

The
Creative
Age

The image features the title 'The Creative Age' in a light pink, elegant serif font. The word 'The' is positioned above 'Creative', and 'Age' is positioned below it. The text is set against a solid black background. Decorative elements include a thin pink line forming a semi-circle above the 'C' in 'Creative', a blue leafy branch extending from the top right of the 'e' in 'Creative', and a red leafy branch extending from the bottom left of the 'A' in 'Age'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CAN and the City of Mandurah acknowledge the Binjareb Noongar people of the Bibbulmun nation as the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and honour all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First People of this nation.

CAN is proud to work with people from all cultures, but we do so on the understanding of First Peoples, first.

Kalyakoorl Kwadja Be, Kalyakoorl Boorda Be
Always Was, Always Will Be

ISBN 978-0-646-83735-2

© 2026 Community Arts Network



The Creative Age is the City of Mandurah's first Creative Wellbeing Project. It launched in 2025 as part of a broader commitment to supporting community health through the arts.

Designed in response to the growing need for social connection and mental health support among older Australians, the project engages seniors living in aged care through a series of creative arts workshops.

The Creative Age aims to improve mental health, reduce isolation and celebrate the voices of older residents through storytelling and artistic expression. It allows people to connect, share their stories and celebrate their valuable contributions to Mandurah's community.

The Creative Age has provided an avenue for expressing the joys, challenges and unexpected surprises that come with ageing in our society.

- City of Mandurah -

A CREATIVE MANDURAH
WELLBEING PROJECT

PRESENTED BY
CITY OF MANDURAH
Arts+Culture

PRODUCED BY
CAN COMMUNITY
ARTS
NETWORK


Australian Government


Creative
Australia


GOVERNMENT OF
WESTERN AUSTRALIA


lotterywest



Introducing The Creative Age

Food and memory are inextricably linked. The meals and morsels we consumed when we were children have the capacity to trigger all sorts of recollections, and even the name of a particular recipe or snack can see us tripping down memory lane.

This relationship lies at the heart of The Creative Age, a joyful project which gave aged care residents in Mandurah the opportunity to participate in a series of artist-led creative workshops exploring memory, identity and connection through food, family and place.

With guidance from lead artist Sandy McKendrick and CAN producer and artist Tegan Jenkins, participants were supported to create hand-crafted place mats – visual stories made from collaged materials, representing personal and cultural memories.

This project encouraged intergenerational dialogues by engaging family members in story-sharing and collaborative art-making processes.

Many aged care residents face a number of challenges, including deterioration of both mental and physical health, loneliness, and feelings of disconnection and disengagement with the world.

Our hope is that this project reminds them, and the broader community, of their inherent value in society as elders in their creative age!





The method behind the magic

The Creative Age workshops were designed to be playful and powerful with gentle yet dynamic creative processes that engaged all participants and encouraged connection to individual and collective stories.

Workshops were focused on storytelling and uncovering memories, using these as a starting point for creating artworks.

The artists worked with each participant to identify symbols that represented memories of celebrations and rituals, of cooking and sharing meals in their kitchens, growing and tending their gardens, and sharing time with their families. These symbols informed paper silhouettes of simple outlines and shapes that were then used to create a place mat, layered with the paper cutouts to create a "tapestry" artwork that reflects each participant's connection to their past.

It was clear from the first session that these personal stories were at the heart of the project. Residents received and filled "inspiration boxes" with photos, significant objects, notes and drawings that would contribute to their place mats.

"There was a lot of collaboration going on – many of the residents, staff, supports or family members who liked to draw would offer to do so for others, likewise cutting or sticking. There were a lot of conversations and sharing of memories during this time," says Creative Age Project Producer Tegan Jenkins.

Quite quickly, participants started creating place mats that reflected their own lived experience, using symbolic shapes cut from paper and stuck onto card. Their images, made of colours reflecting the kitchens of 1940s and 50s Australia, dance joyfully and boldly against a black backdrop.

Collectively, the artworks reflect a shared human experience that spans a lifetime and speaks to all, across cultures, ages and abilities. The mats work to continue these stories, memories and identities, crossing the barrier between participants' previous lives and their current world of residential care and communal living.

They're also conversation starters and a point of connection between residents.

The last workshop was a lot of fun, with dress-ups, decoration-making, music and a small celebration of the work that the participants had made. They were all visibly proud of their artworks.

Collaboratively, we designed one fabulous event to celebrate the project and honour the participants from both residencies. All participants and their families, close friends, care staff and volunteers were invited to join in this special moment. Vibrant with live music, fresh flowers, handmade decorations and, of course, delicious food, the celebration encouraged participants to dress up in their best and delight their senses.

The stories found in this book were collected over many weeks, either transcribed during the workshops as residents told their stories, or recorded on-site by our CAN writer Nina Levy.

One resident, whose voice has been rendered soft by Parkinson's disease, was particularly anxious to record her many stories. When Nina explained that the microphone would be able to "hear" her quiet voice, she replied poignantly, "Oh good, I need somebody to hear me."

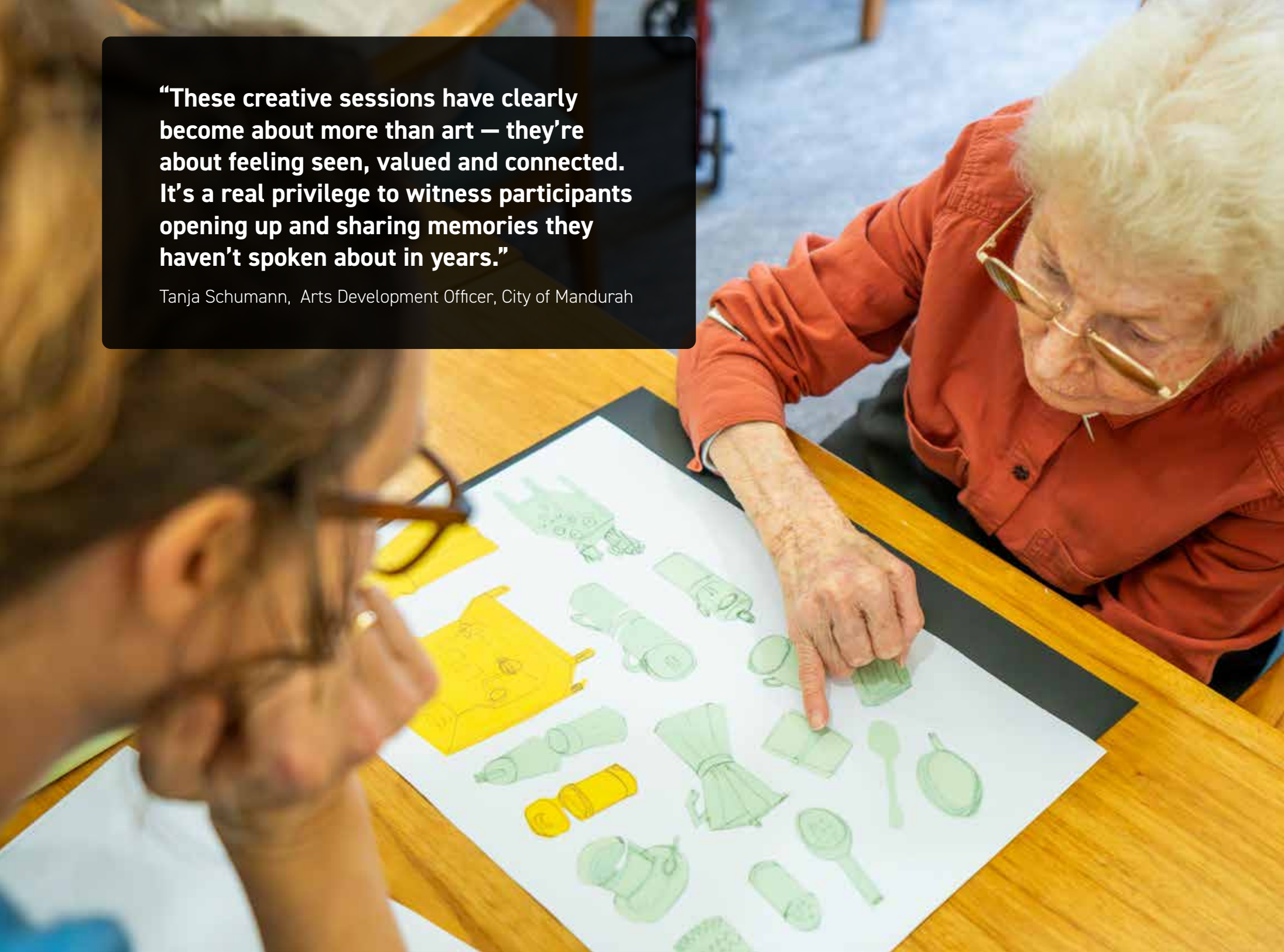
Tegan also returned to visit and interview some of the residents in their rooms. "This was a very touching experience for me," she recalls. "The trust shown by them alongside the appreciation of my interest and curiosity in their personal stories was immense." Although the stories have been edited to fit in this book, they have been recorded in full and gifted to the residents, their families and the City of Mandurah, as a record of these long and fascinating lives.

