Community Activity Groups for People Living with Dementia:

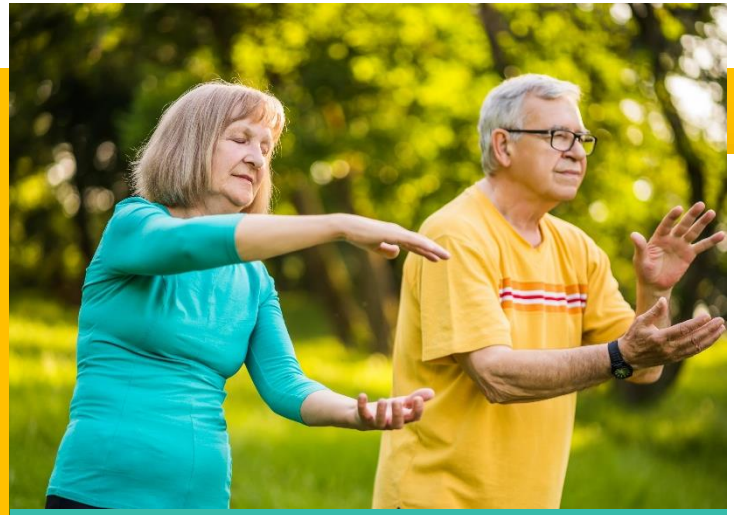
A Guide to Getting Started



SOUTH ISLAND ALLIANCE
best for people, best for system

Dementia Canterbury

Canterbury District Health Board
Te Poari Hauora o Waitaha



Gee, S., Campbell, D., Toothill, D. (2020) *Community Activity Groups for People Living with Dementia: A Guide to Getting Started.* Christchurch, NZ: South Island Alliance.

This guide is available to download at:
https://www.sialliance.health.nz/our-priorities/health-of-older-people/useful-resources/

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Welcome to this resource

Our vision

We believe that community-based activities for people living with dementia can help break down barriers to enable people living with dementia to participate in and enjoy activities in the community and lead fulfilling lives.

Our model

This guide is about a special type of activity group just for people living with dementia. The group meets regularly in a community venue with a community organisation partner facilitating the programme. A dementia organisation partner recruits and supports the group.

Our resource

We hope this resource provides a practical and user-friendly guide to help you feel inspired and confident about setting up a community activity group.



With or without dementia, meaningful activities and meaningful relationships are at the heart of a positive and enjoyable life.

What’s inside!

The purpose of this resource pack is to help organisations get started on running community-based activity groups for people living with dementia. It covers why activity groups are such a positive experience for all the parties involved, guidance and resources to help you run groups for people living with dementia, and lots of examples of successful groups to inspire you.

01. **Why**
The benefits of the community activity groups

02. **How**
Tips for readying and running the groups

03. **What**
Examples of community activity groups



Sharing experience

This interactive toolkit draws on Dementia Canterbury's experience in providing meaningful community based activities for people living with dementia in normal social settings, as well as tips from other passionate supporters of people living with dementia from around the world.

When you see this book symbol you can click on the white speech bubble to go to further resources.

The core of supporting people living with dementia is enabling person-centred, purposeful, stimulating experiences and activities that offer hope and means to maximize quality of life. We are proud to share our positive experience of offering an alternative respite service model that provides a broad range of community-based activity groups to help people living with dementia enjoy meaningful activities in normal social settings. Between 2015 and 2017 Dementia Canterbury piloted and evaluated a successful community-based program of activity groups [1,2]. The groups have thrived and diversified and become an invaluable component of our wider vision where receiving a diagnosis of dementia is seen not as the end of the road, but the start of a new part of the journey.
- Darral Campbell, Manger Dementia Canterbury





1 Why to get started

THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITY GROUPS



The why

One the principles of living well set out in the New Zealand Framework for Dementia Care is that people with dementia are supported to “live in their communities with a sense of purpose and confidence” [3]. It recommends services that “engage the person with dementia in personalised everyday and social activities that are meaningful to that person”.

This chapter outline how in meeting these principles, community based activity groups can benefit not only the person living with dementia but all those involved.



Community

Community-based activity groups help to create dementia friendly communities.

Most people with dementia live in their own home in the community. But often people in their community don't understand what dementia is or how it can affect a person. This can lead to people living with dementia feeling socially isolated. [4]

A dementia friendly community recognizes the experiences of the person with dementia and helps them to stay engaged in everyday life in a meaningful way [5]. People with dementia say that this means that they can find their way around and feel safe. It means that they can access the local facilities and the outdoors, and they can engage in the activities that they are used to. It means that they feel connected and that they belong, and that people are accepting and understanding [6, 7].

With the support of organisations like yours, people living with dementia can continue to live the life they choose. They can continue to enjoy activities in their local community that are meaningful to them. [4]

If I wasn't doing this I'd be sitting at home climbing the walls.

I'm exhausted trying to get people to ... understand my husband's illness. It got too hard and embarrassing for me. I love being here, it is so good being out in a group with people in the same situation.

Participants

It's been very good because of the people I know and we just gel together... and laugh together have a good laugh, you know, the cup of tea and everything like that and that's all part of it.

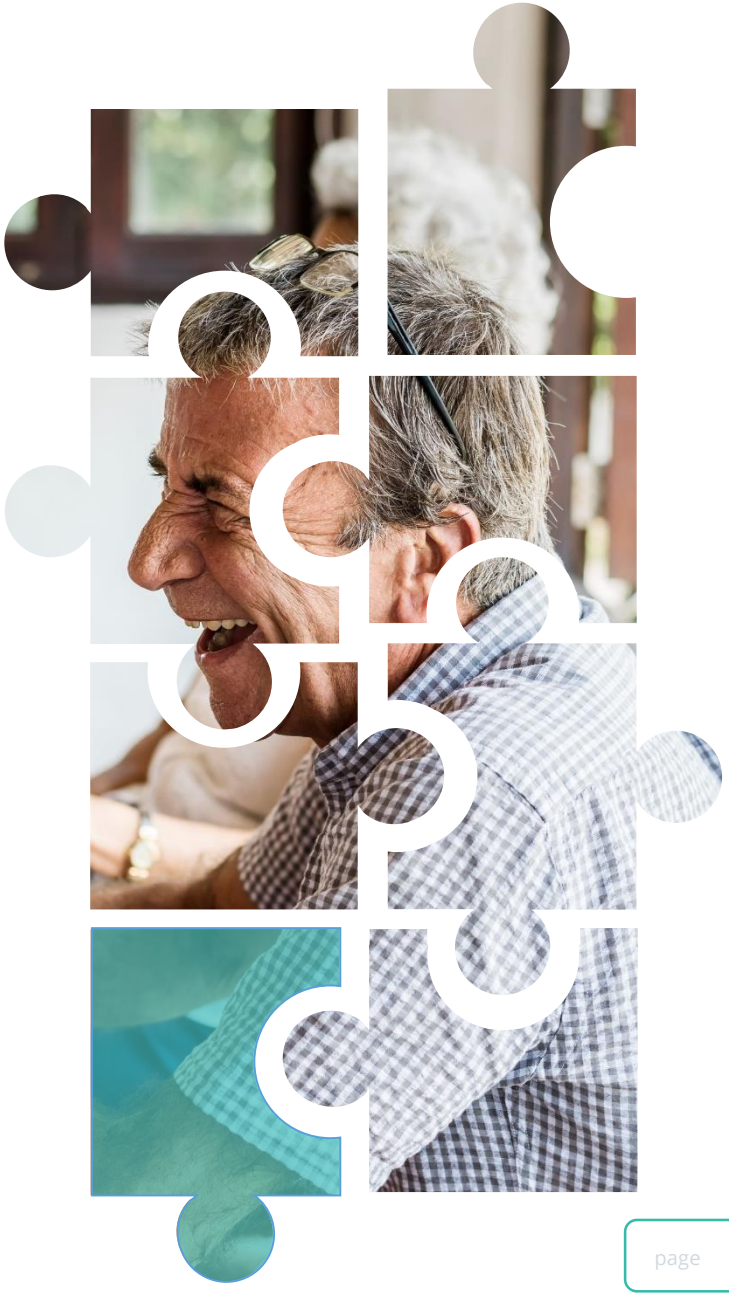
Seeing the enjoyment on his face, seeing the confidence... it's a time where we he can forget his disability. It's a place where he cannot fail.

