



Growing together

Reflection on the *Growing an Older Audience* project at Fabrica

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MORRIS HARGREAVES McINTYRE ▶▶▶

FABRICA



Find out more at www.growingfabrica.org.uk

Cover page Image: Going to See Culture Together, image by Eva Kalpadaki

Growing together

Growing an Older Audience was an innovative arts engagement programme commissioned by the **Arts Council South East**, made real by **Fabrica**. Through a complex and diverse programme of exhibitions and events, it **engaged a 70+ audience** – at risk of social detachment – with cutting edge contemporary visual art.

Participants described an **emotional and rich experience**; meeting new friends, feeling connected, feeling **happier**.

The programme **improved the knowledge** and skills of Fabrica staff, as well as the codes and practices of the organisation as a whole. A complex network of partnerships was created, delivering meaningful impacts to a broad cross-section of the local community.

In this paper, we summarise the impact and success of engaging an older audience with contemporary visual art.



Special Drawing Event, image by Daniel Yanez-Gonzalez

The roots of the project

During the first phase of the programme, Fabrica worked in partnership with **care providers** and the **health sector** to explore how to remove some of the **physical and psychological barriers** that can impede older people from engaging with the arts, and in particular, **contemporary visual art**. This research served as a benchmark, and revealed the benefits of increasing the engagement of older people (aged 70+) with Fabrica. It also indicated that Fabrica had set itself an ambitious assignment.

From humble beginnings

Fabrica takes pride in its approach to inclusivity, and older visitors had been identified as an underrepresented group amongst its audience. A series of barriers were identified:

Crossing the threshold – Fabrica had a low profile amongst older people within Brighton and Hove and, while internally the building was very welcoming, externally it was off-putting and unwelcoming.

Gatekeepers – There was an issue convincing gatekeepers (e.g. health and social care providers), who might hold very negative attitudes to Contemporary Visual Art.

Transport – Presents a real issue for many older people when it came to physically accessing the venue.

Deepening engagement – This initial study concluded that aspects of the existing offer had

to be adapted to the needs of older people. It was suggested that this should include changing the timing of some events, and the development of specific intergenerational activities, tailored volunteering opportunities and some key events specifically designed for older people.

It was clear that for the programme to be successful, physical and emotional barriers would need to be removed.

Audience-focussed, vision-led

Importantly, addressing these barriers in order to enable Fabrica to better meet the needs of older people would fit within the existing values of the organisation and would not necessitate any fundamental change to the programme offer. Fabrica could remain true to its vision.

Three objectives

Fabrica set itself a challenging set of objectives for *Growing an Older Audience*; an adaptable evaluation method was deployed to measure:

- 1 The change in Fabrica's **audience profile**; monitoring increases in attendance and engagement by those aged 70+;
- 2 The **intrinsic and instrumental value** of the programme to participants, partners, Fabrica staff, volunteers and freelancers;
- 3 **Organisational change** – the impact of the programme on Fabrica's approach to exhibition and educational programming, working with volunteers and marketing strategies.



