

STORYTELLING

WITH PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA



A RESOURCE FOR ACTIVITY COORDINATORS
AND CARE HOME STAFF



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INTRODUCTION

WHY STORYTELLING?

Making up stories with people living with dementia can be a hugely rewarding activity. Storytelling can help to:

- Build confidence
- Find new ways of communicating
- Increase self-esteem
- Give someone a sense of purpose and accomplishment
- Reduce loneliness and isolation
- Encourage creativity and use of imagination
- Enable someone to express themselves fully
- Develop new friendships and social connections

And the great news is that you need minimal resources, and anyone can do it!

This resource will guide you through structuring and facilitating a Creative Storytelling workshop with the people you support, and includes some example stories created by people living with dementia.

Links to further resources and support can be found at the end.



PERMA

A HELPFUL UMBRELLA

The PERMA model is a wellbeing theory, developed by psychologist Martin Seligman. It encourages you to consider how you can support someone to 'flourish'.

PERMA stands for:

Positive Emotions: Self-esteem, comfort, satisfaction, joy...
What makes you feel good?

Engagement - We are 'in flow' when we are fully engaged - nothing else matters. When does this happen to you? How does it make you feel?

Relationships - Authentic, meaningful, life enhancing connections. When have you experienced this? How does it make you feel?

Meaning - Having purpose, contributing and belonging is key to someone's wellbeing. When do you feel you have meaning? How does that feel?

Accomplishments - Goals, success, inspired action and mastery. When do you feel you have accomplished something? How does it make you feel?

How could creative activities with people living with dementia impact on the different aspects of the PERMA model?

Consider how the activities in this book might make people feel.

STRUCTURING A WORKSHOP

Structuring a creative workshop is extremely helpful for you, the facilitator, and the people taking part.

It can create a familiar routine, which can be very comforting for people living with dementia, and can help to reduce negative emotions, such as anxiety or fear.

It also helps to give people time to settle in, gain focus and take time to understand what is happening. Structure gives you an opportunity to get a sense of how people are feeling, and to plan ahead accordingly.

The following pages will walk you through a suggested structure for a Creative Storytelling workshop, with a group of people living with dementia.

The sections of the workshop are:

- Check in
- Warm up
- Creating the story
- Sharing the story
- Check out

How you facilitate each section, and which exercises you choose to use, will depend entirely on the people you are working with and how they are feeling on that particular day.

It is helpful to have a number of exercises up your sleeve!

CHECK IN

THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES ARE DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE TO RELAX, FOCUS AND TO TAKE TIME TO THINK ABOUT HOW THEY ARE FEELING. FIND A COMFY, QUIET SPACE AND CHOOSE 1 OR 2 EXERCISES.

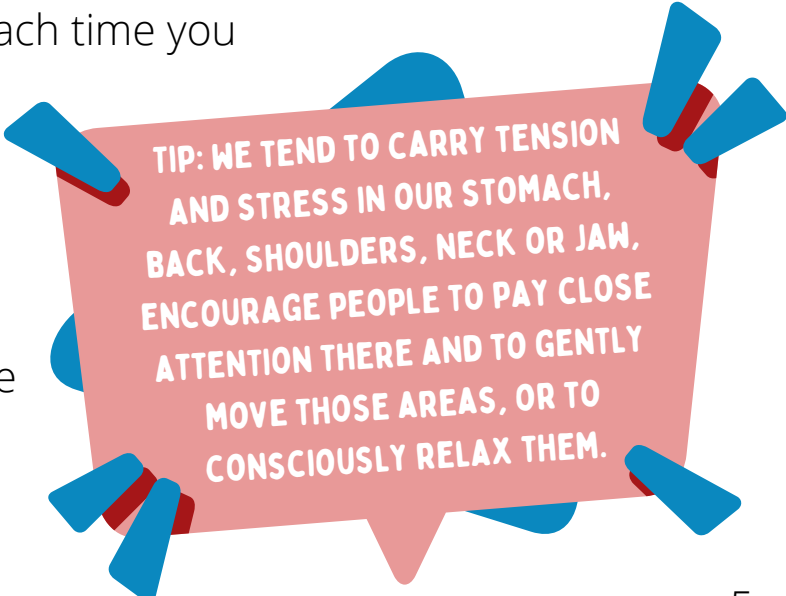
BODY SCAN

This exercise supports people to take time to notice if there is any tension in their body. Talk people through the following steps:

1.If it is comfortable, sit on a sturdy chair with your feet planted on the floor and rest your back against the chair.

