

Project Proposal Application

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor,
with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation(s).



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPLICANT DETAILS			
Proposed Project Title:		Exploring the role of creative practice in supporting wellbeing of families, carers and staff in hospice care	
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>		This project explores the role of creative practice as a mechanism of support for families and carers whose relatives have undergone palliative care at Willow Burn Hospice in Lanchester, County Durham, as part of dealing with the loss of loved ones and grief. The project will also work with staff working at Willow Burn Hospice (both clinical and non-clinical) to explore the impact of creative practice on supporting their wellbeing and resilience.	
Host University:		University of Sunderland	
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): Willow Burn Hospice, Lanchester, Co Durham <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Mr David Barker	Email:	DBarker@willowburnhospice.org.uk
Name:	Mrs Carol Hagri	Email:	CHagri@willowburnhospice.org.uk
Primary AHRC Subject Area: <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Please do <u>not</u> add or amend subjects, as there will not be a corresponding Subject Area Review Panel to assess your nomination.</i>		Applied Arts: History, Theory and Practice	
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?		YES ☒	NO ☐
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?		YES ☐	NO ☒
If you consider the project to be interdisciplinary, please state why: <i>(Maximum 100 words. Please note that your application will be assessed by the relevant primary AHRC subject area review panel. However, in this space you should indicate which other subject areas your proposal covers and how your methodology is genuinely interdisciplinary.)</i>			

SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

Hospices are one of the main providers of palliative care in the UK, with a holistic, person-centred approach to care, providing emotional, spiritual and physical care to patients and their families (Zainab, 2024). People going through the process of seeing a family member dying and subsequent grieving can experience a wide range of emotions, and staff supporting families may experience compassion fatigue, emotional labour and burnout (Hill et al). The use of creative arts has been shown to be important for community engagement and facilitating positive conversations about dying, and an outlet for dealing with death, dying and grief (Hartley, 2021).

This project will focus on exploring the role of creative arts interventions for families and staff. It will not include dying patients, as the average length of stay for patients at Willow Burn is ten days, and they are at end-of-life stage.

The interventions for families will take place as part of the Day Centre provision at Willow Burn. This is an established safe space for families before and after the death of their loved ones. Interventions for staff will take place at protected times, as organized by Willow Burn, so staff are separated from their clinical and non-clinical roles.

The use of arts within a health and wellbeing context is well documented with studies showing benefits in terms of stress reduction (Elkins –Abuhoff, 2008) the acquisition of skills (White, 2006) and improved confidence (Kramer, 2000).

Creative arts in palliative care is an established area (Hartley, Payne, 2008), however, challenges and barriers exist, where further research is needed to prove the efficacy of creative arts practice in this setting (Hartley, 2021). This project aims to contribute new understanding derived specifically from a creative practitioner research perspective through artmaking, an area where there is a paucity of research and new knowledge, and one where attention is needed on the processes that underpin the work of arts practitioners within the palliative care setting. (Rodeyns, De Backer, 2024). This creative focused perspective aims to develop models of practice that contribute to staff development and supports families when faced with death, dying and loss.

The health aspect of the project will explore the self-reported experiences of taking part in the creative arts interventions using qualitative methodologies, namely a thematic analytic framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to identify areas of salience to the participants. Participation will be confidential and voluntary, written consent will be taken, and ethical approval sought by the University. Data will be collected by semi structured, individual interviews or focus groups, whatever participants are more comfortable with, and audio recorded. The transcripts will be transcribed verbatim, and any areas of ambiguity will be clarified with the participants. Data will be analysed using the Braun and Clarke six step process.

Research questions:

1. How might creative practice be used to explore positive wellbeing interventions within a hospice environment with both families/carers and staff.
2. How might creative practice approaches support families and carers' experience of dealing with death, dying and grief following the loss of a loved one.
3. In what ways can creative practice engagement support staff wellbeing (emotional labour, compassion fatigue) in hospice settings.

This research is likely to employ a multi-methods qualitative approach which positions creative practice as central. Experiential and reflective (Schön) art-based methods (Gray and Malins) will be used and a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) employed within the context of co-construction; this is supported by a rhizomatic analysis (Hickey-Moody, 2015) to support the collaborative nature of this research project. Using constructivist grounded

theory will allow exploration of and support for peoples' identified within the palliative care setting.

The outcomes of the research will include a body of artwork and creative practice models/methods developed through co-creation, together with artwork and a thesis developed by the researcher. Contributions will be made to the development of supportive care models that contribute new knowledge, with potential to feed into the development of health and wellbeing practices towards the enhancement of hospice care.

This PhD would build on and consolidate collaborative research, led by creative industries and supported by the Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute, using participatory approaches for creative practice within the health and wellbeing environment.