Fabrica Photography Commission, image by Elena Inga

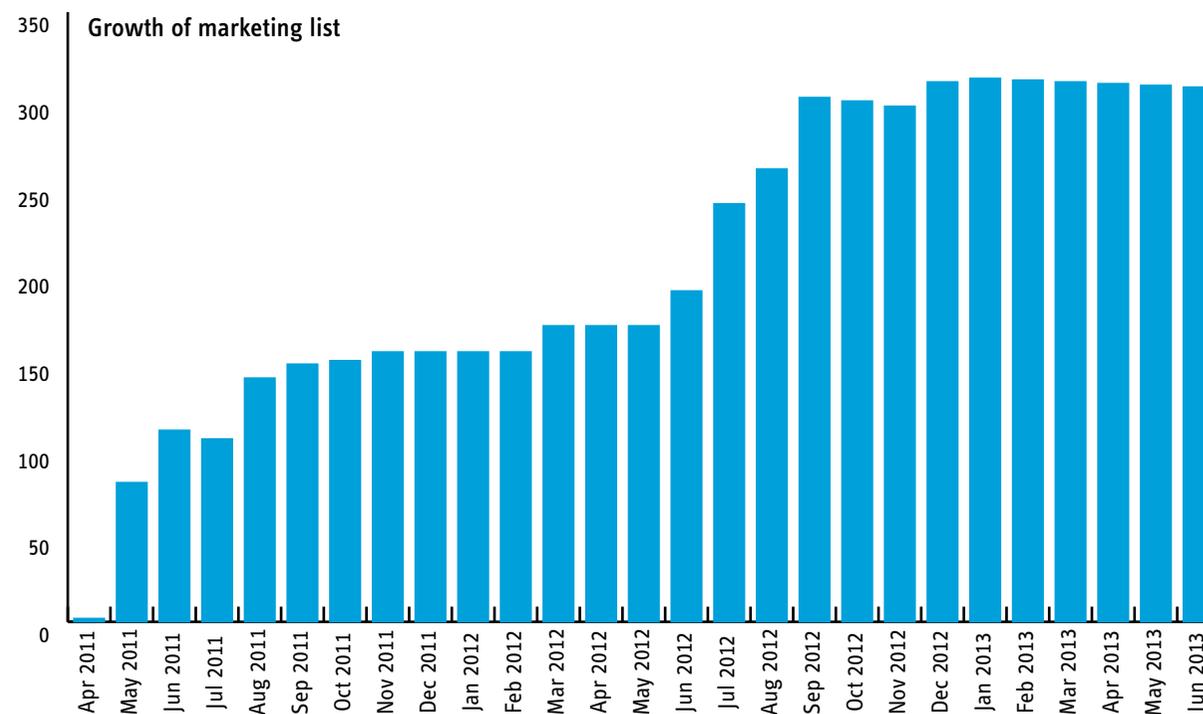
A culture shift was required

Fabrica identified a need to develop the skills and sensibilities of staff, freelancers and volunteers when planning for and interacting with an older audience. Tangible changes were made to operations:

- **Strategised** volunteer recruitment and improved training with the aim of broadening volunteer profile.
- **Ambassadors**, volunteers recruited to work specifically with *Growing an Older Audience*, were provided with additional training focussed on interacting with older people.
- To develop a culture of good practice among staff and volunteers, a **training and continuing professional development programme** was implemented. This included additional mentoring from experienced Fabrica staff and volunteers.
- As part of the evaluation process, Fabrica staff and volunteers were **trained in evaluation techniques**.
- A centralised **marketing list** was created as part of *Growing an Older Audience*.

This list had grown from under 20 marketing partners in April 2011 to over 318 subscribers by December 2012.

In addition to these developments, modifications have also been made to the physical environment – eg better seating. There are also plans for improved external signage and a new picture window for better visibility into the space from the street.



5,000 participants, 100 events, 7 exhibitions

Co-Director Liz Whitehead worked closely with a **steering group** of advisors and freelance workers from different disciplines (Arts, Social Care and Health) to develop a series of **interlocking projects** for Growing an Older Audience. The programme was designed from the outset to be flexible and agile, reflecting the varying needs of its participants.

Exhibitions were produced to be accessible for older people (sightlines, movement, interpretation etc.) latterly themes which are particularly resonant for older people have been developed. Exhibition and event programming for the next

five years will continue to have a focus on ageing and death.

We'll come to you, or help you come to us

There have been over **100 individual events, projects and courses provided** through the *Growing an Older Audience* programme to date. The majority of events took place at Fabrica, but some events for less mobile participants took place in care homes and care centres, or at other cultural venues. Integral to the success of events, the funding for the programme covered costs of transport – a major barrier to participation.

Events were very diverse in nature and included: drop-in activities using drawing, making, dance,

performance, writing, workshops with visually impaired visitors, debates and less formal discussion, exhibition private views, photography projects, film festivals and more.

The total number of 'engagements' with the Growing an Older Audience programme to date is just under 5,500. This is comprised of just under 4,200 visits to the exhibitions made by visitors aged 70 or older, with a further 1,324 participations in *Growing an Older Audience* events and projects.