Explaining her move into Mercy Place, one resident said, "I haven't regretted the decision one bit. People like [carer] Jenny, they're a blessing, she's an angel." This sentiment was repeated by many.



“These creative sessions have clearly become about more than art — they’re about feeling seen, valued and connected. It’s a real privilege to witness participants opening up and sharing memories they haven’t spoken about in years.”

Tanja Schumann, Arts Development Officer, City of Mandurah









Tea time

ANN VERONICA ROBERT

Ann's artwork is largely inspired by her favourite dogs and the ritual of tea drinking brought over from England. "I always had dogs, it was my thing, never my husband's," she says. "I had whippets in England, then borzois in Australia." Ann showed dogs in her youth and later followed in her father's footsteps by becoming a dog-show judge. He showed cows back when they lived on the family farm in England and at the early age of six, she showed cows too!

Ann grew up on Guernsey Island, off the coast of France. "[When] the circus came to Guernsey, me and my friends went down to have a look," she says. "I started going out with [my future husband, Robert], then he moved to the next island [Jersey] with the circus. Mum didn't like that at all and called me a name. I left home then, I got a job with the circus, doing the cooking for the ones that put the tents up.

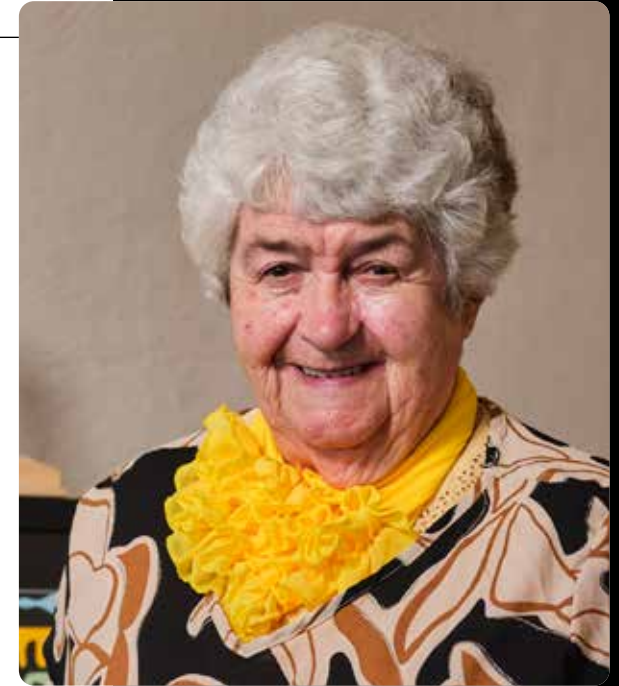
"My husband – 'Victor Zane the wonder boy', that was his stage name – did a balancing act. He was very strong, he juggled too, I had to assist him. I was 19

but my father didn't approve. We lived [separately] in old stationary buses. I lived with three girls in one bus, with shared showers. The people who ran it had a posh caravan. [Robert's] father was a strongman with the circus, but Robert went on his own, left his father and found another circus, [Winships Circus].

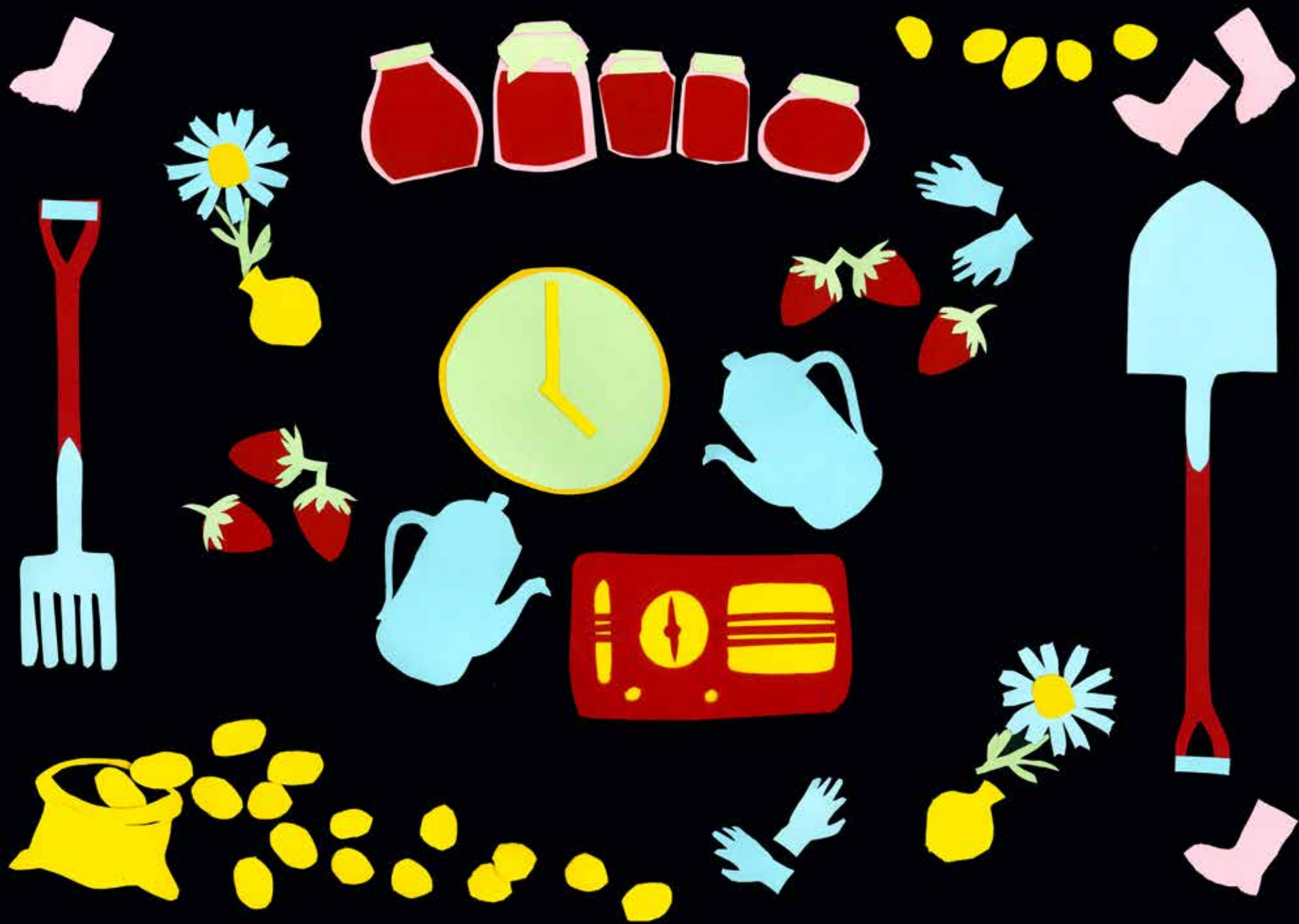
"Robert's father [William Beatie] held the heavyweight championship in the UK. When he was younger, he did this trick, he held up 18 men on a plank, lifted it up on his feet. They'd pull buses too. There were tightrope walkers, they all practised every day, it was really hard work!

