



The Daughter's DEPARTMENT OF DEMENTIA CARE

AN ONLINE EXHIBITION OF MULTIMEDIA WORKS INSPIRED BY CARING FOR A
PARENT WITH MODERATE-TO-SEVERE DEMENTIA



[THE DAUGHTER'S DEPARTMENT OF DEMENTIA CARE.](#)

WHAT IS THE DAUGHTER'S DEPARTMENT OF DEMENTIA CARE ABOUT?

The Daughter's Department of Dementia Care is an online exhibit featuring **four original works of art created to explore the lived experience and impact of unpaid family dementia caregiving**. The piece serves a dual purpose: it speaks on behalf of these caregivers and reframes how they are seen, offering them the rare experience of being recognised, validated, and understood. At the same time, the project **positions creative expression as a radical and necessary act of self-care within the context of long-term, durational caregiving**.


Designed and developed by Andrea Schell, the online exhibition brings together **storytelling, lived experience, and arts-based approaches** to open up new conversations around dementia care and the gaps in support for caregivers in the US context.

HOW IS THE INITIATIVE FUNDED?

This project was developed as a result of Andrea's Master's research and, therefore, entirely self-funded.

WHAT ASPECTS OF HEALTH DOES THE INITIATIVE ADDRESS?

The Daughter's Department of Dementia Care aims to address **social isolation, loneliness, health prevention, mental health and physical health challenges for those experiencing dementia caregiving**.



WHO ARE THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE INITIATIVE?

The beneficiaries of The Daughter's Department of Dementia Care span both **individual and systemic levels**. At its core, the project seeks to support unpaid family caregivers of people living with dementia, a group often overlooked and undervalued within health and social care systems in the US and here in the UK. While the majority of these caregivers are women over 40, the exhibit intentionally embraces inclusivity, recognising caregivers of all genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds. For these individuals, the work offers **visibility, validation, and a reframing of their role, positioning creative expression as a radical act of self-care within the relentless demands of long-term caregiving**. Relatable narratives in a shared space can offer a sense of community and foster belonging.

Beyond the personal, the project also serves **policymakers, healthcare leaders, and organisations engaging with the public** by providing a nuanced, human-centred view of the lived realities of caregiving. This insight can inform more **empathetic and effective policies, serve as an advocacy tool for creative health approaches, and challenge societal narratives around dementia and care**. In doing so, the exhibit benefits not only caregivers and decision-makers but also the wider public, fostering cultural awareness and empathy toward the hidden labour of care.

WHAT KEY LEARNING EMERGED FROM THE PROJECT?

Two significant insights emerged from this research, both centring on reimagining self-care for unpaid family dementia caregivers. First, **creative self-expression gives caregivers access to aspects of their identity that often diminish during the caregiving journey**. Unlike the cognitive strain of navigating complex medical systems or solving logistical challenges, creativity engages parts of the mind and heart associated with imagination, emotional release, and meaning-making. In this way, **creative practice becomes an identity pathway allowing caregivers to reconnect with themselves beyond the role of "carer."**

"Creative self-expression acts as an avenue to caregiver identity retention, renewal, and rebirth".

-Andrea Schell

Second, the **project reframes self-care as an act that centres the caregiver rather than the person being cared for**. Conventional narratives often position self-care as instrumental, something undertaken to "be a better caregiver." This framing reinforces a cycle in which the caregiver's worth is tied exclusively to their caregiving role. By contrast, **creative self-expression asserts that caregivers are full human beings, equally deserving of care, attention, joy, and purpose**. When self-care is pursued for its own sake, rather than as a means to serve another, it affirms the caregiver's intrinsic value. **Paradoxically, this centring of the self does not diminish care for the loved one; it strengthens it, as renewed energy and emotional well-being naturally flow back into the caregiving relationship.**

Ultimately, these learnings highlight **creativity not as a luxury, but as a radical and necessary act of self-preservation within the context of long-term, unpaid dementia care**. They challenge dominant paradigms of caregiving and invite a cultural shift toward recognising caregivers as individuals with needs, identities, and aspirations beyond their caregiving role.



THE COLLECTION

The Daughters Department of Dementia, as an online collection, illuminates the unseen emotional and administrative labour involved in supporting a loved one with dementia. Each piece in the collection offers a distinct perspective, whether through metaphor, materiality, or narrative, while collectively forming a powerful commentary on resilience, identity, and the complexity of care. Four individual works, which can be viewed in full [HERE](#) examine how they contribute to and deepen this overarching theme.

