

What My Mother Taught Me

Project description

In 2015 a member of the BCA team, Taru Kapadia, died unexpectedly. BCA was a long-standing outreach programme of Kew Studio and Taru had been a key team member ever since encountering the project as a participant, while recovering from illness in 2000. She joined the team immediately, bringing with her a unique cross-cultural perspective and an opportunity to enrich all our conversations and projects with her sense of design, education and spirituality.

We introduce you to her philosophy on the last page of this booklet.

This project was designed with her son as a tribute to her memory. It was fully funded by her family to continue with the BCA work.

Purpose

With Rohan, Taru's second son, with whom she ran a nursery school, we designed a project which we felt Taru had inspired and would have enjoyed knowing that her loving service to children and their families continued.

The project brought together a group of people to reflect on what their own mothers or mother figures had taught them and what they had been given as a lasting legacy.

People joined in of all ages, from a two-year old to eighty year olds. Some came alone while others came with family members to participate in celebrating motherhood.

Benefits

The calling up of feelings and emotions around the relationship of mother and child helped people to connect respectfully across the generations with others not usually met, and to share some very precious memories, finding both pleasure and healing.

People found renewed appreciation of their relationships and in some cases, the links made in this project led to further collaboration – notably on research into children's books featuring disability in translation.



How the project worked out

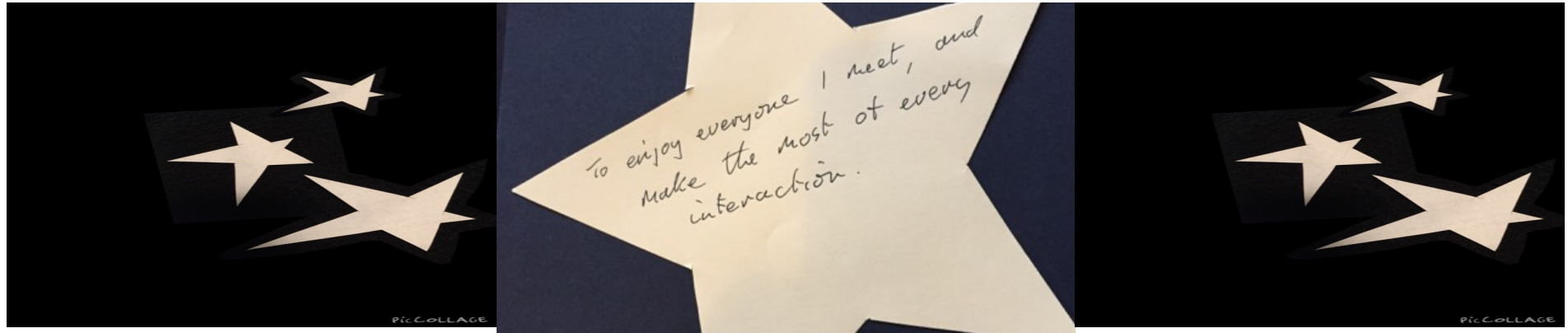
The project was introduced very informally, within an exhibition celebrating 35 years of Kew Studio at St Luke's House. Visitors were invited to respond to the sentence 'What my mother taught me' by writing their memories on cut out stars. A lot of people responded in relation to their own mothers, but some with reflections on mother figures (for instance Mother Teresa) or from a fictional character.

We had responses from a wide age range – primary school – 80s, and one family of a mother with two school age sons, each of whom contributed.

Many contributions focused on character-building. Eleven year old JP, based his comment on Melody Brooks – a eleven year old fictional American who is non-verbal and in a wheelchair. When JP was asked what Melody's mum had taught her, he said, "Melody's mum taught her many things, inspiration and determination. Not stopping when things were hard. She was a hugely positive influence and refused to get angry. She gave Melody confidence to try things, she was a real star."

JP's younger brother, AP aged nine, responded with a poem about their mother, HP in her thirties, who also took part in the project. HP is a teaching assistant in J and A's school. AP wrote a poem in which practicalities merged with his appreciation of manners and kindness...

M for Mental Maths and Music Theory
U for Understanding English and Science
M for mu mum inspired me to climb my tree
and taught me to ride my bike
M for my mum taught me manners and
kindness
Y for you and I all need mums



Some responses...

HP, J and A's mother, included in her memory of what her own mother had taught her "...patience and humility, to try new things, and not to impose limits on myself; the importance of forgiveness, and most significantly she taught me love"

Love was sometimes mentioned, but was implicit in most of the responses.