"We lived with his parents [for a while], we got married the following September, then we went with the Gandy Circus, travelling around the UK with them. We had a little caravan of our own then.

"My son was 11 months old on the boat trip over to Australia, we emigrated as 'ten pound Poms' if you know that term? That was in 1962 ... Pregnant again, they told me on the boat I was. It was a terrible trip, I was sick all the way, otherwise it was a wonderful trip.



We came through the Suez Canal – landed in Melbourne after about six weeks of travel. [Melbourne] was a bit different to what I expected, no air conditioning. We all lived in Nissen huts – maybe an old army place – mixed nationalities, Russians, Italians, Greeks, plenty of work there then. Then you found a place to live on your own."



Digging potatoes

CHRISTINE NIMMO

It's 5pm in Christine's artwork; when she was growing up that was dinner time for her and her two brothers and sister. "With mum and dad at home, there were six of us at the dinner table," she recalls.

Chris's mother made custards and cakes, sweet breads, brains in breadcrumbs, tripe and tongue - pressed and boiled, with worcestershire sauce and mashed potatoes. "Mum grew strawberries, the kids weren't allowed to touch them - she made jams and trifle with them when they were ripe."

There were always rolled serviettes on the table, a radio in the kitchen, and one in the lounge. They listened to serials each night as a family (*The Shadow!*)...

"Who's watching?.. The Shadow is watching!" Chris says in unison with Pat, another resident sitting beside her, both reminiscing over their favourite radio program from another time.

Chris's artwork is framed with a gardening spade and fork, and potatoes. She recounts her vivid and fond memories of digging potatoes with her mother and siblings, saying, "We [kids] would help mum dig them up, it was her work, but it was fun for us. We'd fill big sacks with the potatoes and get to take some home."





Tea and scones

CAROL WILCOCKS

Carol's artwork has all the ingredients for various special occasion meals, from afternoon tea to a Sunday roast. Carol proudly tells us, "My brother makes the best apple crumble."

Carol had a special tablecloth on their family table that had her cross stitching around its borders and remembers having her brothers around for tea, always lots of talk and laughter.

She used to love cooking spaghetti bolognaise and rissoles for the family. On special occasions she would make "roast pork with crackling, baked potatoes, carrots, beans and proper gravy".

As a child, Carol loved going to the ice-cream shop but always got into trouble for sticking her finger in the ice-cream tubs. She remembers having a fig tree in her garden and her mother would make fig jam. Her mother was a good cook and taught her all she knew.

Later in life, Carol's own garden boasted birds of paradise bushes, a lovely budgie, a weiro and a cocky. She also had a cocker spaniel called Peter, and a grey cat with blue eyes called Twinkle.





A glass of red and a good book

SHIRLEY DEXTER

Like many a creative spirit, Shirley enjoyed a glass of red whilst attending workshops, so it's fitting that her artwork pays homage to the simple pleasure of a nice drop, beneath a canopy of grapevines.

Shirley spent her childhood in West Hallam in Darbyshire, a small coal mining town in England. Her father was a railway signal man and her mother sadly died of breast cancer when she was only ten years old. Shirley's grandmother came to live with them then, to help take care of the children.

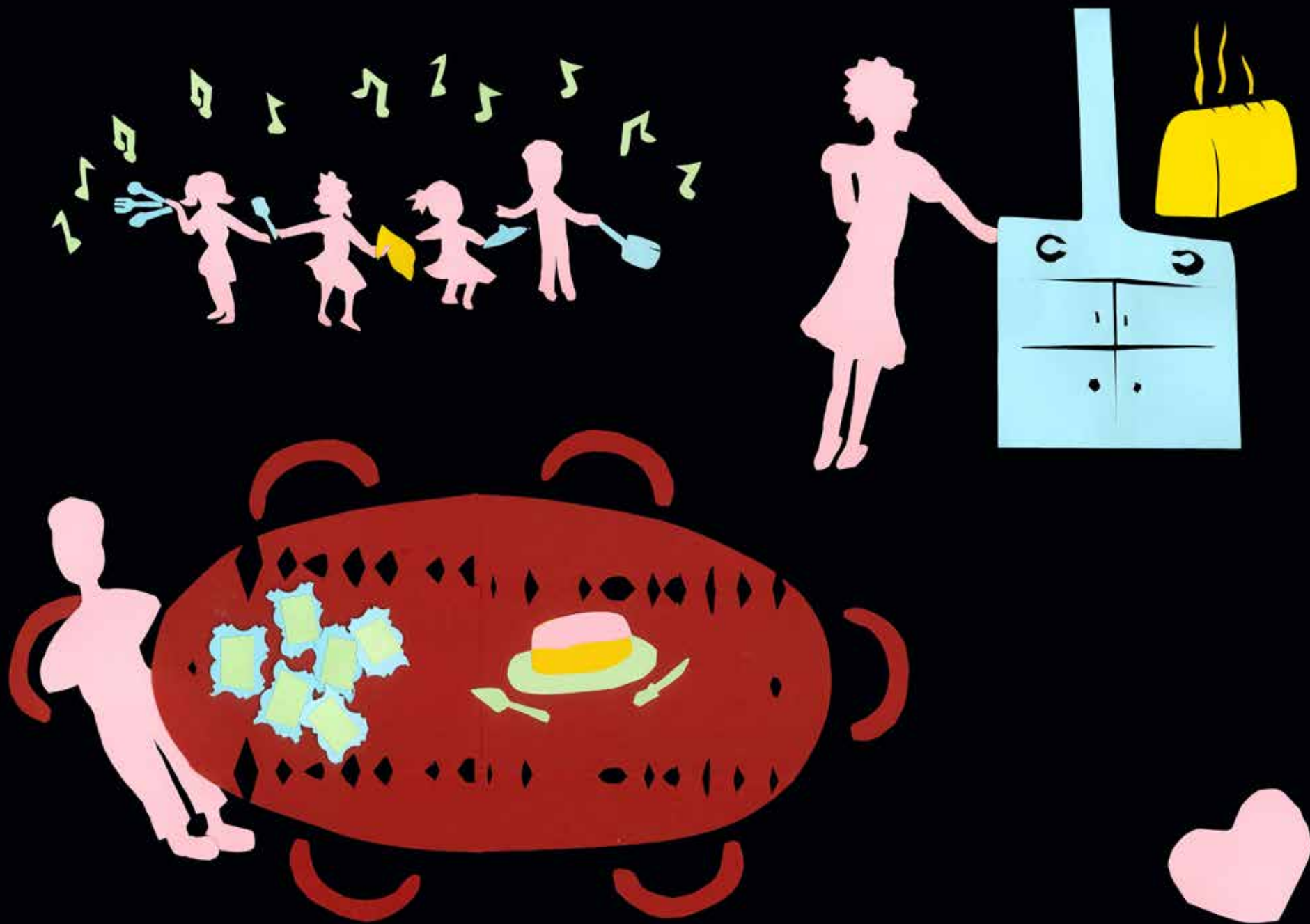
Shirley volunteered and fundraised for the Mandurah Cancer Foundation for six years, knitting, embroidering and crafting pot pourri bags and padded coat hangers. Shirley fought cancer in her

50s and, as well as her mother, there were other women in her family who had cancer. "That work was a way for me to give back," she says.