2.Starting at your feet, turn your attention to how they are feeling today. Wiggle your toes, rotate your ankles one at a time, lift your toes gently towards you. How do your feet feel today?

3.Move your attention up towards your legs. Take notice of your calves, knees, tops of your legs...try gently patting your thighs with your finger tips, like raindrops. Turn this into slightly heavier pats with the palms of your hands. How do your legs feel today?

4.Continue to talk people through this 'scan', all the way up their body, to their head. Each time you reach a new part of the body, encourage people to ask themselves, 'how does this feel today?'.


It is important to encourage people to look after themselves, and only to move in ways that are comfortable for them.

TIP: WE TEND TO CARRY TENSION AND STRESS IN OUR STOMACH, BACK, SHOULDERS, NECK OR JAW, ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO PAY CLOSE ATTENTION THERE AND TO GENTLY MOVE THOSE AREAS, OR TO CONSCIOUSLY RELAX THEM.

CHECK IN, CONTINUED

STRETCH AND YAWN

Did you know, athletes often yawn before competing?! Yawning and stretching both help to increase blood flow and prepare us for something new.

Encourage those you are working with to take a moment to stretch their body, however is comfortable for them, and pretend to yawn... chances are, a real yawn will follow!

BREATHING EXERCISES

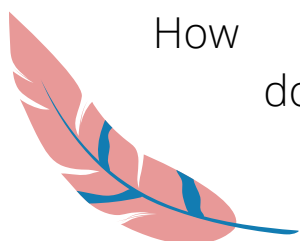
Breathing exercises can help to reduce anxiety and increase focus. Talk people through the following steps:

1.If it is comfortable, sit on a sturdy chair with your feet planted on the floor and rest your back against the chair. Relax your shoulders and try to lose any tension you are carrying in your body. Take notice of your breath. How are you currently breathing? Is it shallow, fast, slow?

2.Try to inhale slowly through your nose, and exhale through pursed lips. You could try counting: inhale for 2 counts, exhale for 4 counts.

3.Now try making an audible sigh on each out breath. Imagine any tension or worries you may have leaving your body on each sigh.

4.Now, on every out breath imagine there is a feather floating in front of you. Try to gently blow the feather away from you.



How
does
it
feel?

WARM UP

THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES ARE DESIGNED TO UPLIFT AND ENERGISE PEOPLE: TO ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY AND PLAYFULNESS.

THEY WORK BEST IF YOU DON'T TAKE THEM TOO SERIOUSLY!

IMAGINARY BALL

Talk people through the following steps:

1. Imagine you are holding a small, colourful ball in your hands. What colour is it? How does it feel? Smooth or rough, heavy or light?
2. Throw the ball up into the air. Watch it fly upwards and catch it as it falls back down. Great catch!
3. Repeat this a few times, experimenting with the force with which you throw it. How high can you throw it?
4. Now imagine it is a bouncy ball. Throw it at any surface you like - you don't need to worry about anything breaking!
5. What other kinds of balls can you imagine throwing and catching? Perhaps a giant beach ball, or a basketball into the hoop?



WARM UP, CONTINUED

DANCE STYLES

Choose a piece of music that the people you are working with love; preferably something that makes people want to move. With that music playing, encourage people to imagine they are the people listed below.

People can dance in their chairs, or standing up. Encourage people to dance as if no one is watching: to improvise and see what happens!

- At a disco in the 70's
- A famous ballet dancer
- In the chorus of a west end show
- A dancer at a ballroom dancing competition
- A morris dancer, with bells and hankies!

Which was the group's favourite?

Ask them if they can think of any other dancers whose shoes they would like to step into.

You may want to add your own ideas to the list too!



CREATE

CREATING STORIES USING PICTURES

Photographs, paintings and drawings can provide us with brilliant starting points for writing new stories, and are a particularly accessible starting point for people living with dementia. Here's how...

