

***Echoes of our Anecdotes – Playing with Playback at Frederic Place  
- Home for the Aged by Susan Jean Hall***

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**Abstract**

In this qualitative study which took place over ten weeks at Frederic Place, Home for the Aged, the aim was to increase the sharing of personal stories amongst residents. Institutionalised elderly often lead sedentary lives with little or no activities that can build a sense of community. Playback Theatre, a form of Applied Theatre that relies on personal stories, was the core methodology in this practice as research project which aimed to combat residents' isolation. A small group of residents learned three Playback Theatre short forms and applied them in larger group sessions to play back fellow residents' stories when opportunities arose. The study endeavoured to ascertain if Playback Theatre could be the catalyst for more storytelling and thus building of community.

Playback Theatre is a non-scripted theatre that uses improvised, embodied responses to perform people's personal stories in a performance founded on structured ritual patterns which create a safe space for an audience to share. Witnessing one's own story brought to life is a unique form of validation which can encourage one and others to tell more, creating an immediate sense of community.

By the end of the research period, while some participants shared stories more than they had in pre-research work, this could not explicitly be attributed only to the use of Playback Theatre. Whether it was Playback Theatre or the process of regular meetings with each other, or the combination, there was more sharing than before. In addition there was the by-product of a select group of participants who learned some Playback Theatre.

An important ascertainment for the researcher came through an omission: not teaching participants the act of sending a story back to the teller diminished the sense of ritual and theatre that may have contributed even more to personal storytelling and community building.

**Key Words**

Applied Theatre, Playback Theatre, aging, institutionalised elderly