

# HerStory: An opera film showcasing the creative talents of people living with Parkinson's

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# COHERE

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## Background

- Regular engagement with group singing, dance & theatre activities has been shown to have positive impacts on the speech, motor function, cognition and quality of life of people living with Parkinson's [1].
- *HerStory* is an operatic work featuring music, libretto, choreography and visual art co-created in a series of workshops with 150 members of the UK Parkinson's community over a 4 year period.
- After its first workshop performance at Snape Maltings Concert Hall in 2019, the cast expressed a collective ambition to use the piece to 'show the world what people with Parkinson's can do.'



## HerStory: an opera film

In 2022, supported by Arts Council England and partners Britten Pears Arts, English National Opera, and Trinity Laban, performance company Cohere Arts opera set about making *HerStory* into a 30-minute film. After running a number of regional workshops, the project team visited 6 UK locations to capture video and audio footage of the cast singing, dancing and acting. Online visual art workshops were held to generate participant artwork for the animated sections of the film. Clever editing and mixing of all of the material captured enabled the finished film to directly feature the performances and artwork of 85 people with Parkinson's.

**“We want to show the world what people with Parkinson's can do.”**

## Impact

- Qualitative data relating to project impact was collected from participants and their supporters periodically via questionnaire, interview and focus group.
- Participants expressed a range of positive impacts spanning across multiple domains that have been categorised within our 'ABC Impact Framework' (see Fig 1).
- References to impacts on specific symptoms were notably absent from discussions around the benefits of taking part in the project.

A

### AGENCY

- People have agency over how they manage their own health & wellbeing
- People identify as artists

B

### BELONGING

- People feel part of a community
- People feel more connected to where they live & their heritage
- People make friends

C

### CREATIVITY

- People are inspired to be creative & culturally curious

### COMPETENCE

- People have developed skills & knowledge
- People feel a sense of accomplishment

### CONFIDENCE

- People have increased confidence that spills over into other areas of their lives

Fig 1: ABC Impact Framework

## Conclusion

The intrinsic impacts reported by participants who collaborated to make the *HerStory* opera film underline the holistic well-being potential of engaging with participatory arts activities for those living with Parkinson's and other long term health conditions.

Taking part in performative projects with aspirational outcomes can instil a shift in identity from 'patient' to 'artist', 'historian', or 'performer', which in turn promotes increases in confidence and agency beyond the project.

[1] Barnish et al. (2020)

Scan the QR code to watch the film