Types of pictures:

The best pictures for making up stories are ones that people have never seen before. If you choose a picture that has a memory connected to it then it will be harder to make a story up from scratch.

Try to find pictures that have some, or all, of the following:

- **Subjects people can see clearly;** especially facial expressions
- **A clear, identifiable setting** to help people to imagine what else might be happening in that place, what it smells like, what it sounds like etc.
- **Images with movement or action.** Perhaps something has just happened, or is about to happen? This will help you to keep your story moving.
- **A sense of mystery or intrigue.** If people are interested in the picture, then an interesting story will follow.
- **Represent the people you are working with.** Consider people's experiences, cultural heritage, individual identities.

Where to find pictures:

- Printed publications e.g. magazines, newspapers, flyers
- Books; from your local library or charity shops
- The internet; Google Images or websites e.g. Wikimedia Commons or The Internet Archive

CREATE

CREATING STORIES USING PICTURES

How to write the story:

- Once you have chosen a picture, make sure everyone in the group is able to see it clearly.
- Have some large sheets of paper and a pen to hand, to write the story on.
- Tell the group that you are going to write a story about this picture together, and anything they say will be written down, and most importantly, will be correct.
- You could start by asking the group what they think is happening, or how the picture makes them feel, to encourage them to begin talking about it.
- Depending on who you are working with, you could ask the group for an opening line to the story.

Ask people 'open questions', to encourage them to respond to the image, and to keep the story moving. Write down as much as you can.

Respond positively each time someone contributes something, and make sure they can see that you are writing down everything they are saying.



CREATE

ASKING OPEN QUESTIONS

Open questions enable people to contribute in ways that are personal to them.

Someone may give answers that you didn't expect, or that you wouldn't have given yourself. However, it is important not to edit what they say. **Write down their exact words.** It helps if they can see what you are writing, to give them confidence that their ideas have been accepted.

Here are some example questions that you could ask about the picture below:

Where is she?
What do you want to call her?
Who else is there with her?
What is their relationship like?
What has just happened?
What do you think happens next?
What can she see?
How is she feeling?
What sounds can you hear?

You could also start a sentence and wait for them to finish it e.g.

Suddenly...
Meanwhile...
The girl said...



Can you think of any other open questions, or sentence starters, that could help people to create a story about this photo?

SHARE

READING THE STORY BACK

When you feel the story is coming to an end, ask the group for a **final sentence**. This could be as simple as 'The end', but someone may have another idea!

Then ask the group for **a title**. If there are lots of ideas, you could take a vote.

And finally, **ask if someone would like to read the final story out loud** to the group. If someone volunteers, ensure the room is quiet and ready to listen.

Writing a story from scratch is something to be celebrated, and so **a round of applause** at the end can help to promote a sense of pride and achievement.

What to do with the story:

- People often like to have their own copy, so you could type it up, with the image, for people to keep or to display.
- You could run a writing group and create a book, with all of the groups' stories.
- Invite other people to listen to the story.



What else could you do with the stories you create?

CHECK OUT

REFLECTION & CELEBRATION

To finish the workshop, it is important to give people time to reflect on what they have just participated in, and to celebrate everyone's individual contributions.

You may find your own way of doing this, depending on the group and how they are feeling, but here are some suggestions:

- **Go around the room and thank people individually for their contributions**, perhaps giving one or two examples of things that you enjoyed e.g. "Thank you June for your final line of the story, it was the perfect ending."
- **Ask people how they are feeling** now that they have created the story. You could do this with words, or a movement or gesture.
- **Finish with a dance or a song**, that relates to the story!
- **Enjoy some food and drink together**, whilst reflecting on the session.



ADAPTING THE PLAN

WHO'S IN THE ROOM?

Whilst the workshop plan suggested in this resource works for many groups, it is important to remember that *you* know the people you are working with best.

There may be occasions where this plan needs to be adapted. In these situations, trust your gut! You may want to run the activity on a one to one basis, for people who need a little more support, for example.

