Remembering Yesterday,
Caring Today

Reminiscence in Dementia Care
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Introduction

• In this presentation I shall introduce reminiscence work
• I shall suggest that it has a particular value in the context of dementia care both to staff and to the people with dementia
• I shall offer ideas on how reminiscence should be adapted for maximum benefit in dementia care situations
• The main part of the presentation will explore creative development of reminiscence work in groups, featuring different approaches which have proved successful
What is Reminiscence?

• Thinking and talking about the past
• Recalling and reflecting on one’s own life experience
• Creative exploration of past experience with others in the present
How Reminiscence benefits older people

- Older people have often lost contact with those who knew them best, whether through bereavement or geographical separation.
- They are often alone with their memories and feel lonely and isolated.
- It is pleasurable to exchange memories with others in a structured session, to find common ground and to share experience with others.
Group Work in Reminiscence

• A Reminiscence group can be fun to belong to, especially if it is run in a welcoming and inclusive style

• Memories can be triggered by other people’s stories
Friendship through Reminiscence

This is especially important for people whose long-term relationships and friendships may have faded away.
• Friendships are consolidated through shared activities and through an exchange of experience over several weeks.
More benefits from Reminiscence

• It encourages people to value their own individual and unique life experience

• It can help to increase self-esteem, especially where there is an ethos of respectful and attentive listening

• It gives an opportunity to deal with painful memories in a supportive environment with people who will understand
Even more reasons for older people to be involved in Reminiscence work

- It helps people to see their particular life experience in the broader context of community and social history in their time
- It can put present difficulties into a longer perspective
- It can give a sense of continuity to the remembered life, linking past and present
Why use Reminiscence in dementia care?

• It maximises remaining memories
• It emphasises what people with dementia can still do
• It promotes communication and encourages exchange
• It enables creativity and self-expression, even for people who do not have many words left
How Reminiscence work can improve staff job satisfaction

• Staff can learn about the elders’ past lives

• This helps them to see the elders as individuals each on his or her own life journey

• It creates opportunities for conversation and creative activity with the elders

• It helps staff to personalise the care they offer and increases their perception of their elders’ needs and potential
Adapting Reminiscence practice to dementia care situations

• Use multi-sensory stimulation

• Explore non-verbal forms of communication

• Allow more time, listen well and “reflect back” what people have said to encourage and support them

• Wherever possible include one-to-one and small group working, as well as work with the whole group
• Wherever possible have one-to-one contact, paying close attention to what the people with dementia say, giving them time and encouragement to locate and share past experience in the present
• Give positive feedback to increase confidence and to encourage further dialogue

• Remember that communication is often a challenge for people with dementia
Creative reminiscence in dementia care

• Choose themes of common interest where everyone can contribute stories
• Explore the theme through a variety of approaches
• Have plenty of thematically related reminiscence objects to handle
• Use drama, music, dance, drawing, painting, writing and cooking so there are opportunities to try new things in each session
Reminiscence Life Course Themes

- Childhood
- Neighbourhood
- Schooldays
- Starting working life
- Going out & looking good
- Courting days
- Marriage & settling down
- The next generation

- Optional additional themes tried:
  - Grandparents
  - War Years
  - Holidays
  - Special celebrations
  - Shopping in the past
  - Favourite recipes
  - Gardening
  - Hobbies
  - Cinema & entertainment
  - Journeys to remember
Some examples of successful creative reminiscence

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Handling familiar objects from the past

- Handling the tools of a life’s work helps people to recall and show past competence and skill. The body remembers!!

- Talking is only one way of communicating
Edith (aged 92) enjoys the familiar feel of the old typewriter and remembers how to work it.
• Informal conversation with time to remember, supported by appropriate triggers, helps people with dementia to relax and talk about what they know.

• Feedback to the whole group from each small group, supported by staff and volunteers, increases self-esteem and gives a higher profile to quiet individuals.
Imaginative use of photographs

- Enlarge photographs to reveal forgotten details which jog memories
- Recreate a photo as a “human tableau” to bring the occasion back to life
- Write captions for photos with whatever names and places are remembered and make into an album
- Take photos of the group and enlarge them to help them remember previous sessions
- Create a small exhibit of group’s favourite photos and pictures of them enjoying themselves today
Gertie (aged 93) sees a blow-up photo of her family at the seaside in the 1930s. She recognises all of them from their legs!

She tells Pat, a carer, their names and what she remembers about them all and Pat writes it all down to refer back to later.
• When presented with a blow-up photo of his wedding day, Dennis remembers his wedding tie and much that happened on the occasion.

• His wife cannot believe this, as he has not given her any indication that he remembers any of it.
• Re-enacting a photograph, even including the photographer, can be fun!

• Physical recreation of the event in an important personal photograph helps trigger memories
Dramatic Improvisations

• People enjoy hearing about very different experience from their own and entering into others’ stories.

• Improvisation is fun and increases energy levels.

• It happens in the NOW, so people can react spontaneously and be funny, often surprising themselves.