Provide details of any resources and facilities, including equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that will be required to complete the project successfully. NBC has limited Research Training Support Grant funding, which may affect the feasibility of high-cost projects. Please note where you might also secure additional funding, (e.g. partner organisations; department or school). Include estimated costs:

(Maximum 200 words)

The student will have workshop access in the school of art and design, which provides a comprehensive set of innovative facilities that are available to the student alongside materials that support the creative practice research. The student will also be integrated into the *Health and Care Workforce Interdisciplinary Research Network* of the Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute and will provide resources and support the health and wellbeing element of the research, including the costs of any related training. Whilst the project is based in Sunderland and the North East, if needed, funds for any additional national travel will be sought from NBCDTP grants. Where appropriate the student can apply for internal funds at the University of Sunderland, for example to cover conference attendance.

Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:

(Maximum 200 words)

The student will have monthly academic supervisions (Livingstone/Graham) and full supervisor/advisor (Livingstone/Graham/Barker/Hagri) every 3 months. Deadlines for the project will be set at the start and the student's progress will be monitored through the regular meetings, formal academic reviews (annual monitoring and progression) and at agreed points within the research. The supervisory team will be responsible for monitoring the research at PhD level and together with Barker/Hagri will provide training, support and professional development required to complete the research project. The supervisory team will use an online system (e- vision) to record meetings, set research goals and outcomes and support communication and planning.

What benefits will there be for the candidate and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 200 words)

The candidate will develop practical experience of socially engaged practices within a specific art/health and wellbeing context that will support professional management and engender transferable skills that will contribute to the enhancement of career opportunities and employability post doctorate. The student will gain experience of developing models of practice that emerge from the collaboration and the authentic position in which to research and develop creative practice and aligned methodologies which have potential to be translated across both the UK and internationally. Hospices are rooted in biopsychosocial models of care and are increasingly incorporating innovative ways of supporting families and staff, so this work is timely and has potential for the student to develop creative practice in the niche area of hospice care, which may support employability and skills.

Willow Burn Hospice has developed a research group to inform development of evidence-based interventions to inform evidence-based decision making for the organisation. Support of both families and staff are research priorities for this group. By having a collaborative PhD studentship with the University and Sunderland, the Hospice has an opportunity to grow its research activity and play an active part in the project. The findings of the project have potential to inform practice and policy for Willow Burn, supporting future development of services.

State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:

*(Maximum 200 words. A financial contribution is **not** a requirement. However, the AHRC expect that **non-HE partners based overseas** will make a financial contribution to the costs of the student's return travel and accommodation when visiting.)*

Willow Burn Hospice will not provide financial contributions, but will support with in kind contributions, without which the project would not be feasible. Through Barker, Hagri and Graham access will be provided to participants (families and healthcare professionals), they will also provide rooms at the hospice to undertake research. Barker, Hagri and Graham will support the student through all governance procedures, mentor the student through ethical research processes aligned to the palliative care environment.

Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the candidate will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:

(Maximum 200 words)

The student will attend day centre support group meetings and activities facilitated by Willow Burn staff and spend time with both clinical and non-clinical staff at the hospice, to gain an understanding of hospice provision in the UK, and to become familiar with the environment, which is different to other types of care. Additionally, both Willow Burn staff and Graham (Research Lead for Willow Burn) will work with the student to give an overview of the principles and practice of palliative care to ensure the student understands the underpinning ethos and philosophy of the biopsychosocial approach to care in this environment. The student will be able to speak with staff such as grief counsellors to understand bereavement, and to ensure that they are comfortable within this environment which may be new to them.

The student will observe and participate in day centre events, in order to meet families and see how existing support programmes are carried out, to inform development of creative practice activities and to become familiar with the types of people who would be potential participants and to discuss ideas for creative practice activities with. Graham will also spend time with the student at Willow Burn to discuss ethical considerations and approval processes.

The student will have protected time at Willow Burn in which to carry out the activities and will be supported by Barker and Hagri. The student will develop the creative practice interventions with Livingstone and will be supported and guided by Graham for the wellbeing and ethical aspects, but the research will be developed through co-constructed creative practice activity with families and healthcare professionals.

This research will contribute to both arts practice and health and wellbeing fields and as such will disseminate through publication and platforms aligned to arts and palliative care networks and professional societies so professionals can learn and understand the value of creative practice as adjuvant to mainstream care. The student's expertise and completed research will inform and contribute to future developments for palliative care support pathways for families and staff, demonstrating the significance of applied art materials and creative practice within this context.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Professor Andrew Livingstone
School or Department:	Creative Industries
Email Address:	Andrew.livingstone@sunderland.ac.uk
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Professor Yitka Graham
School or Department:	Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute (Faculty of Health Sciences and Wellbeing)