Meaningful activity and social engagement improve the quality of life for people living with dementia [8-11], but familiar activities can be put aside as the challenges associated with dementia increase [7]. Community-based groups help participants to maintain familiar activities and interests and reconnect with the life they have lived. Participants talk about feeling comfortable and normal - doing normal things in a setting where living with dementia is a shared experience rather than a mark of difference [2].

The world can narrow for people with dementia, and life can feel limited to within the walls of the home. Feeling lonely and isolated from the community is common [12,13]. Activity groups offer the participants a way to expand their world and be out in the wider community. The groups are something to look forward to and to talk about [2].

Activity groups can be particularly effective in facilitating social interaction as the activity can provide a non-threatening focus for engagement [14, 15]. Participants love the easy socialization and laughter in the groups [2].

People with dementia may experience many frustrations and failures as the changes in their brain make everyday activities challenging and difficult [16]. The activity groups can provide a boost to self esteem and confidence [2].





Care partners

Life can undeniably be tough when living with dementia or supporting someone who has dementia. Exhaustion, uncertainty, loss and frustration are all part of the mix, but with enough support so too are love, humour, and discovery [16].

Many of the most commonly feelings of stress reported by the care-partners can be seen as relating to the difficulty of balancing their caring role with other demands on their time: time for themselves, their other responsibilities, and their social life [2]. Care-partners say that they want respite options that offer age-appropriate leisure and social activities that offer opportunities for personal growth, learning, and support [17]. Community activity groups can provide a trusted alternate care environment for the person living with dementia to enable care-partners to have a break to relax and attend to their own needs [2].

For care partners who join in activities alongside the person living with dementia, the groups can be a engaging and enjoyable shared experience and the chance to connect with other carers [2].

It gives me some time alone . . . It gives me a chance to think more about other family members, friends etc, and to get things done around home without worrying [her].

it gives [him] an opportunity to join in with others ... It is good for me to know that [he] is doing something physical or creative, I feel less pressured...

In their own voices

Meet Wendy, Sally, and Lester as they talk about why community-based activity groups mean so much to them.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/lDcSrBRccAM

Volunteers

It's the most rewarding 1 1/2 hours of my month

Seeing the ... impact on their self-esteem and confidence...I find all of them really coming out of their shell

Volunteers are vital to creating a group that runs smoothly and where every individual is engaged. Volunteering involves connecting, giving back, and gaining skills, and is also an amazing way to improve our own wellbeing.

Every volunteer receives training to help them interact and support people living with dementia appropriately and confidently. Volunteers feel that being involved in the groups deepens their understanding of dementia, and helps develop better understanding and empathy [2].

The volunteers also say that they love seeing the enjoyment and benefits of the groups for the people involved. This makes it a rewarding experience to be involved in [2].





Organisations

Most of us enjoy the opportunity to appreciate activities outside our home. People living with dementia deserve the same opportunities as other New Zealanders to engage in activities they enjoy and to be fully included in what their local community offers [6]. For many community partners, the collaboration with a dementia organisation to offer a programme can be a useful mechanism for meeting their aims of increasing access and inclusion [5].

A key part of the success community based activity groups is increasing staff awareness and understanding about dementia. Taking part in dementia awareness training and interacting with people living with dementia provides opportunities for staff to expand their skills and empathy in working with people living with dementia. This awareness can help communication and client interactions outside the groups as well [5].

We had some accessibility initiatives previously but there was so much more to do to meet the needs of our diverse audience.

It has heightened staff awareness and understanding of dementia considerably. ...[staff] show more compassion and understanding when dealing with elderly visitors.

Community partner view

In this video Lana Coles from the Christchurch Public Art Gallery talks about partnership and joy involved in the Artzheimers group.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/h5UCIiexjtE