Discover more online at growingfabrica.org.uk

Successfully bringing an older and more diverse audience to Fabrica

The programme of activity delivered during *Growing an Older Audience* has brought about a shift in the profile of the audience at Fabrica. Fabrica is now in line with other contemporary visual art venues when it comes to attracting older audiences, with the proportion of visits from those aged 70+ increasing from 1% to 5%.

Over half of those aged 70+ were making their first ever visit to Fabrica. Furthermore, this audience had a significantly different profile from Fabrica's general audience, and a different profile to contemporary art venues in general. The programme has helped to attract visitors who live locally, who have a less specialist interest in art and who are more likely to be retired.



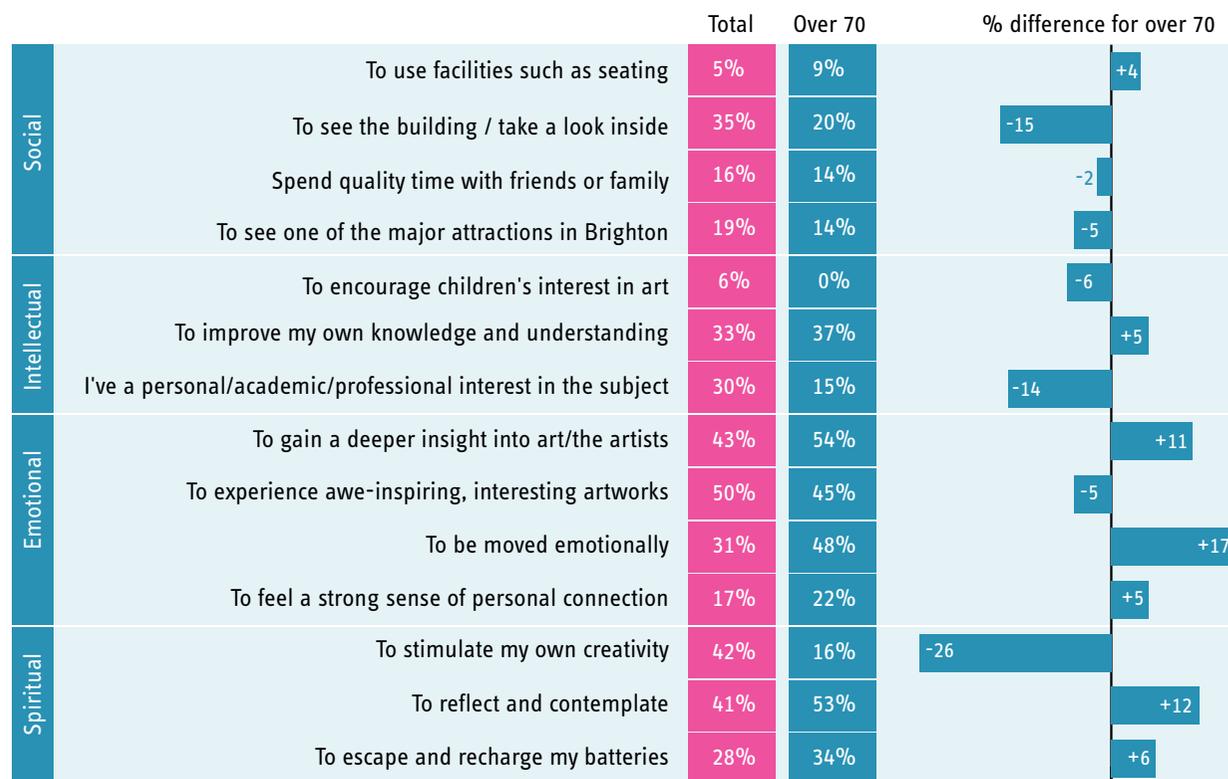
Going to See Culture Together, image by Eva Kalpadaki

An older audience hoping for an emotional experience

The research demonstrated that these older visitors were motivated to visit Fabrica for different reasons than Fabrica’s general audience – they were more emotionally driven. They came to the gallery hoping to get insight into artists’ minds, to be moved emotionally, to have a personal connection and to experience awe and wonder from engaging with Fabrica.

