

THE EUROPEAN REMINISCENCE NETWORK: A BRIEF HISTORY

The European Reminiscence Network was established in 1993 to organise international conferences, seminars and festivals featuring best practice in reminiscence work. We co-ordinate projects involving international co-operation, especially in the fields of dementia care, inter-generational and inter-cultural work.

Co-ordinated by Pam Schweitzer, the Network is a partnership organisation with representatives from 16 European countries and many associates in USA, Canada, Latin America, India and the Far East. Signatories to funding applications to the European Commission and other bodies co-operate on delivering co-operative international action and research projects in the field of reminiscence.

1993: The European Year of Older People and Solidarity Between Generations

Following a feasibility study demonstrating interest in reminiscence work from many member states, Pam Schweitzer, Artistic Director of Age Exchange Theatre Trust in London, set up a year-long programme of reminiscence theatre tours, training workshops and an international conference, supported by the European Commission.

Partner organisations: Age Exchange, UK (Pam Schweitzer) Freies Werkstatt Theater, Germany (Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz) Entr'Ages, Belgium (Genevieve Everarts) Family and Child Care Centre, Greece (Cleo Mavroudi) DaneAge, Denmark (Brita Lovendahl) Flamboyance, France (Christian Robert) Age and Opportunity, Ireland (Catherine Rose)

Five professional productions of reminiscence theatre by Age Exchange were toured: to Germany, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, France, and Belgium.

"**What did you do in the war, Mum?**" based on memories of British women's work in World War II,

"**Dear Mum**", about the wartime evacuation of thousands of London children,

"**Across the Irish Sea**" based on Irish people's memories of growing up in Ireland and then making a new life in England in the post-war years,

"**Can we afford the Doctor?**" based on memories of health care before the advent of the National Health Service, and

"**Routes**" based on the experience of people from the Indian sub-continent coming to Britain to secure "a better future" for their families.

During the European Year of Older People, The Good Companions, Age Exchange's older people's theatre group, came into being, with support and inspiration from our German partners, Freies Werkstatt Theater. Their first show, "**I Remember When ...**", was given a tremendous reception in Germany,

Belgium, Ireland, Denmark and across the UK. Their performances were spontaneous and humorous, very unpretentious and won the hearts of many audiences old and young in all these countries.

Pam Schweitzer undertook a major **training programme** across Europe (Germany, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and the UK.) These training workshops led to the forging of many valuable inter-disciplinary links with practitioners in health, social work, the arts and cultural fields. These links developed into fully-fledged projects in subsequent years.

The year ended with an international conference, "**Celebrating Reminiscence**" in Blackheath, London, attracting 250 people, from all over the UK and many European countries. The conference involved 45 speakers in three strands, covering reminiscence in health care settings, community settings and education. The European Reminiscence Network was established at this conference and applied for funding for future projects from the European Commission.

Links established during the European Year of Older People:

These were some of the organisations involved during 1993, and together they show the wide range of skills and disciplines with which the network was connecting:

- Altern & Kultur, Vienna
- Entr'Ages, Brussels
- DaneAge, Copenhagen
- Centrum voor Amateurkunsten, Brussels
- Points Communs, Paris
- ORPAB, Brest
- Folkhalsan, Helsinki
- Social Service Department, Province of South Holland, Netherlands
- National Institute of Social Work, Netherlands
- Freies Werkstatt Theater, Köln
- Town Social Administration, Kassel
- Social Gerontology Department, Kassel University
- Inter-Generational Action Research Project, Ministry of Education, Hamburg
- Kulturfabrik, Hildesheim
- University of Hildesheim
- Family and Child Care Centre, Athens
- Nordic Conference on Reminiscence, Oslo
- Social Gerontology Department, University of Uppsala
- University of Ulster, Northern Ireland
- Humanities Department, University of Greenwich, London
- Age and Opportunity, Ireland
- Flamboyamce, France

The European Reminiscence Network had contact with most of the national bodies co-ordinating the European Year as well as EurolinkAge and Eur'Age and other European NGOs. We also began to work closely with the other emerging networks supported by the European Commission, such as the Older Women's Network, the Rural Network, Activ'Age, ENOV, the Older Volunteers' project and the Older Migrants' Network.