2 How to get started

TIPS FOR READYING AND RUNNING THE GROUPS



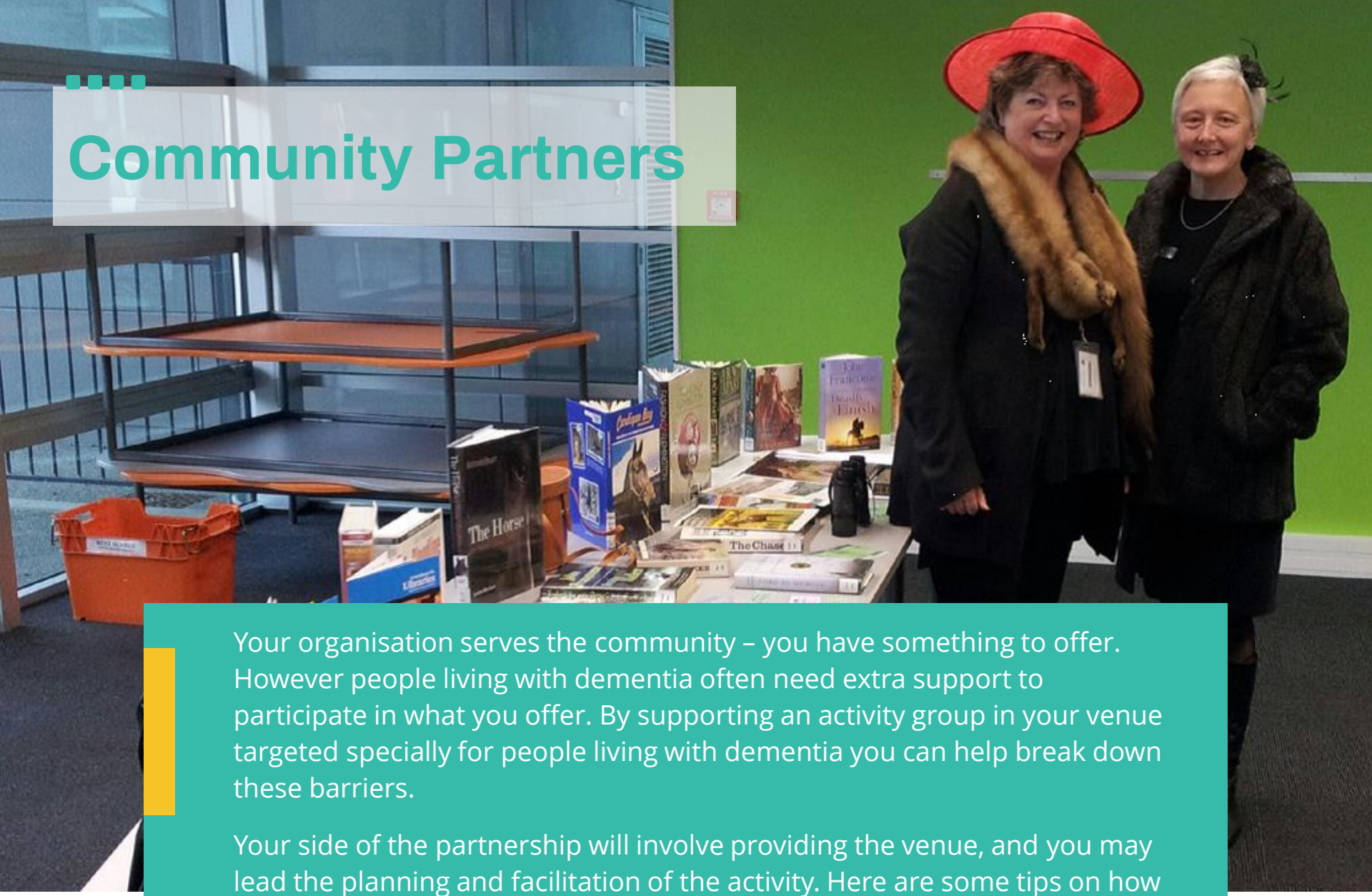
The how

Engaging in meaningful and enjoyable activities is an important part of living well with dementia. The changes that dementia can bring sometimes mean that this is not easy.

For the community partner, this chapter will help you to get the knack of how to support people living with dementia in the groups, identify what makes an activity meaningful, and tailor the activity to the person.

For the dementia organisation, this chapter will help you plan how you will ready, recruit, and run a group.

Community Partners



Your organisation serves the community – you have something to offer. However people living with dementia often need extra support to participate in what you offer. By supporting an activity group in your venue targeted specially for people living with dementia you can help break down these barriers.

Your side of the partnership will involve providing the venue, and you may lead the planning and facilitation of the activity. Here are some tips on how to get started.



You can do this!

Organisations large or small can make a real impact on the wellbeing of people living with dementia with only a small initial investment of time, in order to create impact which affects an entire community [18]. A strong partnership with your local dementia NGO can make it easy.

1. Partnership

Your dementia partner has a wealth of expertise about living with dementia, and you have a wealth of expertise about what you offer – you are in this together. Together you can solve any problems that arise.

2. Responsiveness

This is what you do. Your staff and volunteers communicate, educate, guide, and facilitate – they work with people. They adapt to their audience. To help everyone feel confident about helping people with dementia to engage, encourage as many as possible attend dementia awareness training.

3. Teamwork

You offer passion and great communication skills to help run the groups, but you are not alone. Your local dementia partner staff and volunteers are helping to make sure everyone has an enjoyable and safe time [18].

Get the KNACK



Know the basics about dementia

Nurture strengths and a sense of self

Adapt the activity

Communicate effectively

Kindle positive group interactions

Adapted from Bell and Troxel [19].

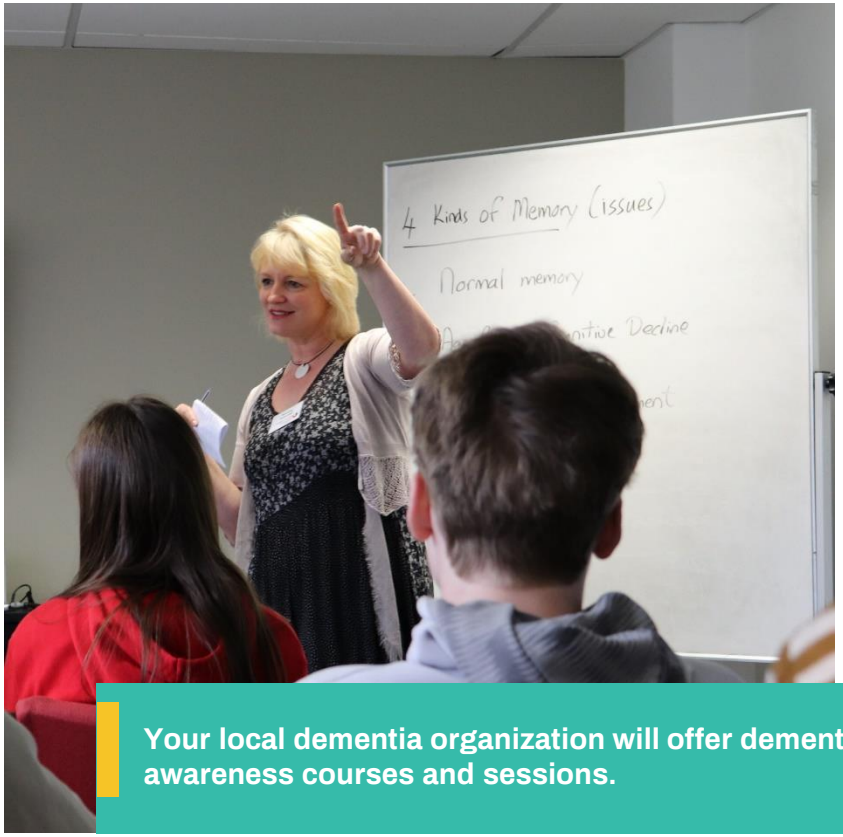
Know

Dementia is an umbrella term for a range of disorders affecting the brain. It is not one specific disease. The most common type of dementia is the Alzheimer's type. Dementia affects thinking and the ability to perform everyday tasks.

Your local dementia organization partner is a great place to start to learn more about the basics of dementia.

Dementia New Zealand
has regional branches in Auckland, Waikato, Lakes, Wellington, Canterbury, and the Hawkes Bay.

Alzheimers New Zealand
has regional branches in Eastern Bay of Plenty, Gisborne / Tairāwhiti, Manawatu, Nelson, Northland, Otago, South Canterbury, Southland, Taranaki, and Taupo.



Your local dementia organization will offer dementia awareness courses and sessions.

Know the basics of dementia

Cognitive changes can impact on how easy and enjoyable an activity is and how confident a person feels.

Memory

I can struggle to remember recent things. You can help by not telling me too much at once.

Processing

It can take me longer to process information, think, and respond, especially if I am tired. You can help by slowing the pace.

Focus

I may not be able to filter out other sights sounds, or options, and it can feel overwhelming. You can help by minimising distractions and helping me focus on one thing at a time.



Language

I may have trouble 'finding' the right word, or understanding words. Be patient. Say things a different way if I have trouble understanding. Show as well as tell.