‘I felt alive for once. It was also the right exhibition for me.’

Second Sight participant



Motivation for visiting Fabrica

A new, different experience for older people

As a result, these visitors have had a completely different experience through engaging with Fabrica which they couldn't get elsewhere.

As a result of *Growing an Older Audience*, older people have experienced something different or new, seen things or thought about things differently and have developed knowledge about artists. Most significantly, older people have enjoyed themselves.

A plethora of events delivering a wealth of benefits

Aside from the exhibitions, outcomes from the events cited by older people have included being inspired, challenged, being with other like-minded people in a social context, having new perspectives and experiencing something new and stimulating. All of which gave rise to the most important impact of all – happiness.

Outcomes from a visit to Fabrica

	Total	Over 70
Enjoyed myself	8.82	9.53
Experienced something different/new	7.59	8.17
Was encouraged to think or see things differently	6.36	7.19
Developed my knowledge of the artists and the creative process used	5.92	7.21
Felt confident in expressing my opinion of the work	7.26	6.83
Had the opportunity to interact with others	5.75	5.31
Improved my general understanding of contemporary visual art	4.96	4.65
Felt the physical design of the gallery limited my engagement	1.39	1.11

Voice: creative expression and opinion

One of the most significant impacts of the programme has been the extent to which it has broadened horizons and provoked changes in opinion and perspective. It has encouraged participants to put forth their opinion in healthy debate. Participants have reported feeling inspired and challenged.

‘I probably have a more rounded opinion of painting and art, because of my introduction to Fabrica.’ Going to See Culture

Together participant

Meeting new people

Growing an Older Audience has created friendships among a network of older people, increasing happiness and well-being.

‘Normally today I wouldn’t be out, and I’ve met 2 or 3 people that I know and we’ve had a chat. So not only having looked at the installations that are here, but it’s also a social thing.’ Special Daytime Event: ‘Relativity’ participant

New arenas for social contact

Some participants were new to Contemporary Visual Art and some of the experiences they had during *Growing an Older Audience* involved being ‘out of their comfort zone’.

Happier

Being involved with *Growing an Older Audience* has made participants happier in their lives.

Participants often found it difficult to articulate the root of this happiness, but were often extremely grateful to Fabrica for the opportunities they had been offered.

‘I can only say that if I couldn’t come here I would be quite upset. If I lost out on not going to a life class I would be quite bereft almost I think.’ Special Drawing Event participant

Increased self-confidence

The majority of participants felt that their self esteem was already high before participating in the programme. Some participants who were less familiar with Contemporary Visual Art reported feeling more confident as a result of *Growing and Older audience*.

Keeping senses invigorated and the mind sharp

Engagement in the arts offers intellectual benefits to all. Older people participating in *Growing*

an Older Audience reported doing, seeing, experiencing and learning new things was essential to their enjoyment of the programme.

‘I think it relaxes the brain and when you look at something you tend to forget the rest of what is going on around you. It is relaxing.’ Special Daytime Event: ‘Stories from the City’ participant



Second Sight, image by Daniel Yanez-Gonzalez



Second Sight, image by Daniel Gonzalez

A more knowledgable and skillful organisation

Delivering the programme has given rise to important organisational learning and development.

There has been clear evidence of organisational learning amongst staff and volunteers at Fabrica. The importance of engaging older people and being an example of best practice is deeply engrained within the organisation. Staff have developed new understanding and ways of working when thinking about older visitors – and can identify where further improvements need to be made. There has been increased awareness of the needs of older visitors which has changed perceptions and increased confidence.