Shirley's love of reading was shared with her late husband Harry, who was a librarian. Their twelve full bookcases shrunk to five as they downsized, eventually to be inherited by their son when they moved to Brightwater. Also an avid reader, Shirley's son visits her regularly, takes her out for lunch and brings along a rotation of books each time. Mystery novels are her favourite but she says, 'I'll read anything!'

Shirley moved to Brightwater with Harry when he was unwell and after he died, she stayed on as she has made friends here. "I'm used to it here now," she says.





We all came together in the kitchen

BERYL BACON

Beryl is a lover of fine foods, with a small fridge in her room for her weekly specialty shopping trips for fresh berries and French cheese. Beryl arranges her plate beautifully, taking photos of the resulting artwork to share with her family.

We initially met Beryl in the dining room during a tour of Brightwater as we contemplated this project. Our chats with her sparked the theme around food and mealtimes, as we realised the richness of this subject and its ability to draw out memories from the past as well as create new connections in the present.

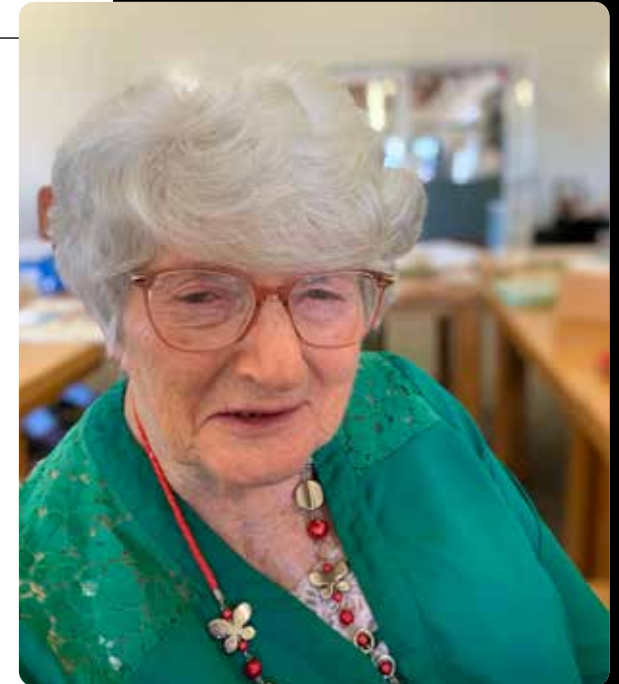
There's a sense of joy and family love in Beryl's place mat, from the dancing figures to the steaming bread, fresh out of the oven.

"My mother was a marvellous cook, she had a wood stove and baked bread in it, she could cook anything," says Beryl.

"After school we'd come inside and there'd be a chocolate slice or a cake of some description."

Beryl remembers the smell of fresh bread with such fondness. "Everybody congregated in the kitchen, it was a kitchen/dining area combined, it was a smallish house ... We'd all wait at the table to eat until my mother sat down with us ... Us kids – I had two sisters and a brother who was five years older – would all sing as we did the dishes together after dinner. Sometimes my parents would join in. My brother would usually wash and the girls would dry and put things away.

Dad collected stamps and we often all sat around the table together watching him. Sometimes we'd play bingo, or listen to the radio while mum cooked dinner."





Dad did the cooking

NORMA BREMMELL

Norma spent most of her time as a child outside. "I can't remember much of the inside of the house," she says. They had bonfire nights and the kids were all very active - "always the young boys there, all us kids would sit along the fence".

On Norma's place mat those boys make a playful backdrop to a chef's silhouette that stands proudly, front and centre, depicted in powder blue. This is Norma's father; she speaks of him and his culinary skills with great love and admiration - his preserves and jams,

roast dinners with lots of roast veggies, and "his apple pie was the best!" He was often bottling and preserving - strawberry jam especially - "you couldn't buy it back then".

Norma's tattoos all represent her husband and children, with love hearts surrounding them. There was a lot of love in her family. Norma grew roses in her garden and remembers making bread and butter pudding, custards and homemade trifles with Aeroplane Jelly. She dearly misses a home cooked roast!





Violet and other memories

SANDRA SCOTT

Sandra sits in the workshop sessions with her husband Barry and their beloved dog Violet, a delightfully happy and placid cocker spaniel.

Barry and Sandra met atop Uluru while on separate tours. Sandra was widowed with three young boys at the time. "We just met up there, something clicked and that was that," says Barry. They fell in love and were married 45 years ago.

Sandra's eldest was "a very clever, gifted boy" and the family moved to Perth so he could go to university.

Barry calls her Sandy; he teases her gently with a sweet smile and kisses her after checking if it's ok. Sandra's eyes sparkle and the frustration and confusion, that was present moments ago, melts away.

Lying on a rug in Sandra's artwork, Violet is depicted as a puppy and adult. Her place at the centre of the work represents her role in Sandra's ongoing story of love and deep connections. Ice skates feature too – from a time in Sandra's young adulthood when she ice skated with a best friend.





High tea

LILLIAN (FAY) DIABLE

"I used to love going to high tea ... and I collected tea cups and saucers," says Fay. This love is reflected in her artwork which showcases a fine teapot and teacup.

"I was a little orphan girl, and I was fostered out as a little baby when I was six months old. I had beautiful foster parents," says Fay, who grew up on an orchard where they grew pears, peaches and plums. Her brother would sell fruits at the local market, and she remembers sitting up on his shoulders, walking through the orchard while he picked the best fruits for her to eat. "I was very lucky, he was the most beautiful man, always there for me," she says.

"Mum would cook a baked dinner every week with the best gravy! We had a tin bath outside and every Friday it was filled with hot water boiled on the copper, and the kids would take turns, youngest to oldest."

Fay's first job was working on the switchboard and later she worked as a nurse at the Woorloo tuberculosis hospital, 65 kilometres east of Perth. Fay would go on to work as a nurse in an aged care home for 30 years. Married at 20 she left home to make her own family, and now has four children, seven grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. Fay loved her home, her garden and reading novels. She has always quilted and still makes hexi-flowers for quilts.

Fay's best memories of those years are of sitting around with the family at mealtimes, after school and work. She loved celebrating birthdays with a roast dinner for family and friends. She always ate a lot of fruit from the orchard.

Fay misses the pumpkin and pea soups she used to make in her kitchen. Fay cooked for her four children and her husband every night; their favourite



meal was her sausages and mash. She loved her flower garden with many varieties of roses – "it was my pride and joy".

"My son-in-law is a chef and makes a mean cottage pie - yum!"



Out camping

ANNE BRADSHAW

Anne's artwork captures the tranquility of an evening around a campfire with her husband, children and friends. "We did a lot of camping in the Acacia Caravan Park near Busselton," she recalls. "We had a very happy holiday life down there, all the families knew each other. We'd get together down there every year, especially for Christmas. We all fished together. I made a great wind shield to wrap around our covered area, out of canvas, for night time. We built a fire in a big old copper and we'd cook a big communal meal together. It was a very special time for the family."

"I was born in Solihull, in the West Midlands in England," says Anne. "It was a small village, a very old town, with a church built around 1100."

Anne was an only child, and her mother and father always said to her, "You have to do what you want to do, it's your life."

"I had a charmed life really," she says. "My mother had a very exciting life, she was on the stage as a chorus girl. She was born in Paris, came over to England

as a baby. Her French father [Andre' Vaugon] owned a delicatessen, and supplied small goods to Buckingham Palace, by appointment [to Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother].

"I was living and working in Mitcham, Surry, as a qualified housing manager through the Royal Institute ... I studied law and housing law, lots of things ... took about five years. I met my husband [Alexander] through my landlord, they were friends and fished together in the Richmond Reservoir". Alexander asked Anne to be his new darts partner, then a week later he invited her to the pictures.