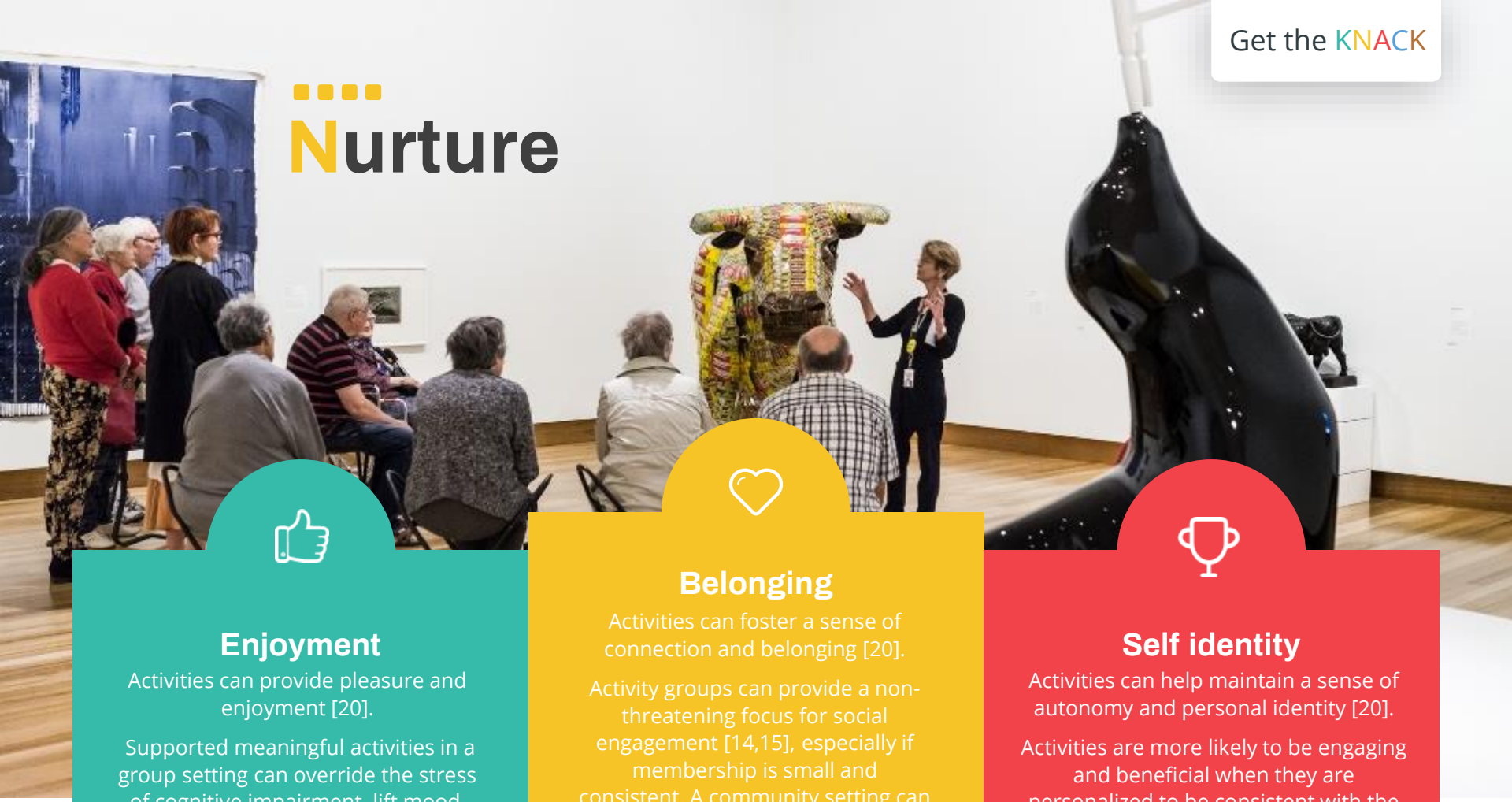
Planning

I may find it challenging to work things through in my head to plan or make decisions. Breaking things down into steps for me helps a lot.

Orientation

I may have trouble finding my way around and knowing where I am. It can help to have a volunteer guide me from the entrance or toilet to the activity room.

Nurture



Enjoyment

Activities can provide pleasure and enjoyment [20].

Supported meaningful activities in a group setting can override the stress of cognitive impairment, lift mood, and provide positive manageable stimulation [21]

Belonging

Activities can foster a sense of connection and belonging [20].

Activity groups can provide a non-threatening focus for social engagement [14,15], especially if membership is small and consistent. A community setting can encourage familiarity, reminiscence, engagement in the wider community, and reduced stigma [20].

Self identity

Activities can help maintain a sense of autonomy and personal identity [20].

Activities are more likely to be engaging and beneficial when they are personalized to be consistent with the interests of the person living with dementia [22 ,23].

Alison Phinney and her colleagues talked with people with dementia and found that activities can be meaningful in three main ways [20].

Nurture

How can we help make the activity group experience meaningful?



Enjoyment

- Have fun.
- Be flexible and adjust to the strengths and needs of the group members.
- Provide individualised support so that activities don't make people feel stressed or inadequate.
- Involve participants in planning the programme and listen to feedback.

Belonging

- Keep the group small, typically no more than eight members.
- Build in opportunities for socializing.
- Keep a familiar structure: Same place, same time, same people, same format.
- Create an inclusive, welcoming, and safe environment.

Self-identity

- Focus on people's interests.
- Recognise and reinforce each person's strengths.
- Maximise opportunities to share opinions and life experiences and stories.
- Help people to feel useful.