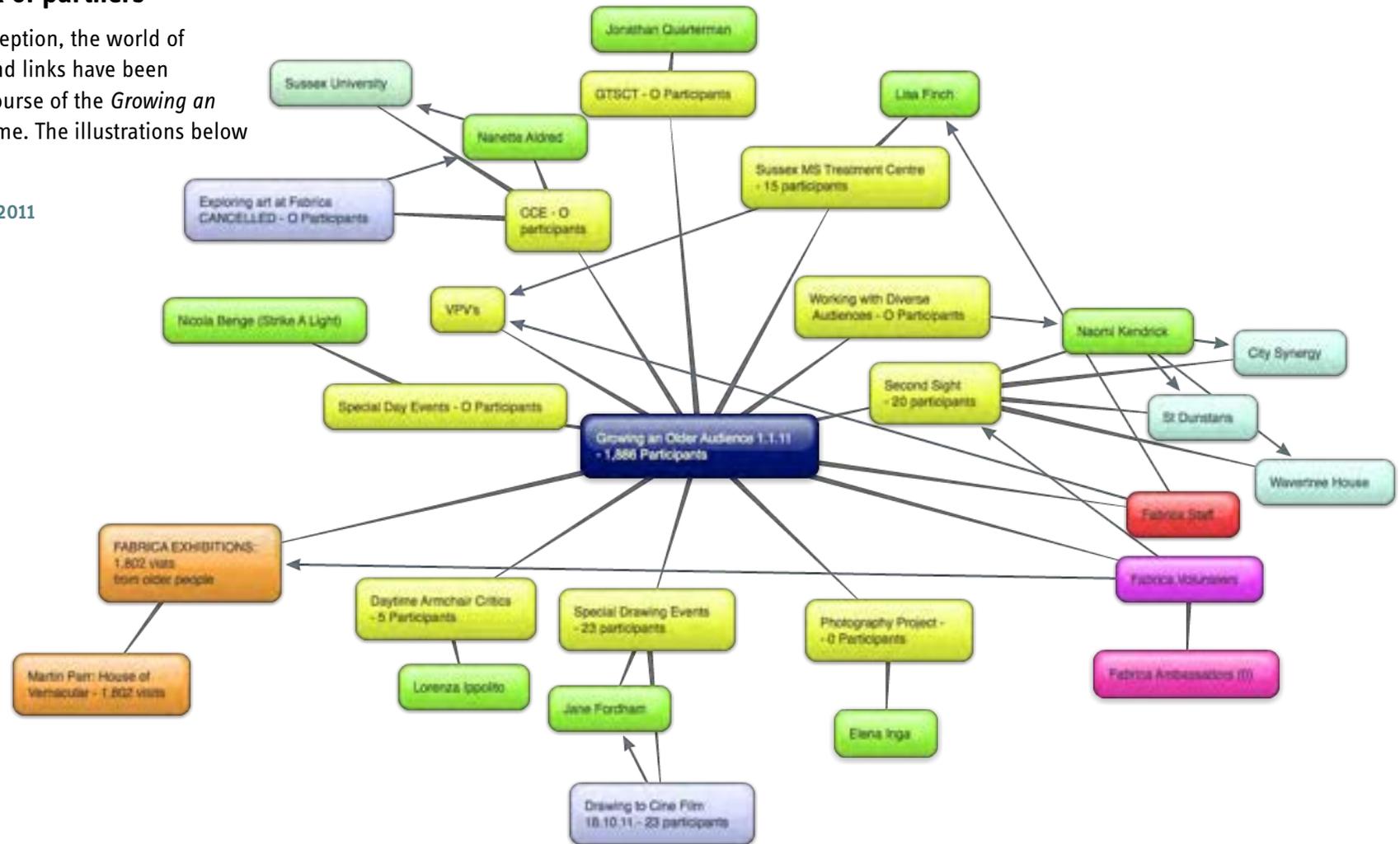
An online survey of all Fabrica staff, volunteers and freelancers was conducted at the start, halfway point, and the end of the programme. This model shows how perceptions have changed:

	Percentage difference between initial stage and halfway point	Percentage difference between initial stage and final stage
Fabrica markets to the needs of older people effectively	+12%	+20%
Fabrica is an example of good practice in engaging older people	+11%	+24%
Fabrica places the engagement needs of older people at the centre of organisational practice	+10%	+20%
As an organisation, Fabrica should be looking to attract and engage older visitors	+4%	+8%
I'm confident that I know how to support the needs of older visitors	+3%	+9%
Older visitors can benefit from engaging in contemporary visual art	+1%	+4%
Fabrica's programme is relevant to older people	+0%	+4%
Older people's voice is represented by the organisation	+0%	+19%
I believe that Fabrica is physically accessible to older people	+0%	+3%
Fabrica's programme appeals to and meets the needs of older people	-1%	+10%
I'm confident that I understand the full range of access needs of older people	-2%	+10%
The volunteer base reflects the audience profile we are seeking to achieve at Fabrica	-5%	+13%
Older people feel comfortable and welcome in the gallery	-7%	-3%

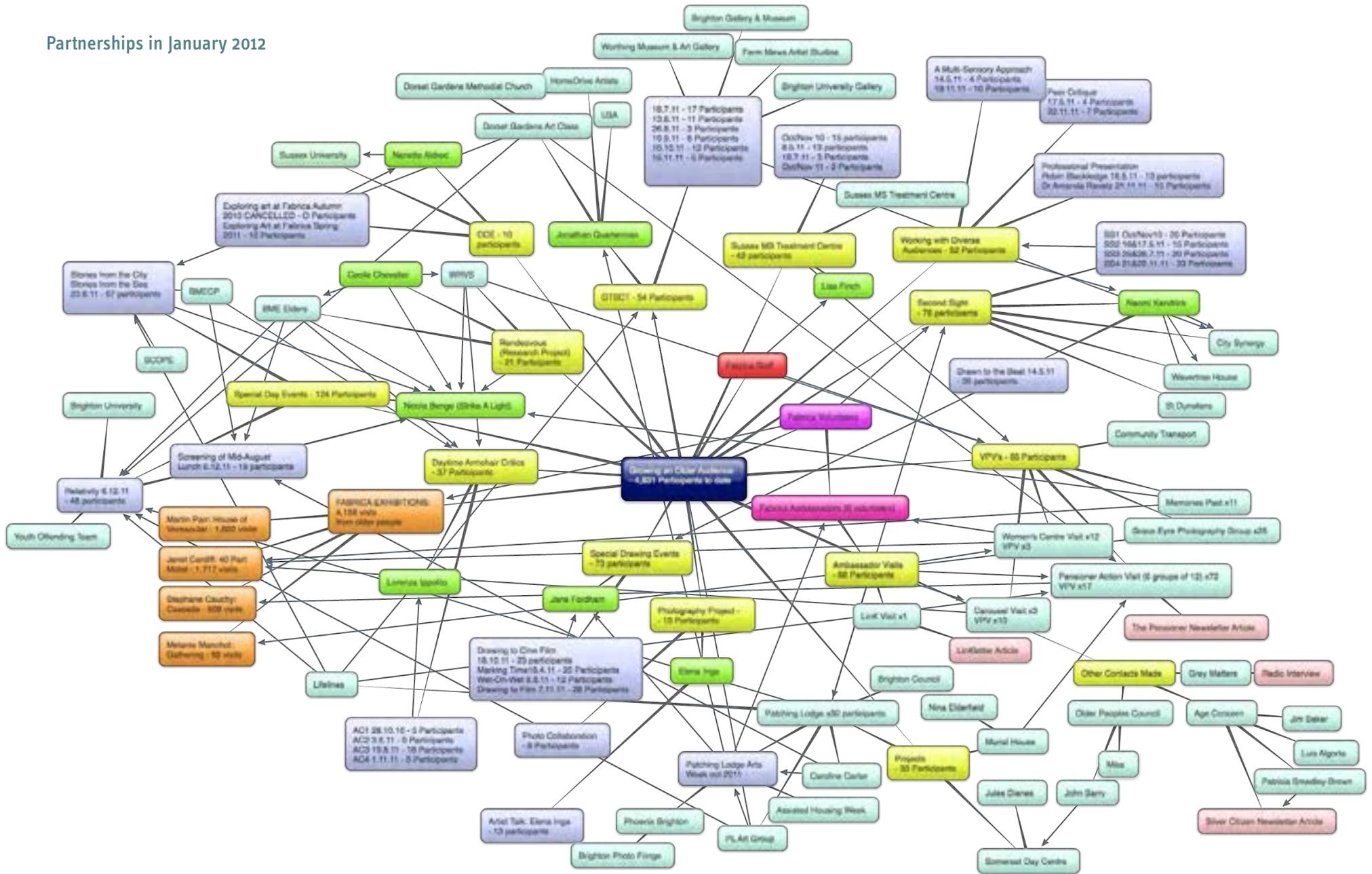
A complex network of partners

As well as a shift in perception, the world of Fabrica has expanded and links have been strengthened over the course of the *Growing an Older Audience* programme. The illustrations below express this growth:

Partnerships in January 2011



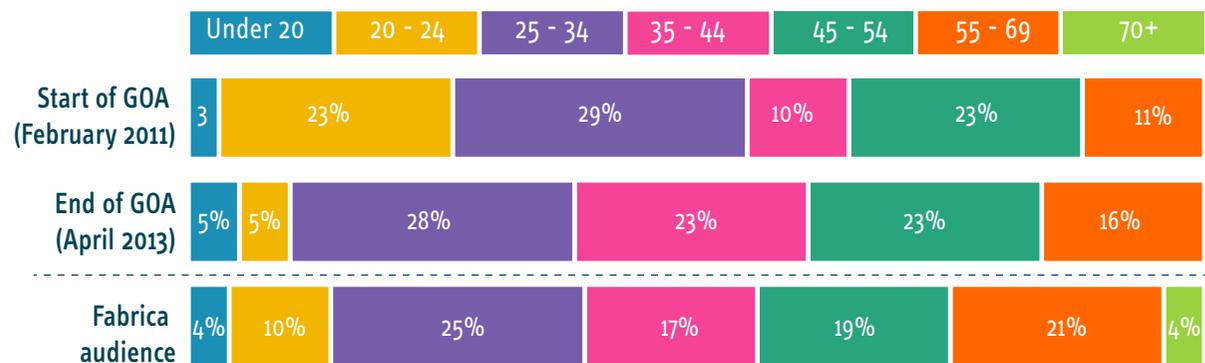
Partnerships in January 2012



A shift in staff and volunteer profile

The staff and volunteer profile of Fabrica has also begun to see a positive shift towards an older demographic following changes to volunteer recruitment marketing. However, the Fabrica audience is getting older, and staff and volunteers remain younger than this audience.