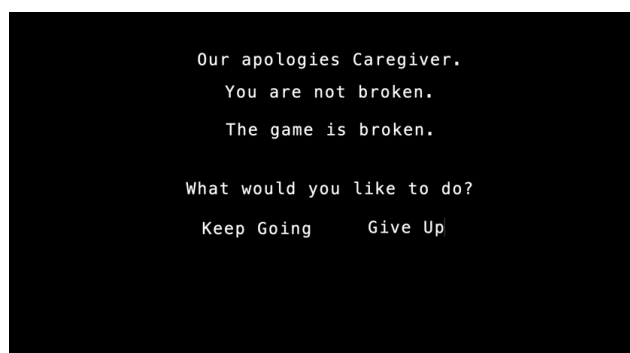
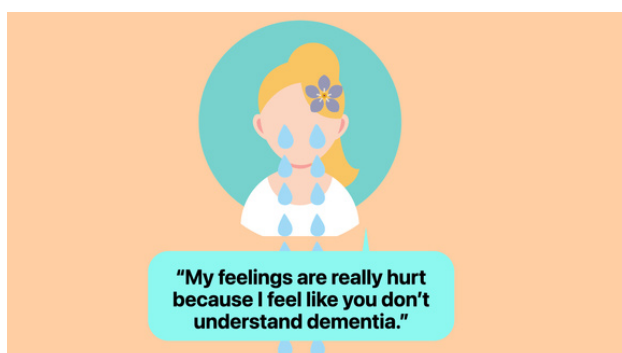
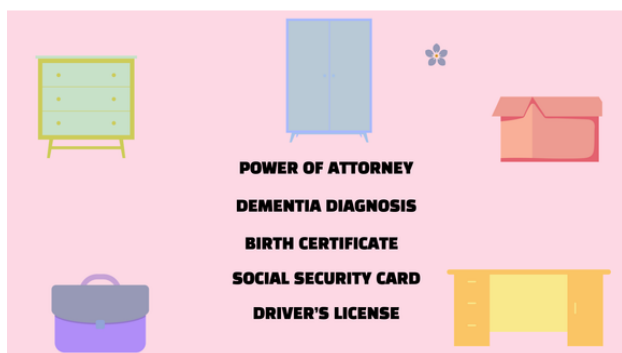
THE JARS

The Jars is a deeply symbolic piece that speaks to the act of preserving fragments of life and memory. Each jar becomes a vessel for moments, ordinary yet precious, echoing the way caregivers strive to hold onto identity as dementia erodes continuity. The work invites reflection on containment and fragility: how care often means gathering what remains and protecting it from loss. Within the wider exhibition, it resonates as a metaphor for resilience and tenderness, reinforcing the theme of making the unseen labour and emotional weight of caregiving visible.



THE GAME

The Game transforms the overwhelming reality of dementia caregiving into an interactive experience, highlighting the hidden weight of administrative burdens. Designed as a playful yet poignant commentary, it immerses viewers in the bureaucratic maze caregivers navigate daily, forms, protocols, and endless compliance tasks. By gamifying these challenges, the piece underscores how systemic barriers compound emotional and physical strain, connecting back to the exhibition's central theme: making visible the invisible labour of care.



THE JACKETS

The Jackets explores the physical and emotional weight of care through garments that once signified identity and belonging. Each jacket becomes a silent witness to change, holding the shape of a person while hinting at absence and transformation. By presenting clothing as both protective and symbolic, the piece reflects on how caregivers navigate loss while preserving dignity. Within the broader exhibition, it adds a tactile dimension to the narrative, reminding us that care is not only about memory but also about the material traces of a life lived.



THE STORY

The Story acts as the narrative thread that binds the exhibition together, weaving personal experience into a collective reflection on dementia care. Through words and imagery, it captures the emotional cadence of caregiving, the moments of tenderness, frustration, and profound love that shape the journey. This piece invites viewers to pause and listen, offering a voice to those often unheard. Within the wider context, it serves as both anchor and lens, framing the other works while amplifying the central theme: that care is as much about storytelling as it is about survival.

Click here to find out more about THE DAUGHTER'S DEPARTMENT OF DEMENTIA PROJECT.



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