1994-5 Consolidating the Network

The idea of a **European Reminiscence Network** fitted in well with the Commission's own plans to support voluntary organisations which had achieved success in 1993 and our proposal was accepted. It included the development of **Reminiscence Magazine** as a voice for the Network and support for the development of a new resource centre at Age Exchange for international co-operation in reminiscence projects.

Partner Organisations: Age Exchange, UK (Pam Schweitzer) Altern und Kultur, Austria (Heinrich Hoffer) Entr'Ages, Belgium (Genevieve Everarts) Freies Werkstatt Theater, Germany (Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz)

As part of the United Nations International Year of the Family celebrations, the European European Commission supported a tour of intergenerational reminiscence productions (including "Grandmother's Footsteps" by old and young from Age Exchange) and seminars promoting educational reminiscence projects in schools.

A new base for the European Reminiscence Network in London

The opening of Age Exchange's new reminiscence education and training centre in a beautifully converted old bakehouse building was marked by a **European Symposium on Reminiscence**, with special reference to two groups: people with dementia and young people in schools. We called together people with expertise in these fields from across Europe for a week-long exchange of ideas and best practice in May 1995.

1995 "A Time To Remember" An international festival of reminiscence theatre

In October of the same year, we marked the 50th anniversary of the end of hostilities in Europe with a festival entitled "**A Time To Remember**". Two hundred guests from 10 countries presented specially written pieces of theatre based on their memories of the end of World War II in their countries.

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Associate organisations: Footprints of the Elders, USA (Sarah Worthington) Uhan Shii Theatre, Tai Wan (Ya Ling Peng) Japanese POW's organisation in UK

Many of the elders who visited the festival in London had never left their home countries before. They spent an amazing week together sharing performances and participating in practical arts workshops which did not require a shared spoken language, but used song, dance, mime and improvisation as a means of communication. This Festival was a major undertaking, which none of the organisers or participants have ever forgotten and it succeeded in bringing together older people who were on opposing sides in the war in a spirit of reconciliation and new adventure.

1996 "A Time To Reflect"

In 1996, we followed up the festival with a thorough evaluation and reconvened all the group leaders for an international seminar and workshop entitled "**A Time To Reflect**", organised by one of our key German partners, Frank Matzke and held in Hildesheim, Germany. A professional photographic exhibition was created from the festival by Rado Klose and launched at the seminar. It featured the groups' performances, the practical workshops and the elders' responses to the event in written panels. This was subsequently displayed in London and has given us a high-quality permanent record of this major event.

Skills Exchange for European Reminiscence Network Partners

In the summer of 1996, the partners who had put so much work into creating the London Festival and the Hildesheim seminar met for a week of skills exchange and personal development on the island of Crete, by kind permission of our Greek partner, Cleo Mavroudi. The team of fourteen from seven countries, included theatre directors, social administrators, health and community workers, all highly creative and imaginative people. Having time together when we were not responsible for organising large numbers of older people or running a demanding conference event was immensely refreshing and enjoyable and enabled us to consolidate our personal friendships. This has been very important in ensuring that we do not lose contact with one another when we do not happen to be working together on current projects.

Sharing the organisational burden between Network Partners

Later in 1996, the Network held two further international events: a seminar on **Inter-generational Reminiscence Work** organised by Entr'Ages, our Brussels partner, and a conference on **Reminiscence and Social Inclusion** in Copenhagen organised by our Danish partner from Dane'Age. Both events attracted participation from Network members from across Europe and excellent papers by invited experts.

1997: Two major new projects for the European Reminiscence Network

"The Journey of A Lifetime": an international arts project for ethnic minority elders

In spring 1997, with funding from the European Commission's anti-discrimination unit, the Network was able to mount a series of reminiscence drama projects with ethnic elders in different European countries. The project culminated in a festival of live theatre, hosted by Age Exchange in London entitled "**Journey of a Lifetime**", featuring original works by ethnic minority elders from many different European countries, supported by professional directors and writers.

This was a unique opportunity to share the "migrant" experience of leaving their homes in the colonies or ex-colonies of the wealthy north European nations to seek safety or work and a better life for their families. Theatrical pieces involving Turkish people in Cologne, gypsies in Hildesheim, Indian and Caribbean elders in London, Moluccans and people from Surinam in the Netherlands and many others provided a fascinating range of experience and a celebration of difference. Again, we used workshops and non-verbal activities to promote understanding between the participating groups and a sense of shared experience.