Age of Fabrica staff and volunteers



Conversation Piece, image by Eva Kalpadaki



Going to See Culture Together, image by Eva Kalpadaki



Conversation Piece, image by Eva Kalpadaki

Opportunities for development

A foundation for growth

Through *Growing an Older Audience* Fabrica has successfully delivered a programme of new activity - developing new partnerships and new staff skills. This has worked to deepen engagement for older participants amongst those engaged with Fabrica, but more now needs to be done to build on these foundations in order to widen engagement. There is an opportunity to encourage more people to cross the threshold and engage exhibition visitors more deeply.

A more sophisticated marketing mix

Now that modification to environment, staff, skills, partnerships and a programme are in place and integrated into Fabrica's work, the organisation needs to go to the next level with its communication.

Reaching new gatekeepers

The challenge to Fabrica is to connect with gatekeepers who are still not convinced that Fabrica is for older people; this would open up more partnerships and further demonstrate the value of engaging with Fabrica and contemporary visual art.



Going to See Culture Together, image by Eva Kalpadaki

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Special Daytime Event: ‘Relativity’ participant

‘It has added to my memories’

Special Daytime Event: ‘Stories of the City’ participant

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre

50 Copperas Street
Manchester M4 1HS

+44 (0) 161 839 3311
intray@lateralthinkers.com

lateralthinkers.com

MORRIS HARGREAVES McINTYRE ▶▶▶