"We married in a hurry in 1954 because we wanted to go to West Africa for Alexander's work," she remembers. He was a communications engineer and for much of the 1950s the couple spent 18 months in Nigeria and returned to England for summer months. They lovingly adopted a Nigerian parrot and took it home to England by sea, but couldn't get it into Australia when they immigrated.



"A friend of ours moved to Australia and talked us into coming over," says Anne. Anne's mother then came out from England when she was 74, and joined the Country Women's Association. "My mother was very creative and independent, she wanted to build her own life here. We built a bedsit for her at the end of our house."



Angels

JUNE WARDROP

Born 1936, June grew up in West Leederville. "My dad was an aluminum moulder, had a shed in the back yard and made up things from aluminum. He made my grandpa a knife and fork all in one, as [Grandpa] only had one arm. We used to go to a tap dance class and he made the taps for our shoes.

"Mum used to make all our clothes of course, sewing and knitting, and she was a good cook, baking different things. Our house was on St Leonards Avenue, near Lake Monger (Galup). Mum would sometimes make a cake for birthdays and we'd have a picnic celebration down at the lake with all the ducks and the swans there.

"We had a little corner shop, actually two of them. There were four of us, a brother, me and two sisters, and then my mum remarried and had another child. We stayed in the same house. My parents went dancing at a place called the Blue Room and regularly went to the Embassy.

"When I was older I went out dancing at the Embassy too. I met a group of

boys one day and found one I liked. We went out for a while and married; we had two boys, but that marriage fell apart.

"I remember when we were young, the war was on and we still lived up the hill from Lake Monger, one particular day there was a light plane that crashed into the lake. We didn't know if it was friendly or an enemy plane, everybody was out on the street looking at the commotion. I'll never forget that."

June says that Christmas lunch with the whole family was the best, the Christmas pudding always had coins in it. Cheese-cake was her favourite as a child, and she's loved seafood throughout her life.

"One of my sons works and lives in Scotland and the other in Victoria," she says. "I visited [my son] in Scotland about 20 years ago. I spent a month there, it was a big experience, [my] first time travelling.

"I ended up in Mandurah about a year ago, when my husband was ill and I hadn't been all that well either. I wanted to be looked after and not doing all the



looking after anymore, so I decided to move us here [to Mercy Place]. We got a room here for my husband and then one came up for me. I haven't regretted the decision one bit. People like [Mercy Place staff member] Jenny, they're a blessing, she's an angel."

Angels figure prominently in June's work, representing not just living versions like Jenny, but also loved ones lost.



The old woodstove

MAUREEN SOADY

With its crisp and whimsical fish, flowers and Battenberg cake patterns, Maureen's artwork is reminiscent of the early 20th century artist Paul Klee, who was known for his ability to bring magic to everyday scenes.

"I was born in a small village near the New Forest in Hampshire, southern England, and then lived in Salisbury, Wiltshire, for seven years after the time I was married," says Maureen.

"From the time I was small, I helped my dad. He was a gardener and during the war years, us children from school, we used to go and help the farmers with picking up the potatoes, stacking the hay, all that sort of thing. So I've always liked gardening, and if you look in my room now, you'll see there's lots of flowers."

Maureen remembers the old water pump in the kitchen and the kerosene and paraffin used for the old stove and lamps. Her first job was working in the office of the local butcher and green grocer.

Christmas time was always special, she says. "My brother played the piano accordion ... we'd put candles on the

Christmas tree and one year an uncle's beard caught alight!"

Maureen emigrated to WA in 1959 with husband Derek and their children. "[We went looking for] a better life. It was postwar ... I was nine when the Second World War broke out. We were still on rations when we got married in 1952, things like that. But not only that, the country was basically destroyed ... it was my husband's wish to come ... We had two small children, and we came for their future."

Arriving in Australia was like stepping back in time, remembers Maureen. "When we came to Australia in 1959, that was the stove I had to work with, a wood stove, and I broke all my casserole dishes from the heat of the oven. We had chip heaters to warm the water in the bathroom."

Maureen has many memories around food and cooking. "I like eating fish – barramundi, herrings and things, fresh fish that has been lightly fried.

"I had Sunbeam Mixmaster for about 30 years," she says. "I bought Battenberg cake with marzipan around it.



"Steak and kidney pie, that's what my grandmother used to make us when I was young ... My granny had a fireplace, and a pot hanging over it, you know, to cook slowly."

Maureen likes gardening and flowers, "especially the spring flowers, daffodils, snowdrops ... bluebells. And red roses are my favourite flower ... I had those in my wedding bouquet."



Billy Buck

PATSY BONSER

A pale pink cockatoo hides in one corner of Patsy's artwork. "We had a cockatoo – Billy Buck – [who often escaped his cage]. I'd go outside in the morning, dressed in my dressing gown over my pyjamas," she remembers. "He'd try to hide under my dressing gown and say 'I'm Bill Buck, I'm Billy Buck' and I'd say, 'Get back in your cage, you're a silly Billy Buck.' I'd have to lure him back with some fresh bread and trick him."

Patsy grew up in Burekup near Bunbury. "When I left school, I got a job in the post office and my dad, Fred Best was his name, he worked in the shop next door," she says. "Dad worked at the front desk of the shop, he ordered all the products from Perth. Back then it was all delivered on the train."

"I went on my own to Bunbury, worked on the switchboard at the post office again – a room full of girls and the walls

were full of numbers. I had to get my mind trained around numbers in the thousands, not just the hundreds! I used up my voice on the telephone in those days, it was hard work.

"I got married and had my first baby when I was 29. The marriage wasn't arranged at all, just a boy from the neighbourhood, [Bill Bonser]. He rode a motorbike, he was a very pushy man, all he wanted to do was get married and have children. Once I had one, I wanted more, two boys and two girls. Still in Burekup at this stage, by then I had four kids."

Contrasting the vibrant reds, oranges and yellows of this artwork is an elegant silhouette of a pair of dancers, in a subtle mint green. "We went to dances all the time, my husband was a great dancer," recalls Patsy.





200 egg cups

HAZEL HATHER

"I lived in the Lake District, in Scotland," says Hazel. "We had a farm with everything – pigs, sheep, ducks, geese, Jersey cows. They would hang the bacon in the shed." Hazel moved to Australia in 1968 when her children were young, "for a better life, and the weather!"

She continues, "I keep photographs of my parents ... in little gold frames, I've got them on the window [sill]. My daughter brought them in for me."

A giant pale pink pair of handheld beaters reclines across the centre of Hazel's artwork, paying tribute to Hazel's daughter, who loves to cook. "She's a better cook than me," says Hazel. "That's where the beater [on my place mat] came from."

Egg cups in cheerful red and yellow also feature. "I collected egg cups, had over 200 of them, all gone now," she says, although some were kept by her daughter. "They were all different, made of pewter, wood, silver, brass, ceramic, you name it."

Hazel also included two little pairs of bananas on her mat, and there's a reason they're so small, she says. "I just love bananas, not real ones, no. The sugary ones."

When asked what drew her to this project, Hazel says, "It just had to be done I suppose, and the girls [leading it] are all lovely."



Hazel died 24 July 2025



Marmalade, jams and pickles

HANNAH SPINKS

Hannah remembers watching her mum bake cakes and make trifle for special occasions. She loved all the chatter around the table, the smell of a roast cooking. "We would eat rabbits, my brothers would set the traps," she recalls. Hannah had five brothers; the youngest, still alive, lives in New South Wales.