JP described Mother Teresa who "taught the world how to care for each other and that everyone belonged to one large family..."

Like HP, many of the mothers had passed on very practical life skills. TH, in her 60s, said, "My mother died when I was eleven years old so what she taught me is a distant memory. She taught me how to have fun and that doing interesting things was more important than having a tidy house. She also taught me how to knit, darn and make scrambled eggs."

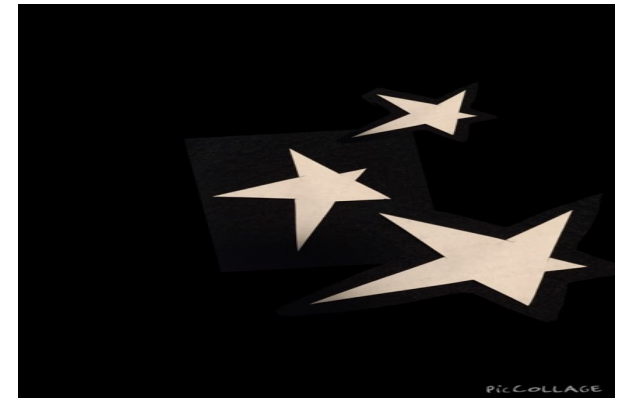
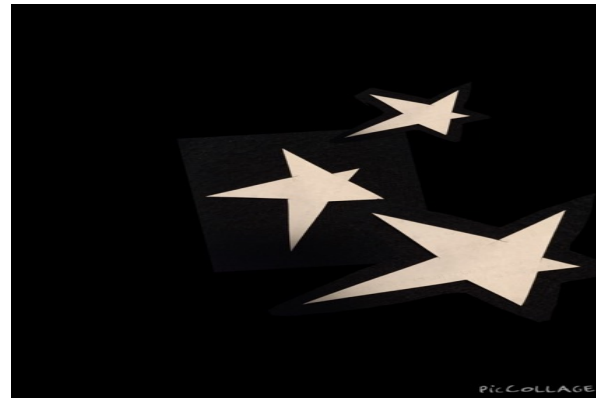
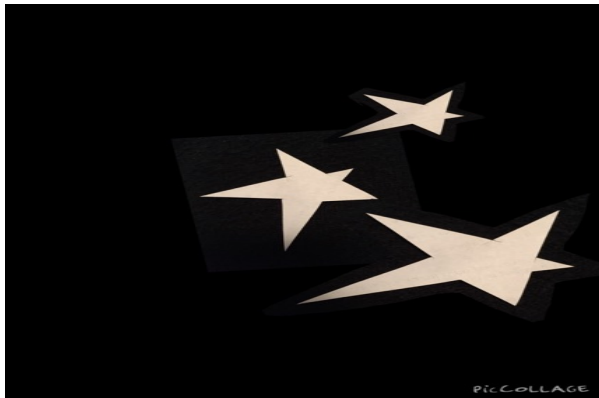
TC, in her 60s, said her mother had taught her many things: "Diving, Swimming, Piano, Painting, Drawing, Cooking, Driving, Flower Arranging, Knitting!"

AHLL, in his 70s, offered "a lifelong enjoyment of classical music."

MW in his 70s, said: "To enjoy everyone I meet, and make the most of every interaction," and his wife, JW in her 60s, wrote "To make the most of everything with everyone."

KLL in her 60s summed up "to love books, people, beauty and God."

HF replied: "To love my carers, my Indian ayah and all the others, to love animals even the wild animals of the forest, ...to endure absence and to make life worth living when she came 'home' after my father died, and to make fudge."