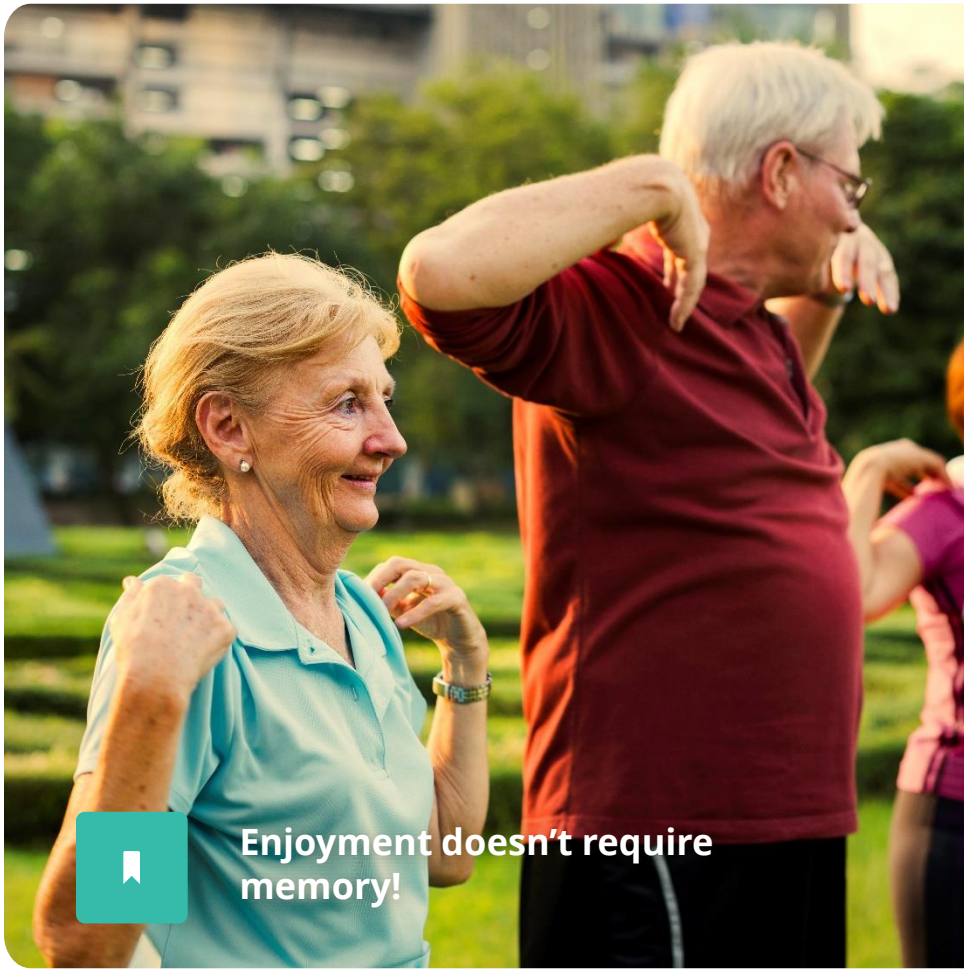
Adapt the activity

We want to be flexible and think about the ‘essence’ of the experience we want to share, and how we can get that. For example rather than reading whole books in the Next Chapter groups, the librarian reads aloud to the group to spark discussion.

When adapting activities we are aiming for the “just right level" - not too easy, not too hard. If an activity is too simplistic, the person might feel insulted or bored. If it is too complex, it might frustrate and turn them off.

When we are trying to figure out how to support an individual to do an activity its really helpful to think about the steps and the skills involved in that activity. We want to break the task down into ‘bits’. Once we think about the steps and skills we look at the ‘bits’ that the person can do. Strengths are our focus! Next we look at the ‘bits’ that may need more support. We may be able to simplify by breaking the process down into smaller steps. We may be able to provide clear cues for that step verbally and/or visually. We may be able to do a particularly tricky step ‘with’ the person.

People living with dementia can vary from day to day in what they feel able to do. Flexibility is a key!



Communicate effectively

Communication is often impacted by brain changes for many people living with dementia. For example, a person who has early stage Alzheimers-type dementia, might have some difficulty concentrating and following the conversation; struggle to find the right words at times; lose their train of thought when speaking; and repeat things they have already said. [24]

The University of Queensland uses the hand acronym MESSAGE to summarise key communication tips. [25]



You can watch videos about MESSAGE communication here.

M — **Maximise attention**

Avoid distractions. Because people living with dementia typically have problems with multiple thoughts at once, focus on one idea at a time.

E — **Watch your Expression and body language**

You being relaxed helps the person living with dementia to relax. Use positive body language and gestures to show you are interested in what they are saying. Maintain good eye contact.

S — **Keep it Simple**

Keep your language and explanations simple. Try to avoid slang or unfamiliar words. It can be easier to make a decision if you offer clear choices.

S — **Support their conversation**

Slow down, be patient! Encourage them to take their time if they are struggling with words. Drop in gentle reminders about the topic of the conversation, especially after a pause. Repeat and then rephrase if they don't understand what you said.

A — **Assist with visual Aids**

Gestures and actions can help get a message across, and pictures and objects can be a great help for communication.

G — **Get their Message**

Watch as well as listen, people may use gestures to help. Keep an eye out nonverbal cues, for example that they are finding an activity frustrating.

E — **Encourage**

Use positive, rather than negative, language. For example, instead of "Not like that" say "Try it this way."



Kindle positive group interactions

Friendly

You can't force friendship, but you can create opportunities, for example: Welcome each person as they arrive and have a 'slow start' to allow catch up, use name tags, provide a relaxing atmosphere, and include time for a cuppa.

Flexible

Perhaps the only certainty of facilitating a group is that there will be surprises. When a surprise arises or something doesn't work as well as you hoped, respond with positivity and creativity. The process of an enjoyable group is more important than sticking to the agenda you had in your head for the session. [26]

Fun

Laughter is one of the things we often hear people say that they love about the groups. This doesn't mean that you have to be a stand up comedian, but you can be light hearted and enjoy yourself. Laugh at yourself, laugh with the group – but never laugh AT people.[26]

Some groups involve discussions. Everyone has something valuable to contribute and stories to tell. The facilitator's role is to create a safe space for people to contribute and be heard [26, 27].



What if someone is very quiet?

- A person may be quiet for all sorts of reasons, including confidence, cultural reasons, difficulty processing information, or if someone else in the group seems too dominant.
- A person who is quiet is not necessarily unengaged: this can be observed through body language and facial expression.
- Some people take a longer time to process information, so allow time them time.
- They may need to feel settled and safe before they participate.
- Invite participation, but don't put the individual on the spot.
- Try activities as a pair, this might help build confidence.
- Introduce a subject or activity that is of particular interest or expertise to the person.

What if someone talks a lot or is repetitive?

- Try placing a helper next to the person so that they can gently let them know if someone else is trying to speak.
- Ask the rest of the group about their insights into what the person has been talking about.
- Keep the group busy!
- Be kind if you need to interrupt: Compliment or validate what they have before turning the conversation to others.
- Some repetition is to be expected, and the group will often be tolerant of this.
- Summarise and use a prompting question to move the person past the repeated story.
- Pick up a different aspect of the story to take the conversation in a different direction than last time.
- Acknowledge the feeling behind the words.



Time for a shared cuppa is a great secret weapon for kindling positive group interactions and relationships.

Readying: The venue

A community venue helps the activity group feel normal and familiar. It can also encourage engagement in the wider community and help breakdown stigma [8, 20, 28]. Here are some issues to consider in making a great environment for your group, and perhaps making your venue more dementia friendly. The dementia organisation partner can help advise you on this.



Noise

Can you find a space that enables people to chat without background noise or music? Are there times of the day or year to avoid (for example to avoid school visits, or school holidays)

Facilities

Is it easy to find, recognize, and access the toilets? Can you arrange for the group to share a cup of tea? Is the seating suitable for older people?

Parking

Can you arrange parking spaces for 'door through door' transport?

Ambience

Does the venue feel welcoming? Training is a key here.

Readying: The programme

While it might initially seem daunting to think of sustaining a programme across time, we have yet to have a community partner run out of ideas! One of the keys is to keep it simple – this help people focus and participate at their own pace. A relaxed pace and achievable goals make for a rewarding experience.



Ideas

What is it that people want to connect with and experience? Do you already offer activities that could be adapted? Can you learn from the experience of other groups? (See chapter 3)

Structure

The groups are generally 90 minutes long. A useful broad structure is a) gathering and orientation, b) engaging in the main activity, c) socializing over morning tea.

Goals

Some activity groups may have an end product or goal, such as creating or achieving something. The larger goal is always what happens during the group however: the conversations, connections, and increasing confidence.

Growing

The group can be a great source of new ideas for future sessions– themes and activities often evolve from what people discuss in the group [27].

Dementia Partners



We love the idea of a 'social prescription' as an important vehicle to support people with to live well with dementia in the community. We are delighted that you are considering adding or expanding community activity groups in the portfolio of support that you offer!

As the dementia experts, your side of the partnership involves responsibility for recruiting, supporting, and communicating with group members and care-partners, as well as supporting the community organisation and volunteers. Here are some tips on how to get started.