Email Address:	Yitka.graham@sunderland.ac.uk
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Mr David Barker
Organisation/Institution:	Willow Burn Hospice
Email Address:	DBarker@willowburnhospice.org.uk
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Ms Carol Hagri
Organisation/Institution:	Willow Burn Hospice
Email Address:	CHagri@willowburnhospice.org.uk
Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:	
Name:	
Organisation/Institution:	
Email Address:	
Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected candidate: <i>(Maximum 500 words)</i>	
This research will be supported across the subjects of arts/creative practice and health and wellbeing sciences – the supervision team are well positioned to support and guide the research development and consolidation. Professor Andrew Livingstone is leader of CARCuos (Ceramic Arts Research Centre University of Sunderland), with 21 successful PhD completions. He has completed research on both practical and theoretical aspects of ceramics and wider creative practice arts discourse including sculpture and conceptual application. His publications <i>The Ceramics Reader</i> (Bloomsbury) and <i>Beyond Disciplinarity: Historical Evolutions of Research Epistemology</i> (Routledge) will help support contextual development and understanding in terms of arts criticality and research methodologies. His expertise and professional experience of contemporary creative practice will help guide practical development and contextualization. Andrew has worked within socially engaged practices over twenty years. He has supervision expertise in creative practice and health and wellbeing engagement including completed PhD research (McHugh, 2015, AHRC) (Grant, 2017), addiction recovery and wellbeing (Bagi, 2025, AHRC), and current research into creative practice - neurodiversity and body (Lucas, AHRC) veteran health and wellbeing (Watson, AHRC), MBS Bariatric Surgery and stigma (Dollery, AHRC). Professor Yitka Graham is the Head of the Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute, with 5 successful PhD completions. She has led on participatory arts and wellbeing projects within obesity, MBS and veteran populations. She has expertise in qualitative methodology, participatory action research methods, health inequalities, public and patient involvement in research and has subject expertise in the stigma of obesity, workforce development, palliative care, social prescribing and patient and advocacy. She is a member of the Willow Burn Hospice Research group and is leading on work on assisted dying which was recently presented at a fringe session on Assisted Dying at the Conservative Party Conference. She has over 100 peer-reviewed publications. Graham is co-supervisor for Lucas, Watson Hamilton and Dollery, all CDA students. Graham sits on the Research Group of Willowburn Hospice and has been integral in developing Willow Burn as a research active organisation. David Barker, MBE, MBA is the Chief Executive of Willow Burn and is responsible for the operational management of the hospice and best practice. David has worked closely with Graham to develop the Research Group and its priorities, embedding a research culture within the hospice. David will advise on governance issues and provide nonclinical support for the student.	

Carol Hagri is Head of Clinical Services and registered manager for the in-patient, day care and counselling services at Willow Burn and she has overall clinical responsibility of the Hospice and ensure the highest standard of palliative care is delivered to patients, families and carers.

Both David and Carol will provide access to participants, support the governance, implementation and delivery of the project from the hospice side, working closely with Livingstone and Graham.

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

The student will be affiliated to both the HMNCRI and Creative Industries research environments including the newly formed Centre for Creative Practice Research led by Professor Kevin Petrie, where they will be joining a vibrant community of research students, staff, research associates and international visitors. In addition to wider university doctoral activity and support the student will form part of postgraduate art and design research which provides subject-specific research training with monthly sessions that cover practice-led methodologies and ethics. The student will be embedded within collaboration between HMNCRI, and creative Industries supports five students, who are part of the wider HMNCRI research community.

The student will be part of creative practice research at the University of Sunderland. The research area aims to develop, support, and disseminate new knowledge and scholarly activity whilst also providing a platform for research and discussion aligned to creative practice and wider arts discourse. The arts and creative industries area provide resources that include gallery spaces for exhibition and research project development, a reading room for concentrated study including access to completed PhD's and art exhibition/catalogue and an environment to develop seminars and symposia aligned to the research. The arts and H&W areas host resident artists, guest speakers and symposia which will provide the student with a rich resource.

The disciplines of health and creative practice converge with their Health and Care Workforce Interdisciplinary Research Network, offering a space for creative thinking, training education and interaction. The Network has a core theme of Arts and Wellbeing, having successfully delivered projects in collaboration with the National Glass Centre involving marginalized populations in the local community. The student will be aligned to this Interdisciplinary Network which supports opportunities to situate the research across the two Faculties to maximise the resources available through the University. This Interdisciplinary Research Network has a multidisciplinary, diverse membership which offers opportunities to network with other research students from different backgrounds and staff to provide further experiential learning which will support the student through their studies.

The Helen McArdle Nursing and Care Research Institute oversees the governance of the Health and Care Workforce IRN and the development of a robust evidence base for non-clinical wellbeing interventions to inform policy and practice. Central to the Institute's strategy is the development of research students, providing training and mentoring to support career aspirations and experiential learning.

HMNCRI and Willow Burn have worked closely together since 2020, with Graham leading the research group at Willow Burn. The collaborative research was recently presented at the Conservative Party Conference fringe session on assisted dying and the role of hospices.