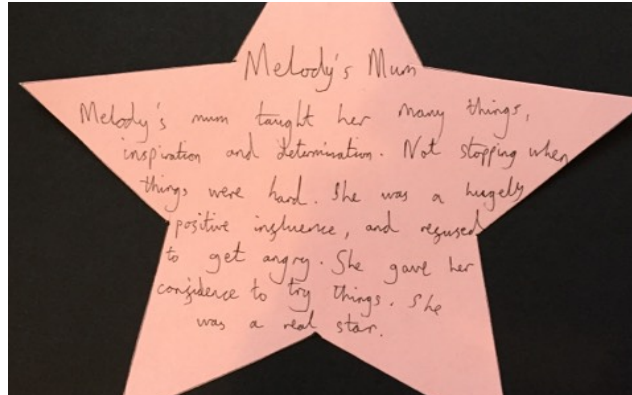
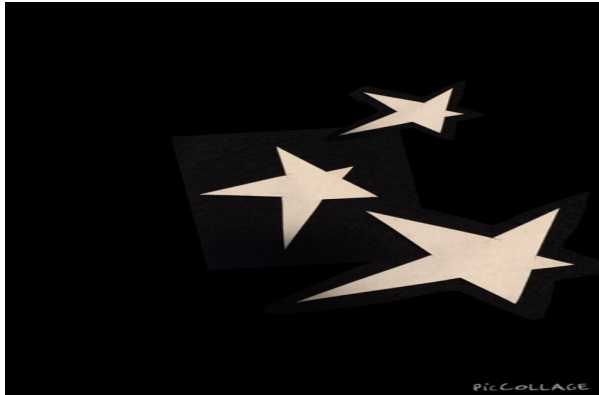
Further responses...



BB, in her thirties, said that her mother had combined a typical variety of character building and immediate pleasures: “The power of whipped cream; the joy of books and sharing them together; and always to try to be kind – to have an irreverent sense of humour, to be determined like her.”

And finally, in our range of responses, we have a statement with which Taru would have agreed, given to us by PC an artist and teacher in her fifties. “This is your time to shine” – just as the community shone for and in memory of Taru.

These were just some of the many responses and although we have not put everything into this little book we did notice certain themes emerging: especially love and forgiveness.



Running your own project

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

- Find a small group of fully committed people, preferably at least three, to form a core team; to be both participants and facilitators
- Agree project timescale and time available from each volunteer, and a budget
- Remember the KISS principle: keep it simple stupid when designing the project
- Be aware that sharing memories can bring up a range of sensitivities. Be gentle.
- Be prepared for the project to develop along different lines to those envisaged. Do not have expectations.
- Always have a Plan B, simpler still, up your sleeve

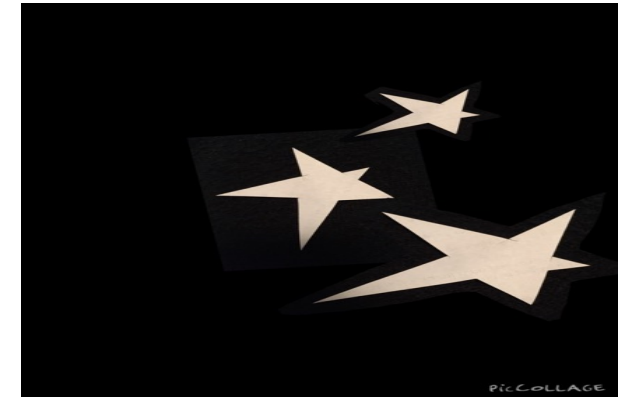
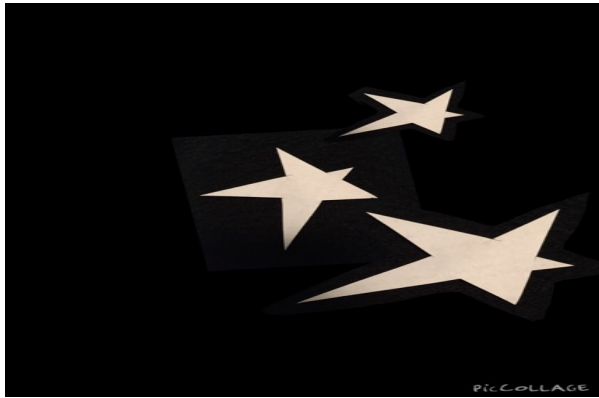
- Agree the project outputs e.g. exhibition, booklet, event, meeting etc... Perhaps start with a taster project and think about ways the project might ripple out. Do not over-commit!

WHILE DELIVERING THE PROJECT

- In the face of a participant's reluctance to address the question, offer alternative e.g. not *your* mother as that is too painful – then choose a mother-figure e.g. Mother Teresa
- Be prepared to reverse the question. 'What my mother taught me' may not be positive.
- The project may have unintended outcomes.
- Be willing to abandon or alter the project if circumstances change, or ask for help.

BENEFITS

- Therapeutic value of expressing both positive and negative experience and entering a more reflective mode – not a usual activity for many. This breaks down rigidity of an accepted view of parental relationship and allows for reframing our experience and moving on with increased understanding and compassion for self and parent.
- Renewed appreciation and celebration
- Team participants, hopefully, experience engagement and validation of roles and their contribution
- What other issues are specific to your project?



