

TESA-DRI

Technology Enriched Supported Accommodation



Art Workshop Guide

Working with people living with dementia

The TESA DRI (Technology Enriched Supported Accommodation - Dementia Research Initiative 2014-2018) project - explored the experiences of people living with dementia, their family carers and paid carers in supported living environments that use technology to support care. During this research project, art activities were undertaken with over sixty people living with dementia across eight focus groups and what was learned has been used to compile this booklet. This information aims to inform anyone wishing to enhance participation and maximise the abilities of people living with dementia undertaking Visual Arts activities in a community setting.

Setting up the Art Space

Organisational skills, focusing and maintaining attention can be challenging for people living with dementia. It is important before beginning any artwork to have a workspace that is ordered, with a clearly defined layout for activities and materials.

- A table-cover needs to be plain, not patterned, and secured with a little masking tape. A busy print distracts the eye, and patterns could be mistaken for an object on the table.
- Using a contrasting colour of page and table cover helps keep the artwork within the confines of the paper.
- Set out limited amounts of materials needed for the session, in an appropriate sequence. If drawing is the first activity lay out only the pencils and paper. If paint is to be added, introduce it after the drawing is finished.
- Undertake a Health & Safety check of the venue, including ensuring there are no trip hazards. Make adequate space for tables and chairs for ease of access, and reserve the seats nearest the door for individuals with reduced mobility.
- Good levels of lighting are important. Turn on lights even in daylight hours or plug in extra lighting if required.
- Keep materials and equipment within easy reach and if appropriate place in a small tray or on non-slip matting to prevent them rolling off the table.
- Try to work in a space that will have minimal disruption.

Communication

People living with dementia can have difficulty with sequential memory and processing new information. A lot of questions or verbal instruction can be confusing and hard to process so simple instructions are essential.

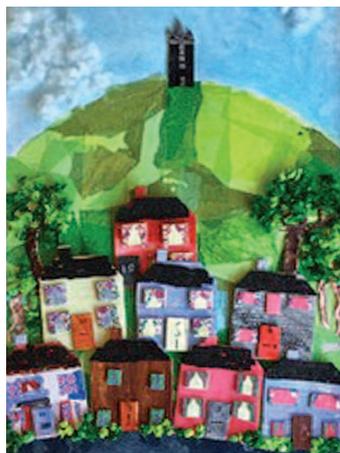
- Wear a name badge that just has your first name on it and introduce yourself at the start of each session and during the session as necessary.
- Each person is unique and it is important that everyone is given the chance to participate equally and do what they can within their own limitations and boundaries. Always assume capacity to participate, but do be flexible and have additional plans ready. Participation can look differently for everyone from painting a picture to making a mark on a page.
- Speak clearly and use aids to communicate your message for example show the paints you are talking about.
- The session should be guided by the person based on how they are engaging and what their emotional language is telling us. Keep things simple, one step at a time using straightforward language.
- Personal information gained from weekly group conversations, or through informal one to one chat is helpful in order to choose subject matter that the person with dementia can connect with. It can be helpful when a member of staff that knows the individuals are involved in these conversations to stimulate ideas according to personal preferences.
- A slow and steady pace is important. Incorporating a cup of tea mid session connects the activity with a sociable, relaxing experience and enables a rest time for participants.
- Remember to make good eye contact, particularly if a person has a hearing impairment, so that he or she can lip read to aid understanding. Avoid asking direct questions, try to connect with individuals through short sentences.
- Ensure that if someone needs glasses that they are wearing them and hearing aids are used if normally worn.



Supporting Development

The object of creating artwork with people living with dementia is to enrich life experience, raise self-esteem and have fun. Process is more important than product.

- It is best to keep colours bright and contrasting to enhance the visual experience. Use ready mixed colour to eliminate the need for extra tasks.
- Keep activities short, structured and achievable.
- Singing was often spontaneous when working with groups and we encouraged it to break up activity, enhance enjoyment or diffuse a situation when there was conflict arising.
- An ipad is an invaluable tool in terms of storing images to stimulate memories through conversation or music. A drawing app was also used with great results. A rubber tipped stylus was mistaken for a rubber tipped pencil though, so use a pointed stylus if possible.
- The more support the better the experience for individuals and outcome of the creative activity. Generally, more than one person will be required to support a small group of people engage in the art session.
- Working on individual pieces of artwork can be challenging if attendance is erratic. A group piece is probably more successful because everyone works at a different speed, and can work at their own pace towards a common goal. We found six sessions to be the best time frame to complete a project successfully.
- Observe body language, facial expression and general engagement of participants.



Additional Tips For Creating Artwork

- Shiny reflective surfaces present problems, and little pieces such as small sequins or beads are best avoided.
- While some people like clay, others find it sticky and difficult to work with. Model Magic can be a cleaner and softer alternative.
- 'Dancing across a page' with a loaded paintbrush in time to music engaged individuals who were finding it difficult to get started.
- Adapt tools and materials when necessary to ensure access for all. Cellotape added to a crayon wrapper will make it stronger and less likely to break, while the foam tube of a hair roller encasing a pencil and taped in place will improve grip in an unsteady hand.
- Experiment with a variety of materials when possible because each material has a different property and appeal. It would be easy to assume someone doesn't like art because they don't like paint. Switching to a different medium such as felt-making or clay work can totally change the experience.
- Sometimes a person with dementia will keep working at a collage or painting not knowing when it's finished or when to stop. Consequently, a completed collage could become buried under a frenzy of additional materials glued on top, or a page end up with a hole in the middle due to over use of a paintbrush. Let the person know when the artwork is complete and by gently introducing the next step of framing or adding the piece to a wall display.



For further information on the TESA DRI Project contact:

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