Tell me about your research
I’m interested in the link between the biology of the brain and behaviour. My PhD was in mental health where I learnt the techniques of epidemiology (how to study groups over long periods of time). I’m currently working on a study with a group of people who were all born in March 1946. The group has been followed since birth and are tested every five years.

500 members of the group had brain scans at 70 years old as part of a sub study called Insight 46. We’ve been looking at changes in the structure of the brain and how this links to other aspects of their lives such as their blood pressure, whether they smoke, what physical exercise they have done and when.

What motivates you?
I’m hopeful that there are ways to reduce the risk of dementia, and to find more treatments. I’m personally motivated by being able to measure and see the changes in someone’s brain during dementia. If we can improve brain health and slow down the symptoms, people can live well with dementia for longer.

Are there any myths about your work which bother you?
Some believe we’ll never be able to find a cure, which I also believed at first. There’s also a myth there is nothing you can do to reduce your own risk when there are things we can do to protect our brain health and build in reserves to keep symptoms away for longer.

There is a window of hope between the first brain changes appearing and the symptoms of dementia occurring 15 years later.

In an ideal world, where do you see your work in the future?
The work would inform policies and how doctors and other clinicians work. The connections we find would provide ways to reduce risk. There would also be a greater understanding that it’s never too late to reduce someone’s risk of dementia.

About the artwork
Sarah talked so passionately about studying groups of people over a long period of time, I felt I had to represent that on her page. I also wanted the brains to be visible to emphasise that brain health is important at all stages of life - Hana

This project was kindly funded by:
Alzheimer’s Research UK