Since this festival, there has been a growth of arts work involving older people from ethnic minorities across Europe. Pam Schweitzer offered support and training to many groups in Germany, Netherlands and Belgium seeking to develop this work, and new partnerships emerged. For example, our Kassel partner, Angelika Trilling co-ordinated a festival in the autumn of 1997 bringing together Turkish elders from Germany and Belgium, and organising related events including training workshops and performances of Age Exchange's professional show concerning the life experience of older Asians in Britain.

1997: Reminiscence in Dementia Care:

In 1997, The European Reminiscence Network proposed a new project to the European Commission's Health Promotion Unit in Luxembourg. This was to call together from across Europe those who had experience of using reminiscence with people with dementia. We were funded to host a four-day conference entitled "**Widening Horizons in Dementia Care**", and this proved to be a powerful theme, attracting international delegates from five continents and a series of extremely eminent speakers. The papers from this conference were incorporated into a useful publication, "Reminiscence in Dementia Care", funded by the Commission.

One of the themes emerging from this conference was the urgent need to support family carers of people with dementia who carry the burden of care for the vast majority of dementia sufferers across Europe. A new grouping of partners emerged from European countries represented at the conference, and these were different people from those concerned with the arts-based projects we had been pursuing with the Commission in the mid-90s. The Network was now making new links with reminiscence workers in health, social work and mental health settings who were seeking to establish positive initiatives for

people with dementia and family carers in their countries. There was some overlap with our previous partners, but the door was open for new groups and organisations to join our network.

1998-9 A Dementia Care project "Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today"

Partner organisations: Age Exchange, UK (Pam Schweitzer) University of Bradford, UK (Errollyn Bruce) from the, Kassel City Council, Germany (Angelika Trilling) Copenhagen Pensioners' Organisation and Reminiscence Centre, Denmark (Ove Dahl) Folkhalsan, Finland (Viveca Hagmark) Ersta, Sweden (Lotta Isacs) Norwegian Reminiscence Centre, Norway (Liv Hulteng and Lise Naess) Altern und Kultur, Austria (Heinrich Hoffer and Doris Otte)

Consultants to the Network: Nori Graham, the Chair of Alzheimers Disease International and Faith Gibson, Professor Emeritus from the University of Ulster

Our new proposal, "**Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today**" involved partners in ten countries in an 18-week programme to be followed in all countries, with a conference to bring all participants together to share and measure the outcomes. The Network received our largest grant yet and set about the programme with an intensive training programme for all partners in London, followed by the setting up of pilot groups of families in each country under the leadership of project workers with a mixture of skills and experience.

The project involved training family carers of people with dementia in the essentials of positive dementia care and the use of reminiscence to promote and maintain communication. The people with dementia in every family involved were active participants in a series of chronologically organised reminiscence sessions incorporating a wide range of stimulating activities. Emphasis was on multi-sensory stimulation and creative involvement through music, dance , drama, drawing and other forms of social and creative interaction.

An extremely thorough-going evaluation was carried out by four academics from Ulster (Faith Gibson) Bradford (Errollyn Bruce) Kassel (Birgit Jansen) and Berlin (Marianne Heinemann-Knoch) and this was published at the project's conference in Vienna in 1998.

We had clearly discovered a viable way of improving communication with people with dementia and of supporting the coping skills of family carers. The European Commission funded the Network for a further year to develop a manual through which we could disseminate our findings and share the best ideas to emerge from the project. The resulting handbook, "**Reminiscing with People with Dementia**", was launched at a further European Reminiscence Network conference in Stockholm in 1999, and has subsequently been translated into Swedish, German, French, Italian, Danish, Spanish and Catalan. Variations on the project are now running in many European countries, and the partners on this

project continue to meet up and share progress. Further research based on this project has now been funded by the Medical Research Council in the United Kingdom and other senior academic bodies in other EU countries.

