



Media release: social drama for seniors  
March 25th, 2021

*“The way I contribute in this class makes me feel better and more socially valued.” (Participant reflection)*



Loneliness is twice as unhealthy as obesity for older people and while there are many services tending to the physical health needs of our grandparents there are few that specifically support their social and emotional wellbeing. Voice Arts is one of them.

Delivering a programme of free social drama classes in neighbourhoods throughout Wellington, Voice Arts is a creative space committed to bringing laughter, play and performance (back) into the lives of older people. 65 or 95, introvert or extrovert these classes help keep the mind active and creative, while building a social network of people that all live nearby.

“Declining self-confidence, often due to perceived failings in cognition and mobility is a significant barrier to participation in new activities,” says Voice Arts Director Nicola Pauling. “This is particularly so for a drama-based creative activity.”

“Hear the word drama and it’s assumed there are lines to remember and an audience watching you. Neither are true of our creative spaces” says Pauling. “Nor do you need any previous experience or any special talent. We make sure participation is effortless. No lines to learn, no audiences, no pressure.”

There are no lines because there are no scripts. Voice Arts’ facilitators use Applied Improvisation, drama-based games and exercises where dialogue is made up and no matter what you say it’s right. “The ‘Yes And’ principle of improvisation supports a creative freedom in our classes. Participants confidently engage knowing there is no wrong way to do it and no wrong answer” says Pauling.



These social drama classes also draw heavily on oral storytelling traditions that span all cultures. After a burst of improvised play and a break for a cuppa and cake the class becomes a space for storytelling and reminiscing.

A Monday morning class running at the Linden Community Centre is almost full to capacity. That's thanks in part to a Health Improvement Practitioner based at the local medical centre. Emma Frommings was already familiar with the work of Voice Arts when the class began in her local community. "I have referred those who were low in mood, stressed by life events, in need of social connection, or in need of meaningful activity. Every person I have sent has enjoyed the class and has chosen to continue. They tell me the class sets them up for the week and they quickly feel connected to the other participants," says Emma.

Our social drama classes are gently active, enhance cognitive function, provide meaningful activity, create deep social connections, honour stories of place and identity and are dripping in joy and laughter.

They are free to attend thanks to funding support from Wellington City Council, Wellington Community Trust and Lotteries. Voice Arts also leads weekly classes in a number of Wellington retirement villages.

### **Our Community Classes:**

Tawa/ Linden: Linden Community Centre. Mondays 10.30am facilitated by Kerryn Palmer.  
Miramar: Miramar Community Centre, Mondays 10.30am, facilitated by Georgia Ball  
Petone: Petone Library, Tuesdays 10.30am, facilitated by Sally Richards  
Karori: Karori Community Centre, Tuesdays 10.30am, facilitated by Jacqueline Coats and Hilary Norris.

To visit a class or for more information contact:

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