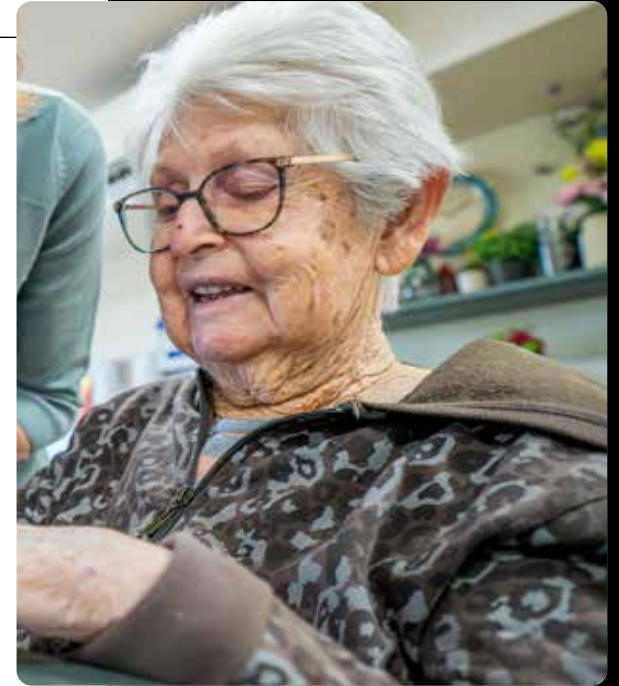
A fruit cake, placed in the centre of a giant crimson glove, takes pride of place at the centre of Hannah's artwork. "I always loved boiled fruit cake. Now my daughter makes it," she says.

Seafood also features prominently. "I love me fish, any kind of fish," she says. "We [used to go] fishing and crabbing ... We had a boat at that stage, years ago ... We were allowed to put a net in for fish every Wednesday, so I had big waders and everything. And my husband, he couldn't even tread water, so I used to be the one that went out as far as I could – I nearly got to Pinjarra. It wasn't deep."

Roses symbolise that gardening was important to Hannah; she grew roses and kept a vegetable garden. The family pets are also represented here – they had a white cat with brown patches called Pebbles, and dogs; a Kelpie called Peggy, and they also cared for a stray called Lady, who had 11 pups.

A preserving jar represents the marmalade, green tomato pickles, choko pickles, pickled octopus and squid, and even sweet chilli sauce that Hannah made. "I always made marmalade, jam and pickles and all that," she says. "That's all gone by the by now.

"That butterfly [in the corner of the mat] ... my daughter in law's mum and dad both came out here for a holiday, and we took them all the way down south to Margaret River and all those places. I loved it. It was the next time she came, she bought me this [butterfly]. It's hanging on my wall in there, and it's blue with silver around it. That's where I got the idea."





Whitby, by the sea

PAMELA JANE BOLWERK

Pamela's spiritual home is Whitby, North Yorkshire, with its gothic history, folklore and myths around Dracula, Vikings, witches. Pam recalls dressing up each year at Halloween with her sister, making their own costumes and walking the town, "watching all the interesting people, and all the goths in their amazing costumes".

Perhaps these memories have informed her artwork, which has the feeling of a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale, with its two doll figures in the foreground, and an ocean full of adventure in the background.

"I was born in England," says Pam. "My husband [Case] was Dutch. He came over on a ship. My mother said, 'You girls have a bad name, going out with foreign seamen'. But it was really love at first sight. I was only 17, he was 20." They were apart for three years, writing letters and then she married him.

"We went to live in Holland and then when Lonnie, my daughter was born, he didn't want to go to sea anymore. He was supposed to be going to Tokyo for three months. So I said I'd go to England with the baby, because she was only a few months old, and he was going to be

away. We went to get tickets for me, and he asked for two tickets. I said, 'No, you don't need two, we don't have to pay for the baby.' He said, 'I'm coming with you.' And we never went back, he liked it that much! He loved England, and he went drilling for potash on Yorkshire Moors.

"I have a diploma in psychotherapy, I used to always be studying. My husband worked for a company and he would fly in and out, so I could do as I wanted. I had a business, astrology and numerology ... I wrote for magazines [*Women's Weekly* and Scottish magazines] and mystic magazines ... I worked as a freelancer. There used to be a thriving magical industry in Rockingham." Pamela tells stories about the interesting people she met through her work, and the people who would come to her door for help.

"I lost my boy to suicide, he was only 22, and then [my other son] in the Bali bombings ... I kind of stopped doing everything after that ... I went on living like a zombie for a few years. You see, my husband died the following year, and then my brother died the year after that," she says.



"After my son's suicide, I decided I had to do something about it. I joined Compassionate Friends. I spent 10 years as a support for parents who lost children to suicide. It was pretty hard, but you also know you're helping people ... and I got a lot out of that too, it helped me a lot."

"I belong to more than one generation really, I never feel old. I'm 83, it means that I've lived in different times, not just chronologically. But it was a very different time."



Many ways to make a coffee

GIACOMA (MINA) AMATA

Mina will tell you all about the many ways to make a “good nepalese coffee” and her love of coffee is reflected in her artwork, filled with coffee pots and other paraphernalia that seem to dance off the paper.

She’s quick to tell you all about the wonderful people around her but we discovered she’s pretty damn wonderful herself.

Mina was born in Naples where she was raised by nuns in an Italian orphanage. At the age of seven, she emigrated to Australia with her adoptive mother, and lived in Fremantle with her and her adoptive father, who was a crayfisherman. She quickly learnt English at St Patrick’s Catholic School and immediately began teaching others all the while running errands for the people in need around her.

As an adult Mina was known and recognised for her selfless dedication to helping the Italian community in

Fremantle. Despite suffering from emphysema, she would travel by bus to interpret for Italian seniors in various settings, accompany them to appointments, and assist those lacking confidence in navigating arising problems. Mina volunteered for the Red Cross, St Patrick’s Basilica, and regularly visited nursing home residents. Her service earned her a finalist spot for a major prize in the West Australian Seniors Week awards. “I just like helping people,” she told a Fremantle reporter, when interviewed in her 50s.

This passion for giving back to her community continues today, where she is the first to jump at the chance to help serve lunches or clean up. She says, “A little kindness goes a long way, it doesn’t hurt to always be helping.”

From her childhood, Mina remembers “little side plates on the tables with drawings of rabbits, birds, guinea pigs and things, all around the edges”. This could



have been the beginning of her interest in drawing. During our workshops, Mina would draw and draw and draw, all the while entertaining us with stories, and her delightful way of being deeply interested in the world and the people around her.



Well travelled

ROSEMARY RANA

"You meet so many people going around," says Rosemary and she certainly got around! She's camped all over, from Exmouth to Broome, Kununurra to Catherine, Cook Town to Newcastle "and I've also been around the bottom that many times because the winter was up north and the summer was south," she adds.

"I was born in Newcastle in New South Wales, but I moved all over. We lived down near Gosford, and then we lived right up near the border, on the Brisbane Water [estuary]. That was a good life too, because we were on the water and swimming."

Rosemary's best childhood memories are from her time spent at her Auntie's farm. She'd sit on the fence, alongside her cousins, waiting for dinner to be ready, and she loved bread and butter puddings back then. "My mum died when I was 13, so I went to stay with my aunts, her sisters," she says. "After that, we moved up to the north.

"I loved writing when I was a kid. My dad ran the newspaper there, he had it for 25 years. I worked for him when I was a teenager, I loved that, and I used to write for him until I was about 20.

"I lived in East Maitland after I was married, and then we came over [to WA in 1970] and went up to Tom Price, up in the mining. They were just finishing the first stage of the town then, when we came over. I was up there when they started to build Karratha, and I used to work on the newspaper for Hamersley Iron, I used to do the Tom Price social pages too, I loved it.

"I've done a lot of travelling since I've been over here, this country sort of tempts you to travel because it's so big. I like adventure! I had a bus, it was called Aussie Moto, that was 1994/95, it went right around Australia."

That bus has pride of place in the centre of Rosemary's mat, a pale blue vehicle ringed by vibrant yellow and red.



"We went round in a smaller thing first to have a look and see where we'd like to go," she continues. "But of course, you like to go everywhere."