For the dementia organisation

You will already have great support opportunities for people living with dementia and have learnt a lot! If you are thinking about building activity groups you may like to consider the following:



Start slow

Start small and slow. Pick the cherries you can reach! When you have built momentum then you can afford the ladder to get to those others.



Gather insight

Take a calculated leap by using the resources available, seeking guidance, engaging in korero with others who are doing the doing.



Talk to clients

What would clients and care partners like? Have you asked? How might you support that to take place in normalised community environments?



Take a step

Be brave. Turn your passion into action! Look for what you as an organisation and your clients can do [not what you can't].



Invest in partnership

Partnering with a community organization and hosting the group at their venue is at the heart of the model. This relationship is a key to success. It may be useful to draw up a memorandum of understanding to be clear about roles. No money has to change hands.



Be unique

Add your own flavor. Different things will work in differing communities and with different organisations. Be creative and have fun! And remember for ourselves and for our clients .... nothing beats feeling good about what we are doing.

Readying: The group

As the dementia partner organisation you will generally be responsible for recruiting and communicating with the group members and their care-partners [27, 29].

Who is in the group?

As dementia organization partner you will identify potential members and assess client suitability or eligibility criteria. This might include having certain capabilities to participate, or you may be targeting a particular subgroup.

Can care-partners come?

Some groups are a great shared activity with care-partners. For some groups, carer-partners may be able to come along but 'just observe', to ensure the focus stays on the people living with dementia. Some groups will work best without care-partners.

What if things change?

As things change a person may no longer meet eligibility criteria, and they may not be able to fully participate. You will want to communicate clearly about this process when people join the group and ensure that you all know how to recognise the situation and how to respond. It can help a lot if you are able to offer or suggest other options to transition to.

When will the group run?

The frequency of the group may depend on resources, but weekly or fortnightly meetings can help the group be familiar, friendly, and part of their routine. It is easier for people to remember if the day of the week and the time are the same for each meeting. Mid morning is often optimal for energy and attention.

How big is the group?

For many activity groups a maximum of eight will help to ensure that everyone can know the group and engage without long waits, and that the activity can be adapted to their individual needs. Some activity groups may have an even lower ideal size due to intensive engagement, safety, or equipment considerations.

Will the group be time-limited?

Generally, activity groups are ongoing. Sometimes the special nature of a group may mean that there are regular intakes of people who participate for a set number of sessions.

Targeted groups

Some groups may aim to provide a comfortable place and activities that appeal to people who share certain characteristics or cultural backgrounds (gender, age, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, culture).



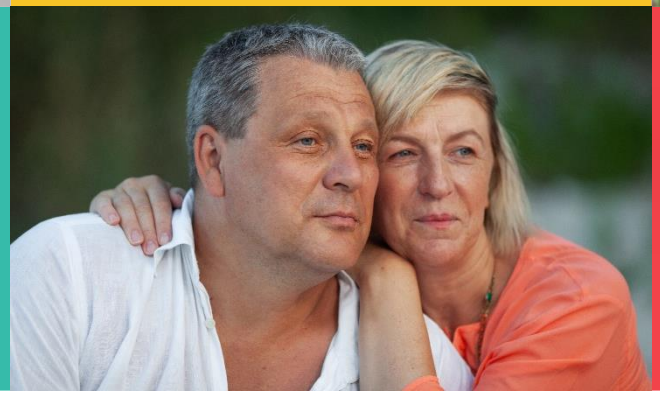
Younger

Some people under 65 may feel they don't fit with the discussions or activities offered in mixed groups. They often enjoy services targeted to their age group.



Men

Some men may prefer the company of other men. They may prefer activities that are active, useful, and creative.



Culture

Some groups may be targeted to a particular cultural group in membership, themes, content, and / or language.