1999-2000 "The Time of our Lives" International Theatre Festivals in Cologne and London

Partner organisations: Freies Werkstatt Theater, Germany (Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz) and Age Exchange Theatre Trust, UK (Pam Schweitzer)

In 1999, the International Year of Older People, the Freies Werkstatt Theater in Cologne hosted a major festival of performances by Senior Theatre groups from across the world. Age Exchange was a partner in this festival and mounted a sister festival of the same name in March 2000 (with generous support from the Department of Health, the Ashdown Trust and the British Council). This was attended by 250 delegates and performers from every continent and all our European Network partners attended and participated. A week of performances and workshops in several prestigious venues in south east London were given by groups from across the world, all of them celebrating older people's experience and welcoming the new century in a spirit of co-operation.

2002: Europe East and West: New Partnerships

Partner organisations: Kuratorium Deutsches Altershilfe, Germany, Kassel Social Administration, Germany (Angelika Trilling) and Age Exchange, UK (Pam Schweitzer)

In December 2002, the European Reminiscence Network partners met in Bonn, through the generosity of KDA (Kuratorium Deutches Altershilfe) to plan future applications for funded projects. A major long-term programme we agreed to pursue was the development of East-West partnerships, whereby countries newly joining the European Union would be able to gain access to reminiscence training and resources through linking with experienced European Reminiscence Network partners in the west. Intensive training in reminiscence was offered by the Network Co-ordinator in three Romanian cities and a programme of training planned for the Czech Republic.

2004-5: Making Memories Matter, Culture 2000

Partner organisations:

Age Exchange, UK (Pam Schweitzer)

Kassel Social Administration, Germany (Angelika Trilling) and

Stadtteilzentrum Agathof, Kassel (Marianne Bednorz)

University Ramon Llul, Spain (Quico Manos)

City of Kotka Culture Office, Finland (Taia Rasi)

Czech Alzheimer Association, Czech Republic (through Petr Veleta of National Theatre Prague and Hana Janeckova from Institute for Medical Research Prague) Mutual Help Society, Romania (Dan Baciu) and Poznan College for Social Work Training, Poland (Lidia Huber)

Following the decision at the European Reminiscence Network meeting in Bonn, Pam Schweitzer from London and Angelika Trilling from Kassel drew up a new proposal for the European Reminiscence Network to submit to Culture 2000 fund of the European Commission whose special focus was on Cultural Heritage projects. The Robert Bosch Foundation and Volkswagen in Germany have also supported the project and the Bridge House Trust in Britain.

Seven organisations from different European countries, five of which were new to the Network, and three of which were new members of the European Union, entered into co-operation to produce an exhibition of **Memory Boxes**. Each partner has produced 20 **Individual Life Portrait Boxes** resulting from a series of encounters between artists and older people. These were toured across the partner countries between March and July 2005. At every stop on this tour there were reminiscence theatre performances and training workshops, and a skills exchange between the participating artists. The exhibition has continued till the present (2007), greatly expanding its original sphere of influence and providing many more viewers in different EU countries with ideas and inspiration for visual arts work with older people around their memories and life experience.

2006-8 Sites and Signs of Remembrance

Partner Organisations:

Matthias Neuntzner: February 1945 Association, Dresden, Germany

Michael Kimmig: Regionet, Poznan, Poland

Marina Grasse: Older Women's Network Berlin, Germany

Pam Schweitzer: European Reminiscence Network, UK

Sites and Signs of Remembrance was a two-year project of the European Reminiscence Network with partners in Berlin, Dresden and Poznan (Poland). This is a life-long learning project supported by the European Union Socrates programme. It involved mapping and documenting older people's responses to the changes they have seen, made and lived through in their different communities. Partners learnt through running their own inter-generational projects at a local level and through a series of international exchanges and visits. In year two of the project an on-line version was produced, bringing together the international project's findings: www.sisie.eu

2009-10 Transitions in Later Life

This Grundtvig-funded Learner Workshop explored the experience of later life changes in the work/life balance through reminiscence and dramatic improvisation. 20 delegates from 12 EU countries came to London for a week-long residential course, led by Pam Schweitzer, supported by Ingrid Berzau and Dieter Scholz from Germany, Errollyn Bruce and Sarah Clevely from the UK.

The workshop used creative reminiscence and life review exercises to reflect on learners' life journeys to date, and used theatre-based exercises to envision the futures participants hoped for. Working in small groups and as a whole group we

tested these creative approaches and considered their effectiveness in enabling us to manage change at a personal, psychological and social level.