The most important things to keep in mind with Creative Storytelling are:

- Use quiet, accessible spaces, with minimal distractions e.g. no televisions in the background
- Consider where everyone is sitting - it helps if you can all see and hear each other, and if everyone can see what you are writing.
- Give people time to settle in and focus
- Explain clearly what is about to happen, and reassure people that there are no 'wrong answers'.
- Use images that are unfamiliar but interesting
- Ask open questions
- Involve everyone, and write down as much as you can, word for word
- Share the stories
- Celebrate people's achievements



EXAMPLE STORIES

THE FOLLOWING STORIES
WERE WRITTEN BY PARTICIPANTS
OF ARTS UPLIFT'S 6 WEEK
STORYTELLING COURSE, FOR
PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA
AND THEIR CARERS.

ANNABELLE'S BEACH ADVENTURE

She's cute and lovely.
She wanted to go to the
seaside, so her family took
her out for the day.

There was mum, dad, gran
and grandad. It was a family
holiday in Greece; Halkidiki
to be precise! It was a lovely little place.



Annabelle was playing on the beach, building sandcastles. It was very hot, so dad decided to put sunscreen on her, from a pink bottle that matched her pink, heart shaped sunglasses. Dad said, "Mr Blobby!" as he dabbed sunscreen on her face, and Annabelle giggled like a seagull.

In that moment, a seagull swooped down and whooshed past Annabelle's face, causing them both to duck and startling Annabelle.

Meanwhile, mum was relaxing on her beach towel, making shapes out of clouds. There was a baby with lovely big eyes and a heck of a lot of dogs, all very furry!

At the same time, Annabelle is helping grandad fetch buckets of water. Distracted by the clouds, she fell into one of the many holes that she and grandad had previously dug. All covered in muck and bullets, gran came to the rescue as they all fell back laughing.

Grandad said, "it's time we go home, back to the hotel, and let's have some ice cream on the way. Annabelle said, "yes please Grampy", as mum and dad packed up. They all went to catch the number 7 bus.

"Can we come back tomorrow?", shouted Annabelle, bouncing with excitement.

"Of course!", they all said in unison.

SATURDAY NIGHT AT THE DANCE HALL

Dancing: you can't beat it!

They're in the Rialto Casino on Moseley Avenue, in the dance hall. It's 7:30pm on a Saturday night, and Rose and Johnny are practising their dance steps. It's the 1960's so they're doing rock and roll, and jive.



Meanwhile, Poirot, looking handsome, is intently watching Johnny, thinking 'I wonder if I could dance like that?'. The two men next to him were having a chat and one of them said, "she won't be around for long!".

They're excited! A crowd has gathered to watch, some feeling envious and wanting to join in. One of the girls in the crowd says to her friend, "I wish I could do that!". All of the girls are looking lovely, waiting and hoping to be asked to dance.

The local band, The Detectives, were playing everyone's favourite song, 'Rock Around the Clock', and other people started to join in with the dancing. Some people stayed sitting down though, too frightened to join in.

It was a big night: a surprise celebrity had come to visit. The Duke of Edinburgh was here to present an award for 'Best Dancers'. It came as no surprise that the award went to Rose and Johnny. They were ecstatic and over the moon!

It was the end of another wonderful Saturday night.

FURTHER RESOURCES & SUPPORT

Dementia & Creativity

- **Arts Uplift:** www.artsuplift.co.uk/arts-for-dementia-warwickshire
- **Arts in Care Homes:** www.artsincarehomes.org.uk
- **NAPA Activities:** www.napa-activities.co.uk
- **TimeSlips:** www.timeslips.org
- **Vibrant Communities:** www.vibrantcommunities.co.uk
- **Ladder to the Moon:** www.laddertothemoon.co.uk
- **Arts 4 Dementia:** www.arts4dementia.org.uk
- **Playlist for Life:** www.playlistforlife.org.uk

Organisations

- **Alzheimer's Society:** www.alzheimers.org.uk
- **Dementia Friends:** www.dementiafriends.org.uk
- **Culture Dementia UK:** www.culturedementiauk.org
- **Alzheimer's Research UK:** www.alzheimersresearchuk.org
- **The Lewy Body Society:** www.lewybody.org
- **Young Dementia Network:**
www.youngdementianetwork.org
- **Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance:**
www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk
- **DEEP:** www.dementiavoices.org.uk
- **Dementia Care Matters:** www.dementiacarematters.com
- **The Journal of Dementia Care:**
www.journalofdementiacare.co.uk