• The drama activity brings people together in a shared enterprise, an artistic challenge, and the chance to perform and engage with a wider group

• Being applauded is a rare and uplifting experience!
Maximum engagement through improvisation

Pat plays her own mother and Caroline plays Pat as a child
• There is scope for humour & creativity in acting “as if” the event is happening.

• Using reminiscence objects as props helps the scene come to life.

• It gives people with little or no speech, constructive actions to perform, which contribute to the combined effort of the group.
• Working as a group on an improvisation based on themed objects, and then sharing the resulting scene with the wider group, is both challenging and fun
Whole group situations like weddings are fun to join in and there are parts for everyone.

This subject of weddings is very important because it often helps reinforce central relationships today in the present.
• Dance gives hand and eye contact, familiar rhythms and remembered steps. If the music is of ‘the right period’ for the person and feels familiar, many memories will be stimulated which can be shared in the group.
Singing familiar songs together

• Tunes and even words are often retained, even when speech goes, and old songs evoke many memories.

• Singing together helps the group to feel a sense of belonging.
Writing and drawing memories
• Some people draw more easily than they speak

• With someone beside them showing interest and asking questions, people can rediscover important forgotten details and share them with others in the present
Edith tells her daughter Pat how she used the curling irons to make her hair beautiful to go out dancing in the 1920s.
• Remembering dressing up and looking good to go out makes people feel elegant today
Memory Boxes or Life Portraits

A quiet reflective individual process with a facilitator. A chance to consider what is important and to find a way to shape and share it.
My Life in a Box

Featuring a running theme across a lifetime, focusing on a favourite memory or trying to convey the whole story!
Memory Boxes celebrate difference and the uniqueness of the individual: an important aspect of reminiscence work
Helping someone to make a personal Memory Box is a valuable way to win trust and gain understanding.
Practical activities in a group

- Quiet companionable activities give a sense of purpose and evoke memories to share

- Seasonal activities for Easter & Christmas
• Practical activities like baking, and gardening are enjoyable normalising activities which absorb the people, engage their full attention and allow easy contact and communication.
William, 82, evaluates his involvement in a reminiscence group

As we are coming to the end of these weekly reminiscence meetings I would like to say how much I have enjoyed meeting you all and thank you for your friendship. I mean all of you, helpers as well. I felt shy at first of mixing with strangers and did not really want to come. But even after the first week I looked forward to the next Tuesday as I felt warm and welcome and we started to talk openly about our experiences. We laughed, talked about old films and sang songs from days gone by. These weeks have brought me out of myself, so I thank you all once again. It has been great.
Conclusion

• These are just a few of the creative ways people have found to explore and develop reminiscence work in groups.

• The range and variety of activities make people feel confident that they will have an interesting and enjoyable time in the group and be able to relax with others.

• The main test of success is whether the individuals continue to attend, have positive feelings about fellow-members, and feel themselves to be valued members of the group.
A manual of best practice from across all European RYCT projects, published 1999, now translated into six languages.
German and Italian translations
Danish, Dutch. Spanish & Catalan editions have also been produced. Japanese & Chinese versions are on the way.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

European Partners:
- Marie-Louise Carrette, Belgium
- Ove Dahl, Denmark
- Arlette Goldberg, France
- Viveca Hagmark, Finland
- Pollo Hamburger, Netherlands
- Heinrich Hoffer, Austria
- Liv Hulteng, Norway
- Lotta Isacs, Sweden
- Angelika Trilling, Germany
- Pam Schweitzer, U.K.

Consultants:
- Dr. Nori Graham
- Professor Faith Gibson

Evaluators:
- Errollyn Bruce
- Faith Gibson
- Marianne H.-Knoch

European Reminiscence Network partners from Germany, France, Finland, Sweden, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark and U.K. meet to launch the RYCT manual.
RYCT since 1999

- Repeat trials of RYCT in UK, Sweden, Finland, Denmark & Germany
- Manual published in 6 languages
- New RYCT projects in Eastern Europe, Spain, Northern Ireland, Wales & England
- Films of RYCT Germany, Norway, Sweden & UK
- Research projects in Denmark and UK
- Evaluation methods developed in trial platform with support from Medical Research Council 2004-6
- 2008-11 UK Health Research Institute funds a national study of the effectiveness of reminiscence in dementia care with 750 participants
Best selling handbook exploring reminiscence in dementia care, with full instructions and advice on how to run RYCT groups.
New RYCT projects supported by the European Commission 2010-14 introducing a new international Training and Apprenticeship scheme running in 12 EU countries led by the European Reminiscence Network from the UK

See website:
www.rememberingtogether.eu
RYCT in London 2015
The inspiring international project “Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today” (RYCT) celebrates its 20th year of delivering Reminiscence in Dementia Care at a Conference in Greenwich, London on 16th & 17th November 2017.
“Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today”
Reminiscence in Dementia Care: a guide to good practice
by Pam Schweitzer & Errollyn Bruce:
Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers 2008
ISBN 978 1 84310 649 4