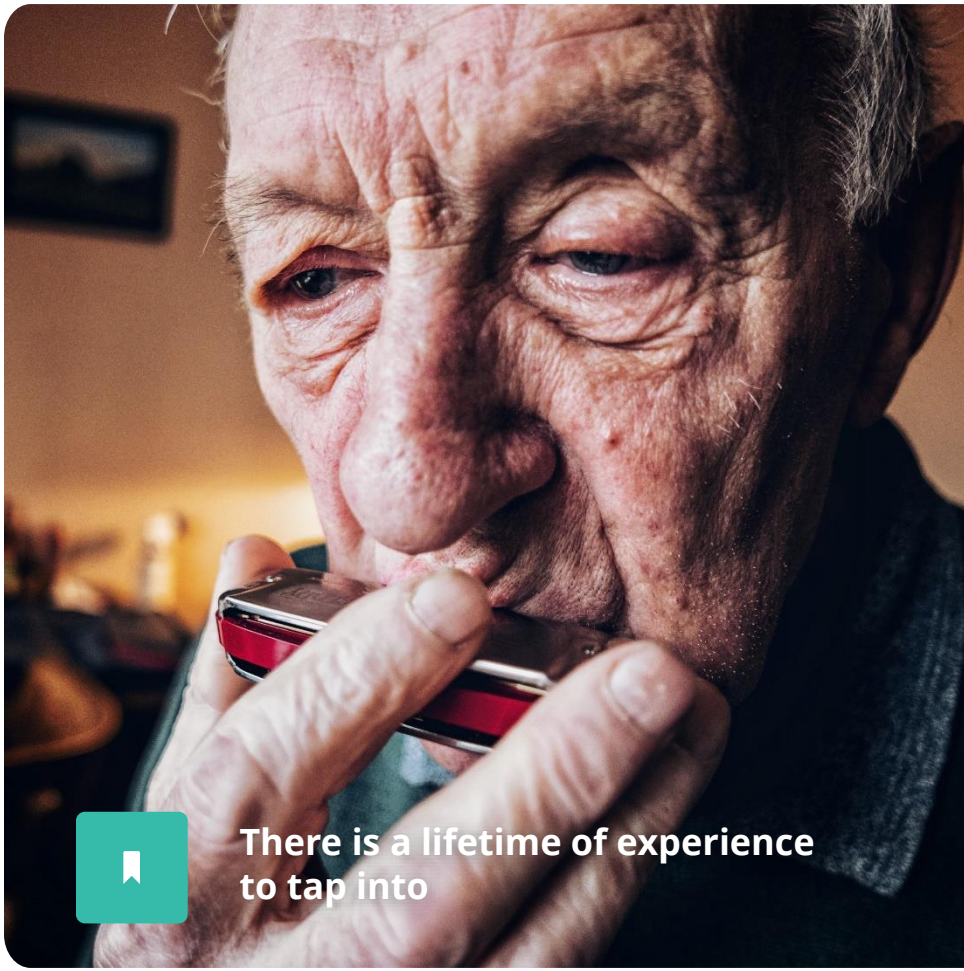
Assessing group strengths and needs

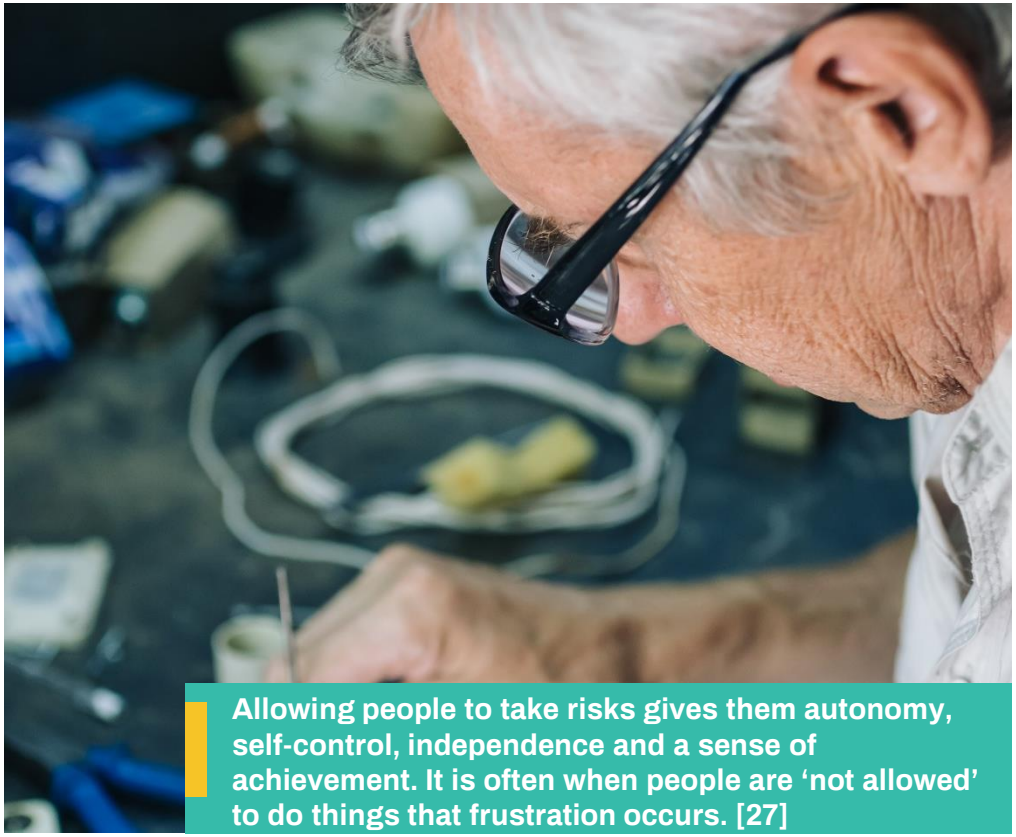
Your relationship with the people living with dementia and their care-partners and the ability to conduct an individualised assessment helps the group to run smoothly [29].

A structured conversation can help understand the person and how they might fit with the proposed group:

- What they enjoy, their strengths, gifts, and interests
- How the dementia has affected them and whether there are concerns about the group
- Whether there are issues that may mean this group is not a good fit, for example incontinence
- Supportive strategies that might help for group meetings, for example using reminder phone calls to help with memory issues, a volunteer 'guide' at the entrance to help with spatial issues, sitting close to facilitator to help with hearing issues etc
- Transport needs and availability during the week [29]

As the dementia organisation, can your staff or volunteers help provide transport? This can play an important role in reducing a common barrier to participation. In addition, transport support can provide more hassle-free respite time for care-partners who would otherwise be driving [2].





Allowing people to take risks gives them autonomy, self-control, independence and a sense of achievement. It is often when people are 'not allowed' to do things that frustration occurs. [27]

Ready for risk

When supporting people living with dementia, risk management can be as much about promoting independence and enabling safe risk taking as it is about minimising risk.

Some groups that include making things or physically activity will involve an element of well-managed risk. Wanting to keep people safe can sometimes lead to us "not allowing' people to do things themselves. It may be useful to talk with the helpers about where they fall on the risk adverse to risk accepting spectrum, and how to find a balance [27].

Minimising risk:

- Know what to do if an incident occurs. Ask "what if...?".. for possible scenarios such as 'what if someone falls?' ..'becomes upset' ..'discloses elder abuse?' and make sure all the helpers know who to turn to.
- Always have enough supporters.
- Check your environment for falls risks.
- Know the emergency procedures for your venue.
- Consider whether a doctor's clearance may be judicious for people to join this particular group.
- Look for ways to 'do with' the person if it is too risky for them to do it on their own.
- Have emergency contact details for group members and volunteers.

Readying: The volunteers

Volunteers are an essential component to the success of a community activities program. They add the extra eyes, ears, hands, and hearts to make sure each member of the group has a safe and enjoyable time. Their roles might include helping prepare the room and materials, welcoming and guiding people to the activity, escorting to the toilet, helping with morning tea, and especially helping support the members to engage in and enjoy the activity.

As well as your usual recruitment and induction processes, it will be helpful for the volunteers to have:

- Relevant dementia education and training
- Some interest in or passion for the activity they might be involved with.
- A clear understanding of the specifics of their role in the group.
- Opportunities to share their observations and experiences and to reflect.
- Recognition for the specific work they do.

It may be useful to specifically recruit for activity group volunteers, and to reach out to tertiary education institutions.



Dementia Canterbury activity groups volunteer representatives receiving the Volunteer Group of the year award in the National Volunteer Health Awards at parliament in 2019



Is it working?

Look and listen

The ‘success’ of the group can be measured by asking yourself the following questions:

- Do people attend and want to come?
- Do they leave with a ‘good’ feeling or positive comments?
- Within their ability, do they actively engage and participate? [27]

Reflect

Take time to review and reflect each week on the group – Did it meet the aims? Are there any lessons we’ve learnt?

Check in with members about what they liked best and their ideas. Sometimes the group will evolve. [27]

Meet up with you partner organization regularly to review how things are going together, and make ‘tweaks’ as necessary.

Evaluate

Sometimes you may want to engage in more formal evaluation.

You can find out more about methods to explore the experience of people living with dementia here.



3 What to get started

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITY GROUPS



The what

All sorts of people get dementia – and that means there are all sorts of groups that will appeal to different people!

This chapter provides a range of example to help spark your imagination. We have example of physical activities, activities that help people engage with arts and culture, and activities that involve making and memories. There are also some tips about taking groups online.

Getting physical



While physical activity is great for the body, some of the most commonly cited benefits of physical activity are psychological, including increased self-esteem and confidence, and improved mood and motivation.

Read more about dementia friendly sports and physical activity

Read more about the benefits of physical activity for people living with dementia



Gardening

A great idea for…

Gardening groups are a valuable opportunity for people who enjoy being physically active and appreciate doing something for the 'greater good'. Gardening can provide a chance to nurture and be useful for people who may increasingly find themselves as the recipients of care. As a familiar activity gardening can often stimulate reminiscence. It also provides a range of sensory stimulation and access to a natural outdoor environment.[30]

For example…

One of Dementia Canterbury's gardening groups meets for an hour and a half at a community garden. Running the groups involves two facilitators from the garden, a staff member from Dementia Canterbury, and sufficient volunteers to support all the group members to participate fully and to be safe. Gardening activities are seasonal and involve a range of activities such as deadheading roses, planting, watering, raking leaves, and general care. The collective garden setting enables participants to choose tasks they would like to engage in, with adaptation of the task by the facilitators as required. The group finishes with "a cuppa and a biscuit" which has worked well to bring the group together socially.

People are able to take produce from the garden, reinforcing the value and satisfaction of their work and prompting conversations with their care-partner. On rainy days the group has been welcomed into the neighbouring church where they can engage in indoor activities such as making bird feeders or exercise.