The learning explored in this workshop is still being developed and will result in an online manual conveying the essentials of the course so that it can be tried in other countries and different contexts.

2010-12 Remembering Together: Reminiscence Training for families living with dementia

Partner Organisations:

Co-ordination: Pam Schweitzer: European Reminiscence Network, UK

Elena Fernández: Alzheimer Catalunya Fundació Privada

Alexey Janes: Reminiscence Network Northern Ireland

Leonie Hohenthal-Antin: Muistojen Talon, Kotka, Finland

Anna Maria Nowak: Wielkopolskie Stowarzyszenie Alzheimerowskie, Poznan, Poland

Suzanne Cahill: St James's Hospital Board, Dublin, Ireland

Marleen Hoogkamp: Stichting ZGAO Amsterdam, Netherlands

Hana Janeckova: Centrum pro sociologii medicíny a zdravotnictví CESMEZ, Prague, Czech Republic

Maria Čunderlikova, Centrum MEMORY n.o. Bratislava, Slovakia

Barbara Koblitz: Diakonisches Werk Kassel, Germany

Marie-France Caparros: Madeleine Gastaldi-Adler Residences, St Cyprien, France

The current Grundtvig-funded project has 11 partners from 10 EU countries. Partners come from UK (ERN and Northern Ireland Reminiscence Network) France, Germany, Netherlands, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Spain, Poland, Finland and Ireland. The Learning Partnership is co-ordinated by Pam Schweitzer

In each partner country, we are undertaking a series of arts-based reminiscence sessions with families living with dementia and introducing them to the value of sharing life stories and personal memories creatively in a group. Our special focus is on enabling carers to incorporate reminiscence into their home lives as well as enabling them to enjoy participating with their relatives in the reminiscence sessions.

Partners in this international project are meeting four times over the course of the next two years to prepare and train, to share experience of running the project in their countries and to document the work. These meetings are in Northern Ireland, Finland, Spain and Germany. The final meeting in Germany will include an exhibition of all the creative arts work produced during the project.

The European Reminiscence Network Today:

The lead organisations and individuals from our European Reminiscence Network have become sought-after trainers and conference presenters in their own countries, and many have continued to visit one another to compare methods and share experience. Newer Network partners have gained recognition in their countries and are keen to gain more experience and to stay in touch with the colleagues they have met through our projects.

Many of the partners involved in our arts, dementia and ethnic minority projects have gained funding in their own countries to conduct further research and development and to produce films, books, exhibitions and videos, through which to promote their reminiscence work "at home". Others have organised their own conferences and festivals at a national level, usually with European Reminiscence Network representation and input from other network partners.

In Summary:

The friendships between partners in the European Network have been maintained over a ten-year period and all of us feel privileged to have benefited from the generosity of the European Commission and those who have supported our work in our own countries in more recent years. We have all gained enormously from feeling part of an international movement and our recognition in our own countries has risen as a result of our greater confidence and higher profile.

Many of the older people who have met at our festivals and conferences over the last decade are still in contact with one another by letter or email and some have visited one another. The festivals of shared work have really helped them to value their own experience and to recognise their relationship with the major social and historical developments of the last century in a new and wider context. These encounters have undoubtedly increased people's sense of being Europeans, with much shared experience and plenty of differences to celebrate.

The Future:

Our decision to remain a loose network of organisations and individuals has had the advantage that when we do make a successful bid for funding, we have the full energy and whole-hearted support of the partners for the year or two of its duration, without draining their financial and emotional resources at other times. However, the disadvantage of such an ad hoc arrangement has been that there is no under-pinning structure to ensure the continuation of the work. In 2005, when the co-ordinator left Age Exchange Theatre Trust which she had been directing since 1983, partners agreed to formalise our organisation, and have established it as an independent Company Limited by Guarantee (reg no. 5585482) called the European Reminiscence Network with directors representing areas of interest of the Network which can apply directly for funding for its projects, working closely with reminiscence-based organisations in other countries in the EU and beyond. ERN hopes to continue to grow as an

independent body providing a unique linking function for reminiscence practitioners and the older people they work with across Europe.

Pam Schweitzer, Director, European Reminiscence Network
Email pam@pamschweitzer.com