get down that muddy slope baby! You know, 'Peel me off the trail!' There's delight for me in the richness, the humanity of both stories. I was just closing my eyes and playing and singing as if that was me – or she became me. *What would that feel like? What's the rhythm of that? What does it sound like?* It's all fishing and guessing and exploring. Elvis Costello said he's written many songs by trying to play someone else's song but not being good enough to get it right! By not being able to get something else right you end up with your own thing – great! So its, 'Oh yes! I don't know what I'm doing here, but *that's it!*' You work it out later – it's this chord, that picking pattern, whatever. But during the actual writing its more, 'Oh, there's a mood here. OK, take *me* dancing!' That's what it feels like. None of the written report is 'I' or 'me' – its all about *them*. Yet the first line of the song is, 'Take *me* dancing.' First person. But that line's not me. That was a stretch for me when I wrote the song – I didn't go dancing then. I'd never asked someone to take me dancing. That was *her*. But the next line – 'Cause I've spent some time alone' – that's *not* a big stretch for me. I can easily identify with that. She'd had some years alone. I've had some years alone.

Kitrina: I think we carry all of these women's – its too weird to say essence or spirit – but there's something they leave with us, or in us, that continues to live, that we draw on in those moments we write a song or poem.

David: In the songs there is an intersection. I become present, visible. Perhaps not logically, coherently, or consciously visible; but I am there. Our lives have crossed.

Kitrina: Absolutely – one hundred percent. It's the same in *Gwithian Sands* with me saying, from Sophia's story, 'Winter chill, father passed...' And I'm thinking, yeah, that happened in my life too. Now what's gonna happen to me? If your dad dies when you're a kid, what's gonna happen? He's the breadwinner. It's both of us there in that song. She was there before me.

David: So we're taking their stories into our bodies. But we're also bringing our bodies to their stories – through imagination. Aesthetic imagination.

Embodied engagement with – and of – audiences

Soon after creating a song, story or poem we often feel a need to share what we've produced. Our first audience is usually each other. Just minutes after writing it, David gave the first ever public performance of *One Step at a Time* to Kitrina, who had taken a pause in her drive across the country to hear the new song 'hot off the press' via mobile telephone. In engagement terms, this example is probably about as close to disembodied as our performances get. Yet even here, the act of performance – in this case singing and picking an acoustic guitar – insists on a level of embodied engagement and investment far beyond giving a talk or writing a chapter. David's performance of the song, in turn, called for multisensory engagement on Kitrina's part, even via a phone connection. Kitrina did more than *think about* the character in the song. She *experienced* her own embodied emotions: a sense of sadness, of holding back tears; feeling the joy of running, moving her fit, healthy body; imagining how it would feel to be restricted by polio, struggling to carry the groceries up the stairs. This example communicates in simple form a reciprocal dynamic we have experienced many, many times through our arts-based research. It can be distilled down to embodied engagement *with* and *of* audiences.

Once we have shared and responded to each other's new pieces, our next step is usually to seek opportunities to give performances to trusted confidantes to stimulate dialogue, gain feedback on and hopefully confidence in our portrayals (see Douglas & Carless, 2008; Douglas, 2012). One such encounter during the *Across the Tamar* project occurred like this...

We had invited two women to join us for dinner in the small chalet we were staying in, in West Cornwall: a health sciences professor we had recently come to know and her friend Jodie, a Cornish resident whose husband, we later learnt, had recently died. Sat round the little dinner table after eating we asked if we might share some poems and songs from our research. Early on, David performed the song *We Crossed the Tamar* and, as soon as he'd finished, Jodie began to weep. She gathered herself, then banged both hands down on the table and said: 'That's *exactly* what it's like! And no one understands. That is exactly what it's like.' We were at once moved, inspired and humbled by Jodie's heartfelt response – how could this song so powerfully resonate with the deep emotional life of someone we hardly knew? The moment of deep connection and solidarity was almost immediately tainted when the professor responded with: 'Yes that was very nice. But it's just one person's story – it's not research.'

Kitrina: We should remember the times – and the field – we were working in then. We were in the sport, exercise and health *science* field where researchers typically didn't go back to participants – they'd just take the findings and publish them as fact. We were influenced by feminist research from outside our field (e.g., Riessman, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1983) that says, 'No! Go back to the participants with your findings.' We had our 'formal' findings – the report – and we had our artistic works. We took both forms back to the participants.