Key features & requirements

CHARACTERISTICS

- Adults and children working together as equals – unusual
- Whatever contribution made is valued
- Deceptively simple project
- Informal
- May look chaotic

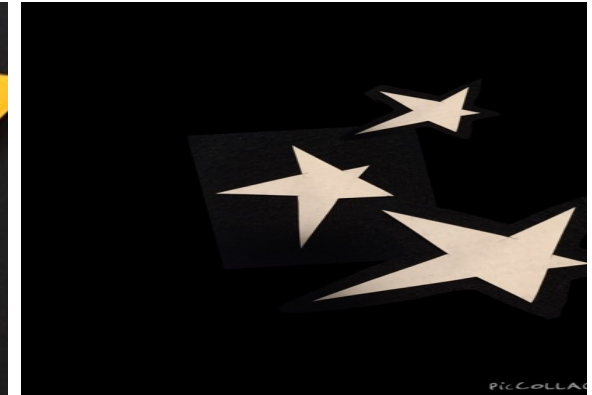
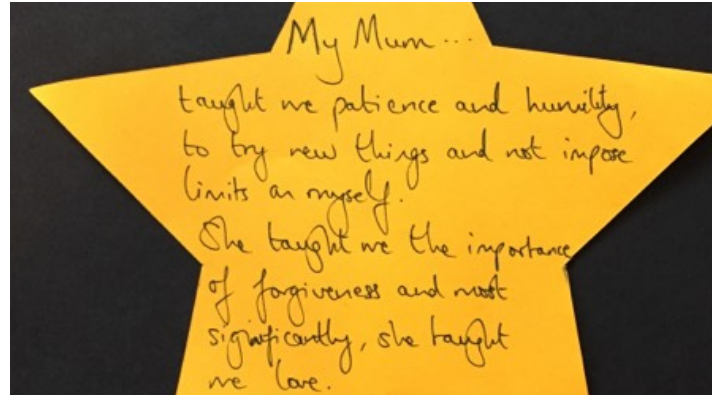
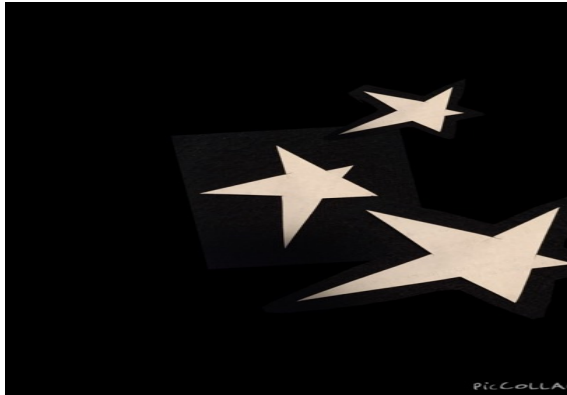
PREREQUISITES

In order for it *not* to descend into dispiriting, even damaging chaos:

- Core team need to be well-briefed and fully committed
- Plans B, C and even Z should always be ready
- Any contribution must be voluntary – people always have the right to pass
- Must have comfortable physical space
- Must be able to decline participation
- Shared review is crucial for learning, improvement and next ideas
- Tangible output designed and agreed by core team e.g booklet
- Care of safeguarding issues

USEFUL QUESTIONS FOR YOURSELF & YOUR TEAM

- How many are in the team and how much time have we each got? Where will we meet?
- Do we need to book a venue? For how long? Does it have wheeled access?
- What is our budget & how will we be funded?
- Do we need childcare provision? DBS checks?
- What diets will be catered for? How?
- Do we need first aid? Who is trained?
- What materials do we need? How do we get them? Who will get them?
- Do we have any back-up plans, volunteers?
- Do we all have each other's contact details?
- Who is going to do what, by when and how?
- Do we need permission to take photos?



What Taru taught us...

WHY ART?

The Indian poet and Nobel prize winner Rabindranath Tagore, to whose thinking Taru introduced us, and with whom her family were closely

connected, was very clear. He said:

- What is art? It is the response of man's creative soul to the call of the Real.
- In Art, man reveals himself and not his objects.