Farm life and working the telephones

BEATRICE FRANCIS

"It takes me back a few years, Alan and I were married and he had the tractor, and the windmill and the crops," says Beattie. She remembers "the trees, the cows and the sheep." All these memories are captured on Beattie's mat, in the sage greens and sunset yellows of the Wheatbelt.

"I was a town girl, growing up in Narrogin," she says. "My father was a railway man, and I had two older sisters." Beattie's favourite meal as a child was spaghetti bolognese but "really we ate whatever was put in front of us". Beattie's best memories were when the whole family was together.

"I married a farmer, we lived in Popanyinning, in the Wheatbelt," she says. Her married life was spent on the farm. They ate a lot of beef, had a tractor for the crops, lots of dogs, a vegetable garden and always a bowl of fresh fruit on the table.

"I quite often go back and think about what I would do if I were still young," says Beattie. "Otherwise your mind goes and you can't do a thing with it."





Times gone by

JILL MIRIAM HERATY

Following a fall, Jill was on respite at Mercy Place for four weeks in June, coinciding with the workshops.

Born in 1943, Jill grew up on a 100 acre farm in Essex. "We had a few cottages dotted around, we had cows and horses, pigs, the usual things. The family lived there, like a village. It was a lot of freedom to go where you liked, safely."

At the heart of Jill's artwork is a piano, symbolic of its place at the heart of her childhood. "The whole family played the piano, my mum, nanna, uncle, everyone," she says. "I was made to play as a child. It was a very musical family, and arty, my uncle was a watercolour landscape painter."

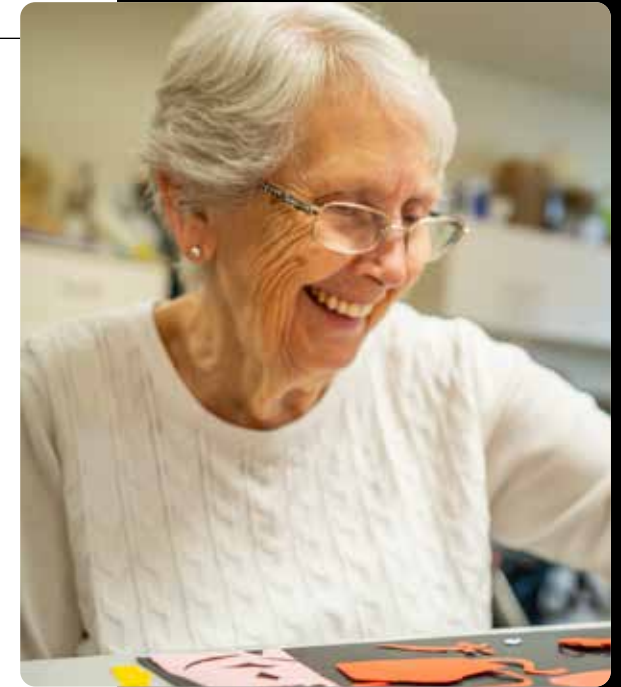
That influence is obvious in the delicate and intricate silhouettes Jill drew for her artwork. "I'm a drawer," she says. "I always drew, from very young, I was brought up on cartoon drawing. My mum was very good at cartoons too, that's where I learnt it all. My mum played for the pub, she was booked

to play in all the public houses in three villages, and I was always in tow – we had music everywhere.

"There was an American airbase on our land, it was there until about 20 years ago. Mum and I would babysit their children. They had a little village, with shops and things. I wore pedal pushers and Eskimo coats in winter, when you couldn't get things like that in England.

"I left school at 14 and went into service, as in *Upstairs, Downstairs*, and I learnt to cook. So I saw all the posh things that existed in upper class houses. I learnt a lot, and that kept me in good stead for the rest of my life. I worked there for four years. While I was there they paid for me to go to TAFE where I learnt three types of cooking (French, country and vegetarian) and woodwork too. They also paid for me to go to the youth club to do dancing classes."

Jill's warmest memories from her childhood are of her godparents.



"I went every weekend and in the school holidays," she says. "She taught me to cook and crochet and he taught me how to sharpen a saw. We'd have roast dinners and play board games; they taught me Chinese checkers, and lots of card games. It was very special."



Grandma taught me to cook

MARIAN CLADINGBOEL

There's a sporty flavour to Marian's place mat that references her childhood netball games. "At half time [during netball games], we ate cut oranges, I remember that," she says.

Marian was the cook in the family; special meals included roast beef with Yorkshire puddings, or beef stroganoff. "I always had a tablecloth on the table with a glass centrepiece," she says.

Marian grew fruit trees and had many flowers in her garden, and both are displayed on her place mat. "I love my family," she says as she proudly shows us her family photos.

Marian met her husband at night classes and married him four years later, after he came back from the air force. "He was a ship broker, and he travelled a lot with his work," says Marian. "Some firms allowed wives to travel with them." They had three children together. Marian's three grandchildren and one great grandchild all call her Grandee.

Marian lived in the Whitsundays for many years before moving to Mercy Place with her husband of 62 years, who has since passed away. Her children all live in Mandurah.





Celebration

A light-filled room overlooking the coastline at Halls Head was alive with colour and joy for the celebration designed to honour the elders who participated in The Creative Age, alongside their personal and collective stories. It was a moment in time to reflect on the richness of this creative age!

Tables were covered in fresh cut spring flowers, echoing those grown by many residents in their gardens or remembered from their childhood homes. The food was also inspired by special meals and favourites mentioned in the workshops including gooey cheeses, fresh berries, sausage rolls, quiches and apple crumble – all designed to delight the elders' senses with colour, decadence and an abundance of choice – something they don't have as much of since being in care.

The room was brightened further with papercut lanterns made in the last workshop, set against the black tablecloths, a thematic nod to the collaged artworks proudly displayed around the room.

Participants were visibly moved by their framed artworks on display. "This has been a beautiful day. You don't really know what cutting out coloured pieces of paper will turn out to be. When you look at all these pictures, that's all

they are. You cut pieces with scissors and then you have your life story behind it. I think it's marvellous," declared participant Ann Robert over the microphone.

When local favourite musician Robert Graham started playing classics such as *Pretty Woman* and *Love Is in the Air*, the dance floor quickly filled.

"It was our hope that guests would dance but we knew it might not happen," says Tegan. "Then Hannah asked me if I could support her to dance. She kicked off her shoes and others soon followed suit. It was such a beautiful moment."

The Creative Age is a project that is designed to respond to the challenges faced by residents of aged care facilities, in particular loneliness and social disconnection. Feeling the palpable joy in the room – the lively chatter, the beaming smiles, the dancing bodies (whether seated or standing) – the project's success in this regard was immediately obvious.

"This has been a beautiful day," said Ann Robert. "I have family close by, but I don't see many people. Things like this help us so we can live a life and live longer."

For participant Fay Diable, the project has proved life-changing. When Fay moved into Mercy Care earlier this year, physically and emotionally scarred by surgery followed by months of recurrent hospital stays, her daughters didn't think she had long to live.

"Mum was really scared. She wasn't our mum anymore. She was sad," says daughter Denise.

"The staff at Mercy Care are beautiful. But the thing that made mum shine, and come out and be happy, was this project," she says. "The fear from the beginning of the year has gone, and has been replaced with this really happy, social person. This project has given mum another lease on life. It's got her back into creating and it's giving her a purpose every single day. It's just mind-blowingly beautiful. We are so grateful to have our mum back again. We thought we had lost her. You guys saved her."

As for Fay herself, she couldn't wait to take to the mic, to thank Lead Artist Sandy McKendrick and Producer Tegan Jenkins.

"I am absolutely gobsmacked," she said. "I don't cry very often, but looking at what these two beautiful ladies behind me do ... I just wanted to thank you both, so sincerely, for the beautiful food, for the entertainment. We never thought it would be something like this. And I won't say much more, because I'll burst into tears."