David: Very early on, the month after we'd written them, I remember we informally shared the poems with my new neighbors, who were the same age group and had lived in Cornwall, but were not actually participants in the study. It was really useful and validating feedback, especially for me, as I hadn't written poems before. Then a couple of months later we did the same with the songs, soon after they were written. Those two 'sharings' gave me the confidence I needed to perform the songs to women in Cornwall – some of whom were participants, some who weren't.

Kitrina: At our village hall performance to the Age Concern group we presented the ‘formal’ report – complete with Powerpoint slides – and followed it with the 35-minute performance of songs, poems and stories we’d developed. We presented it as: *‘We need to share this with you to understand whether we’ve got it right. Is this what you think you’ve told us? If not, we want you to tell us.’* We were trying to reduce our power and authority as researchers, as writers of *their* lives, to shift the balance towards them. And many of the women were feisty – they *weren’t* frightened to tell us if we had something wrong. I fully believe that if they felt misrepresented they would have told us. What we took from it was that there was truth in all of it – both forms of presentation – but the performance was more truthful because, as one woman said, *‘It has our emotions in it, and if you leave our emotions out then you haven’t adequately represented our lives.’* They were unequivocal: *‘The ‘formal’ report is true, but it is not true enough.’*

David: The experience with the professor and her friend was a classic illustration that when you first share art-based pieces, don’t take them to academics, theoreticians, scholars, the so-called experts. Take them to the people who have lived it. Whether they are the actual participants in the research or others who have lived similar phenomena. That’s what we got from the older women in Cornwall, time and time again: *‘Yes, yes, that’s our truth and people don’t understand.’* Others with vested interests might challenge the work – ‘Oh I don’t like that song, or I don’t think poetry is research.’ Those people who want or need to hang on to the ‘expert’ label can try all sorts of tactics to dismiss local, emotional, embodied insights – like that professor did. We learnt two important lessons through that exchange. One, the art-based forms we produce can powerfully capture the truth of people’s lives as they experience it. Two, we need to be careful who we approach for feedback because other researchers and academics sometimes have their own vested interests in preserving the status quo and existing power inequality.

Kitrina: What I have also taken away is when a professor says that from now on, I say to them: ‘Actually, you need to listen to this person here. Because for them this says something important and you need recognize it because otherwise its you that’s in the wrong.’ So I would now be more forthright and challenging of people who say, ‘Its only songs.’ The theory is in there – they just haven’t looked carefully enough to realize.

From these somewhat ‘protected’ initial performances, there was a blurry boundary into open public engagement events. To make this transition, we needed to have developed sufficient confidence and faith in our material (and our competence delivering it) to stand up and sing in front of the public. Here, too, a two-way embodied engagement has proved to be a cornerstone of the process...

Kitrina: We take a broad view of who the public is: academics as well as non-academics; participants and their families; our families and friends. One way we began engaging people was you and I performed sections of *Across the Tamar* to my mother, sister, nieces and nephews. They joined in on one of the songs – which we recorded for the CD version. So they actually participated in the performance and were part of the dissemination process. As people heard about the project we were invited to perform it at conferences which then mushroomed into performances to students or in town halls. One hundred and twenty people showed up for our lunchtime performance in Leeds Town Hall. Over time we gave numerous performances – sometimes smaller groups, sometimes larger groups – all the time collecting audience responses and feedback to learn about the meaning, value and impact of our art-based work for diverse audiences (see, for example, Carless & Douglas, 2010, 2011). I was able to take the parts I could perform without you to New Zealand – two conferences, one of which was a women’s conference after which Maori women reflected communally on *their* heritage, speaking back to the lives of British women in Cornwall.

David: Its interesting how different people learn different things from the piece. It’s a 35-minute performance, which we don’t change much if at all, yet people articulate different lessons and insights. People seem to take from it different things that are relevant to *their* lives at that moment. Some older people in Cornwall take solidarity from it – a sense that, ‘*We’ve been heard, we’re not alone.*’ Other people – in New Zealand, America, London or wherever – learn what life can be like for *these* women in Cornwall. They might be learning about socio-geographical issues. Others again, as students have told us, learn about their grandparents or their parents – understanding more about *their* families through these women’s stories. It’s not so much about place, but age and generational understanding. Others are learning about themselves – either now or in the future as they contemplate becoming old. Others are learning about science and social science and research – and what it can be. Some of the strongest responses we’ve had from academics and students are, ‘I never knew research could be like this!’ We’ve had a Brazilian professor use our portrayals of

Cornish women's lives in a North American university saying, 'Look at what research *can be!*' Isn't that amazing? So there are lots of different 'learnings' going on and its not just cognitive fact-based learning to pass an exam – people *do stuff* with what they've learnt. They have a crack at writing a story or a poem. They give their granny a call.