With the BCA team Taru found something new to focus on at a time of personal crisis... She seemed to be following Tagore when he said:

- I have become my own version of an optimist. If I can't make it through one door, I'll go through another door or I'll make a door. Something terrific will come no matter how dark the present.

From the moment we met at her first BCA workshop, she was an inspiration to us. She seemed to have become a shining example of Tagore's prayer:

- Let us not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless when facing them.
- Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.

She dived into her experiences, sharing with us her hopes and fears as she encountered illness, love and loss. She knew, with Tagore, that:

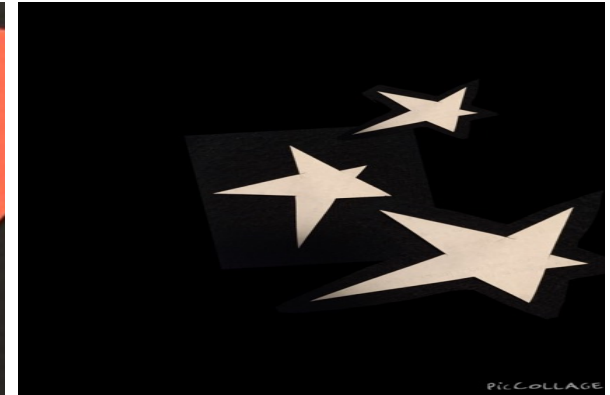
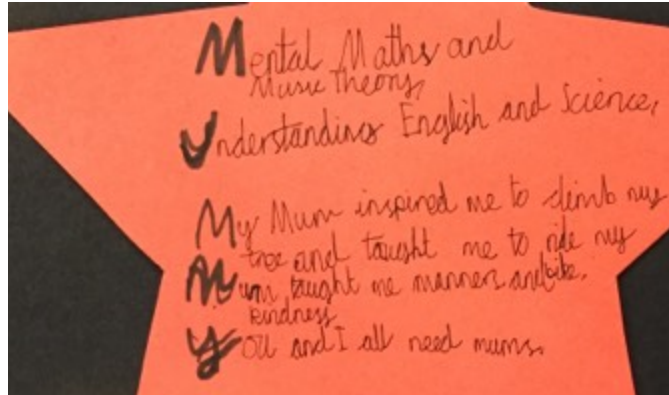
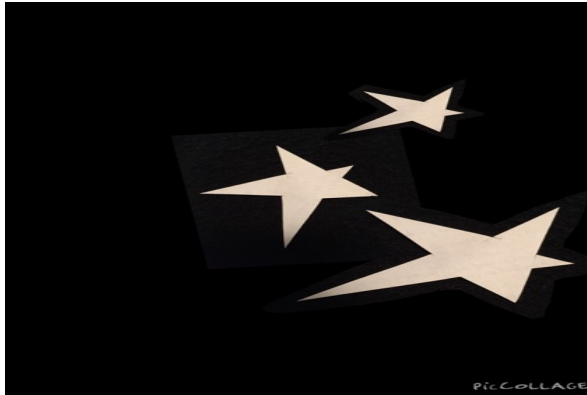
- You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water... You have to dive in.

- We live in the world when we love it.
- Life is given to us. We earn it by giving it.
- I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.

Taru's own family were so precious to her, and through hearing of her love and admiration for them, we came to feel we knew them too. Taru accompanied them through all their trials and triumphs, learning from them all the time...

She lived and knew only too well the worth of Tagore's wisdom:

- Don't limit a child to your own learning, for he was born in another time.



Thanking these people...

This project arose from our wish to celebrate Taru Kapadia and was conceived with and funded by the Kapadia family: Vijay, Sunil and Rohan.

Our thanks are also due to Lucy Brett and the Kew Studio – whose outreach programme featured BCA and its programmes for nearly twenty years. And our thanks go to St Luke's House, without whom Kew Studio would never have come into existence and who celebrated 35 years of Kew Studio magnificently, with an open community event in October 2015. The Taru project was part of this event.

PARTICIPANTS AND VOLUNTEERS

- Adrian Lloyd-Lawrence
- Hannah, Jacob and Adam Parker
- Julia and Malcolm Welchman
- Lucy Brett
- Paulette Collier
- Teresa Hartley
- Trisha Clarke
- Verity, James and Paige Lovick

The Building Community through Arts (BCA) team

- Becky Butler
- Hilda Flint
- Kitty Lloyd-Lawrence

For further information please see the Kew Studio website (kewstudio.org/explore-creativity)

Building Community through Arts
31st October 2016