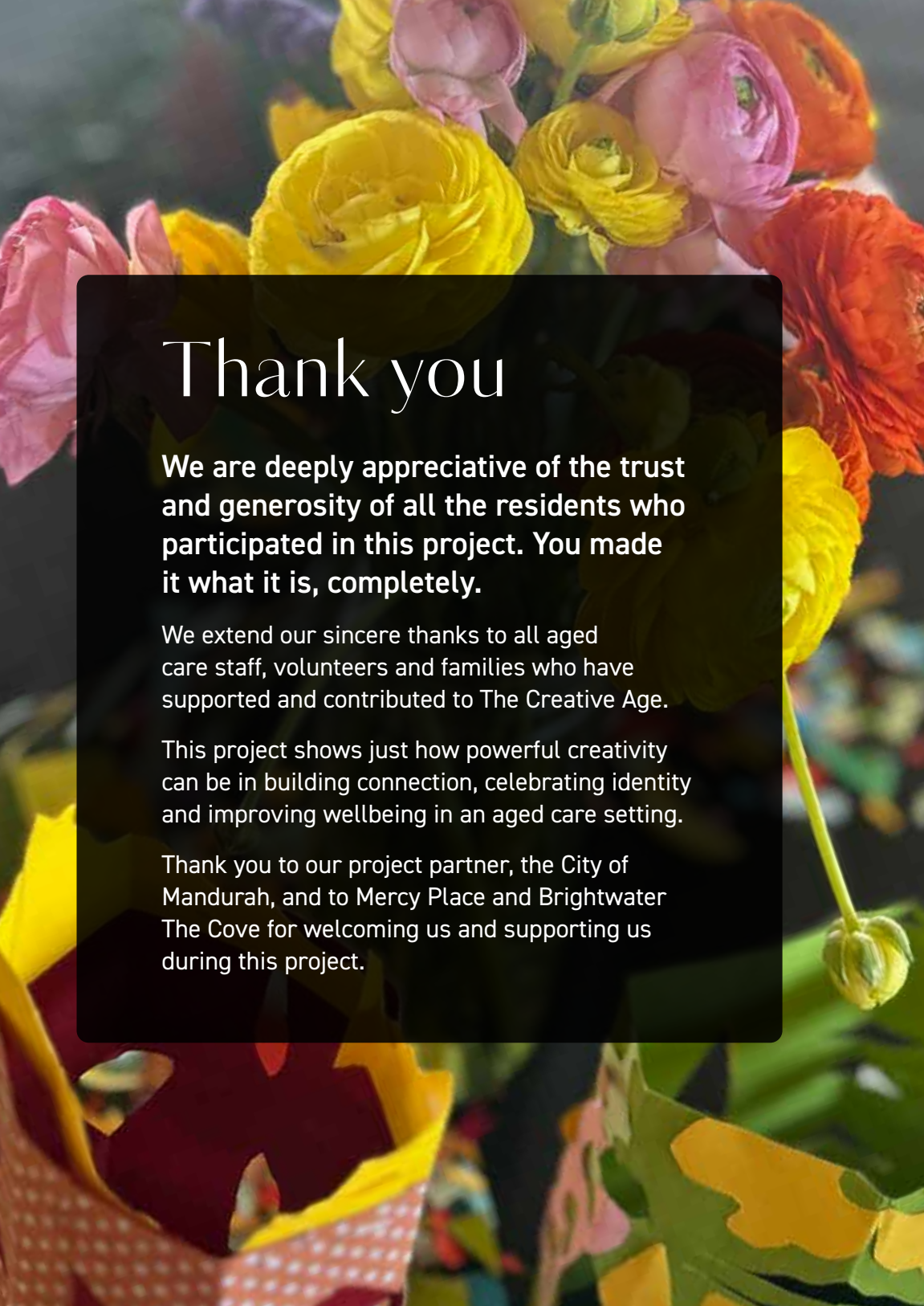
A photo booth set up with clothes racks full of dress-ups included silks, velvets and lace, jewellery, feathered fascinators, silk bows and sequins. Designed for play, silliness and frivolity, it was a place to make new memories among new and old friends.

Friend of participant Rosemary Rana and former aged care worker Mary McLean says that Rosemary has been talking about the project every week when she takes her to church.

"I think this project has just been wonderful for the aged care residents. It's a new activity in their day. They do lots of things, but nothing like art. I think Rosemary really is excited about that. And I think all the others I've seen today, they're all excited, talking about colour and getting dressed up."







Thank you

We are deeply appreciative of the trust and generosity of all the residents who participated in this project. You made it what it is, completely.

We extend our sincere thanks to all aged care staff, volunteers and families who have supported and contributed to The Creative Age.

This project shows just how powerful creativity can be in building connection, celebrating identity and improving wellbeing in an aged care setting.

Thank you to our project partner, the City of Mandurah, and to Mercy Place and Brightwater The Cove for welcoming us and supporting us during this project.



Tegan Jenkins

Producer, Community Arts Network

Sandy McKendrick

Lead Artist, Community Arts Network

Heloise Lorimer

Coordinator, Arts and Culture, City of Mandurah

Tanja Schumann

Arts Development Officer, Arts and Culture, City of Mandurah

Jenny Medford

Lifestyle Co-ordinator, Mercy Place Mandurah

Charlotte Mills

Lifestyle Co-ordinator, Mercy Place Mandurah

Natalie Tomlin

Service Manager, Brightwater The Cove, Mandurah

Nicola Jones

Therapy Assistant, Brightwater The Cove, Mandurah

Miranda De Baughn

General Manager, Community Arts Network

Rebecca Lyon Augustus

Marketing and Design Manager, Community Arts Network

Nina Levy

Communications Coordinator, Community Arts Network

Josh Cowling

Workshop Photographer

Michelle Troop

Workshop Photographer

Duncan Wright

Event Photographer



COMMUNITY ARTS NETWORK (CAN)

Working at the forefront of Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) since 1985, CAN is an arts producer that partners with communities to uncover and platform West Australian stories, histories and experiences that reveal the depth and diversity of our shared identity. By amplifying these stories so that they reach the broader Australian community, our work transforms historic and contemporary exclusions, imbalances and barriers, and celebrates diverse voices, shaping a more inclusive future.

SANDY MCKENDRICK

Sandy is a WA-based artist, director, theatre deviser, designer, photographer and sculptor working across performance, puppetry and multimedia. Her company Sandpiper Productions works with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and artists throughout Australia and internationally.

CITY OF MANDURAH

The City of Mandurah is a local government authority serving the Mandurah metropolitan area and surrounding Peel region in Western Australia, spanning approximately 174 km². As one of WA's fastest-growing regional cities, Mandurah is known for its vibrant coastal lifestyle, diverse community, and commitment to sustainability, inclusion and wellbeing. The City is committed to fostering creative opportunities that support community wellbeing, inclusion and connection. Through place-based initiatives and innovative cultural programming, the City partners with local artists, organisations and residents to tell the stories that shape Mandurah's identity.

WATCH THE BEHIND THE SCENES VIDEO



"Brightwater The Cove is proud to have been part of the Creative Age project, celebrating the power of creativity, connection and community. This initiative has brought joy, purpose and meaningful engagement to our residents, enriching their lives through art and shared experiences."

MERCY PLACE MANDURAH

Mercy Place Mandurah is a welcoming environment designed to feel just like home. Located near the coast, residents enjoy all the perks of a beachside lifestyle, with walking groups and gentle exercise in the natural surroundings. Mercy Place staff form meaningful partnerships with every resident to ensure close and continuous contact with family, the community and friends — both within and outside the home.

BRIGHTWATER THE COVE, MANDURAH

Brightwater The Cove is a residential aged care home in Dudley Park, WA, offering personalised support for older adults, including those with dementia and complex care needs. Run by the not-for-profit Brightwater Care Group, The Cove provides private rooms, homely living spaces, and access to allied health services in a warm, community-focused environment.