Kitrina: What started as a small project for WSFF has taken on a life of its own. It's still going. We're still doing this project a decade on. And we're still invested in it and the lives of the women who entrusted us with their stories. There are layers and layers – it's going round and round and round as we're sharing. It's still increasing our knowledge. We're containing more stories. Recently that led us back to Cornwall to put on an anniversary exhibition in Wadebridge public library, a performance at the community center, and the films we're now putting on YouTube. People from different countries are responding to the films by leaving posts, people are asking for the lyrics, a man in France asked us to send him the music so he could learn *Gwithian Sands* to sing with a women's community group where he lives. This thing we started down here has empowered people – from the ground up – to take the project and its lessons forward. And it's *engagement* that has empowered people to take it on.

Throughout this project – and all our art-based research – we have taken seriously the responses of different audiences to the work. Early on, the responses of participants were invaluable in teaching us where we've got it right, or where more work is required. These early responses sometimes led to changes in the performance. Sometimes they led to changes in *us*. As the project matured, we became increasingly interested in the changes audience members experience through their engagement with the piece. In other work (Carless & Douglas, 2010, 2011), we have explored audience responses in detail. Embodied engagement of audiences (with, for example, the lives of participants) is once again a recurring hallmark of audience responses. Students, for example, wrote how: 'The use of songs and short stories with music creates a strong vivid image of what is being portrayed. I was really imagining a lady stood in her hallway and going struggling up the stairs' (Carless & Douglas, 2010, p. 380). This third wave of embodied engagement is, for us, critical in underpinning the sociopolitical significance of art-based health research...

David: We have engaged seriously with audience's responses to *Across the Tamar* – this in itself has become another wave of the project. Your idea to invite audiences to respond, to gather that material each time we perform, and to analyze and reflect on those responses, and

publish papers on that, has led to us learning anew. Certainly for me, its strengthened my conviction in art-based work: we need this, there's something missing if we don't have these ways of understanding people's lives, something unique comes from this.

Kitrina: It's hard to not feel the pressure that comes from other types of research or 'evidence' being more highly valued – the Cochrane database or the 'gold standard.' Some people want to discredit or de-legitimize what we do. So by collecting these responses and being very articulate and scholarly about identifying what people have learnt from *Across the Tamar*, we validate art-based approaches as a legitimate, robust and important form of research that has huge power to impact people's lives.

David: Audience responses show the piece has led to social change at the local level. It has made a difference. And it's not just those people who are open to it – some people, as you said, are 'hoodwinked' into it! They say, 'Oh, actually, I've changed. I'm going to work differently from now on.'

Kitrina: Your point about not leaving it to the policymakers – its students who say, 'Actually, I'm going to change how I relate to my granny.' Or occupational therapists who say, 'This will change how I work with my older patients.'

David: Grass roots change. We're not going to wait until somebody more powerful, a professional organization or governing body, somebody with money, tells me or compels me to change. *No! I'm going to change!*

Kitrina: We recognize that meaningful change usually occurs through relationships and community. The findings showed us very clearly the reason why older women do – or don't do – physical activity is very simple. Its down to two things: if its *with* someone they care about they'll do it, or if its *for* someone. So it's *with* and *for*. When we say that nowadays, people nod and they get it. The *Across the Tamar* performance shows 'with and for' very powerfully in a richly emotional way. Some students had been telling – preaching at – their grandparents to be more active. They hadn't realized that they actually needed to go round and go for a walk with them. *Don't preach at me – come for a walk with me!*

In closing

Over the past couple of decades, art-based research has opened up – and opened *us* up to – new and exciting ways of doing human and social science research. Art-based research invites qualitative researchers to rethink the research process – from how to gather empirical materials, what to do to ‘make sense’ of those materials, through alternative ways to share our insights with diverse audiences. A central characteristic throughout art-based projects, for us, is intensive and sustained embodied engagement which draws on our bodies, brains, minds, senses, emotions, intuitions, souls and spirits. At its best, art-based research values and communicates these diverse ways of knowing through forms that reach, help and advocate for the diverse groups and individuals that comprise the global communities of the 21st century.

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ⁱ Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) is a UK charity, founded in 1984, that campaigns to make physical activity an everyday part of life for women and girls. The organisation has a remit to research barriers women face in sport and physical activity.