

KNOWING OTHERWISE – The Filo Project

The inspiration behind this exhibition has been all the individuals we have encountered during their time at The Filo Project. In general, the narratives that surround dementia are extremely negative and follow a familiar script i.e. that the potential for joy and meaning are very limited and the loss of some mental capacity equates to incapacities in most other areas. This national story which presents people with dementia as passive receivers of care is one-dimensional, unrepresentative, and, moreover, negatively impacts upon the perceptions people with dementia have of themselves, and how others view them. The stigma which surrounds dementia is significant and to view people with dementia through a predominantly negative lens is to deny potential. The Filo Project has been supporting clients since 2014 across Devon and Somerset and sadly, these perceptions are still prevalent.



With this exhibition it is not our intention to gloss over the challenges that people living with dementia and their families face,

but to present another side, another perspective, another knowledge. Often pride of place is given to knowledge we can evaluate as true or false. It is true that dementia can include difficulties in some practical ability, although by no means all. In addition to problems accessing or reproducing true or false information e.g. what month is it? What year is it? Who is the Prime Minister? Yet, people with dementia are composite of considerably more than this. Knowing otherwise, a phrase borrowed from philosophy, offers an alternative perspective, one which values other kinds of knowledge, including humour, love, care, empathy, practical skill. The term 'knowing otherwise' is an opportunity to give voice to the knowledge and expertise of people living with dementia, acquired through a life rich in experience.

Many people with dementia experience social isolation and, consequently, loss of self-esteem and low mood. Significantly, research has shown that the effect of loneliness and isolation on mortality is comparable to the impact of well-known risk factors such as obesity, and has a similar influence as cigarette smoking. For this population, the small group dynamic provided by The Filo Project provides an environment in which they and their other capacities or skills can be a focal point. The small group is a space where clients can reclaim a sense of their identity and regain a sense of pride and integrity. This in turn leads to elements of recovery, the potential for which is not widely understood. Our exhibition is designed to both demonstrate and amplify this.