

I've never told anyone that before: a story of Buckaroo and other tools of engagement

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There are currently 800,000 people living with dementia in the UK. This number is set to double over the next 40 years (Alzheimer's Society; 2012). The recent Support. Stay. Save. report (Alzheimer's Society; 2011) and the Department of Health's Draft Care & Support Bill (2012) acknowledge the social and financial benefits of enabling people to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. This will require the commitment and dedication of professional carers and support services and will also be heavily reliant on non-professional carers, the family, close friends even distant relatives, whose significant contributions are often overlooked.

Literature relating to dementia that is available to carers generally places the emphasis on the communication difficulties faced by the individual requiring the care. Little attention is paid to how carers articulate their own experiences. Working as a cross-disciplinary team of healthcare professional and a range of designers, this short piece of work aimed to use creative methods to enable the carers to articulate their experiences and expectations with a view to contributing to the improvement of both.



Figure 1: workshop materials

Our approach was inclusive, using visual and physical metaphors, readings

(Shenk; 2003) and games in a group setting. The carers were given an opportunity to speak in a secure and supportive environment. Appropriate prompts, props and questions guided the discussion in each workshop but we were conscious of not disrupting dialogue or being overly directive. The sessions were videoed which enabled us to capture many of the rich narratives and insights that would otherwise have been lost as conversations moved with increasing momentum from person to person and topic to topic. Accounts of misdiagnosis, violent behaviour, worry, distress and a loss of self were punctuated with instances of joy and delight. The potential of what we were doing became clear when a participant declared that she had never told anyone the story she had just recounted.

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