The environment is beautiful, I like gardening, I like [to] tidy, you can't beat it … It's refreshing, I love it".

Partners

Community gardens

Botanic gardens

Friends of public green spaces groups



Walking

A great idea for…

Walking is a safe and simple way for people living with dementia to increase physical activity that doesn't requires any special equipment. A walking group provide social connection and an opportunity to get outdoors. A review of the general literature concluded that "walking groups are effective and safe with good adherence and wide-ranging health benefits" [31]

For example…

A guided walking group at the Botanic Gardens has proved to be very popular. The availability of easy access parking, smooth pathways, and free wheelchairs and electric scooters at the gardens opens up accessibility for clients or care-partners with mobility issues. The group is hosted by an experienced and knowledgeable guide at the Botanic Gardens who shares stories, facts and observations about the garden and the flora and fauna. The group has become very interactive and intellectually stimulating with participants sharing knowledge.

Another walking group in partnership with a community trust meets at a historic homestead and gardens. The group strolls around the gardens and walks by the Avon River and finishes with a warming cuppa in the homestead.

We just have a lovely time, it's very refreshing getting out, chatting away as you walk along the river. It's lovely as it's time out together.

Partners

Community venues with grounds

Botanic gardens

You can read more about the benefits of walking groups here.

In their own voices: Walking groups

Wendy, Sally, and Lester talk about their experience with the walking and Botanic Gardens guided tour groups run in collaboration with a historic homestead and the botanic gardens respectively.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/DjGDO8NhuFs



Swimming

A great idea for…

Many people living with a dementia have positive memories of swimming and water-based activities that can be rekindled by pleasure-based water activities. Water memories swimming clubs were developed in Australia to combine the benefits of a fun social activity that evokes happy memories, with the positive benefits of physical exercise for people living with dementia [32].

For example…

Dementia Canterbury's Water Memories groups include options of lane swimming, hydrotherapy pool, spa pool, and general water fun. It is important if providing group activities the instructor adapts to the working with people living with dementia so that *no one was getting flustered, worried, or thinking I can't keep up with them.*

Participants enjoy the opportunity to gather together for a coffee at the end of each session. As well as volunteer helpers, some care-partners join in the water activities and the cuppa afterwards. This has been a very rewarding experience, with one of the care-partners saying "*In the water my husband comes back to me a little, I can't tell you what this means to us*".

You can read more about the original Australian Water memories swimming programme here.

When I heard about this group I thought 'Oh my gosh, that's for me. I am a swimmer'. It feels so good to get back into the water… So many happy memories it brings back for me.

Possible partners

Council aquatic centres

More examples



Dementia Wellington

Golf

Assisted golf is a monthly opportunity for people with dementia to continue to play golf supported by volunteer golfers, all of whom have received dementia education. The success relies on the commitment of the volunteers and support from the Golf Club.



Dementia Auckland

Dance

A weekly dance group at a local leisure centre offers the chance for people living with dementia to dance. From waltz to disco, swing to soul, everyone can bring music and memories to the table. For some of the couples who come along, the classes bring back special times together.



Dementia Auckland

Gym

Men living with dementia can get together for stretching and sport activities at a weekly men's gym group at a local Auckland gym. While Dementia Auckland has a team member and volunteer present, the stretches and activities are led by a personal trainer from the gym.



Arts and music

Activity groups that support engagement with the arts can provide a wonderful opportunity to enjoy an inspirational venue and creative and cultural stimulation, as well as the collaborative social opportunity. They can help people living with dementia to feeling more fulfilled and confident.

Read more about benefits of arts for people living with dementia

Read more about becoming a dementia friendly arts venue



Art appreciation

A great idea for…

Art appreciation can provide stimulation and socialisation for people from all walks of life and abilities. Art offers a powerful mechanism for evoking memories, stimulating emotions, and encouraging people to share their thoughts and ideas in a non threatening environment [33]. People living with dementia maintain their consistent preferences for particular art styles [34], and the ability to express their opinions can provide not only a stimulating experience but also a reinforcement of their personal identity [35, 36].

For example…

Artzheimers meets at the Christchurch Public Art Gallery fortnightly for an hour. An art gallery volunteer guide leads the group to specific pieces of art. While the group sits, the guide tells them about the artist before encouraging discussion and reminiscence.

Running the group involves collaboration between Christchurch Art Gallery and Dementia Canterbury volunteers and staff. Care-partners are welcome to attend, but are asked to be silent observers during the discussion.

One of the strengths of Artzheimers is the success of the reminiscence and opinion-based discussion in encouraging people to express themselves. For some it provides a boost to confidence that extends beyond the group.

I love the artwork. I'm no good at it myself but I really appreciate it. Really see something in artwork... It makes the old brain think and that's what I need

Partners

Public art gallery



Making art

A great idea for…

Creating art uses a different part of the brain than the area that controls spoken language, enabling some people a way to express themselves that doesn't rely on words. People who have never considered themselves 'artistic' may discover an outlet with help from art therapists, while past artists can find comfort and meaning in returning to creativity. [37]

For example…

A "creative making" group meets in the purpose-built education workroom at the Christchurch Art Gallery once a month.

The Art Gallery educator introduces the group to a new artist (often a local New Zealand artist that is exhibiting in the Gallery) and gives insight into their history, inspiration and artistic process. The group is then led through a step by step process to create a work of art.

Different techniques and methods are used, such as painting, drawing, collage, screen printing etc. The results are often astounding and all are unique (like their creators), and are taken home with a sense of achievement and pride.

It's very special to me. Every time it is something different. We have such a lot of fun

Partners

Public art gallery

In their own voices: Art gallery

Wendy, Sally, and Lester talk about their experience the Artzheimers and Art Making group run in collaboration with Christchurch City Art Gallery.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/_GEezkQXRHI



Theatre

A great idea for…

The creative, imaginative, and emotional parts of a person often remain relatively strong even when the effects of dementia are apparent in other areas [21]. However, attending the theatre with the potential for intolerant staff and patrons and crowds can be a confusing and stressful prospect that tends to be avoided [38]

For example…

The Court Theatre works in partnership with Dementia Canterbury to deliver a targeted theatre and story-telling programme for people living with dementia. This provides a very rich experience drawing on the benefits of artistic stimulation, life story work, and intergenerational connections, which may include:

Performances: A member of staff from the Court Theatre and from Dementia Canterbury meets the group and leads them through to their seats for the play.

Verbatim: Participants meet with the youth actors group and tell anecdotes and stories from their lives. The young actors, coached by Court Theatre staff then produce a performance of the material, re-enacting the stories word for word, with the aid of imagery and music

Costume and Backstage Tour: These tours provide an opportunity for a behind the scenes experience with the enthusiastic and dynamic Court Theatre staff.

Working with the Court Theatre Youth Group was terrific…It helped me, it helped them. I felt proud to see them tell some of my stories.

Partners

Theatre company

Youth actors



Music

A great idea for…

Music can be enjoyable, uplifting and stimulating experience for people living with dementia. It can connect with and strengthen the person's individual and cultural identity and spark reminiscence. Music can be a shared emotional experience that helps connect with others. [38]

For example…

Flourish is an initiative by the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra and Dementia Canterbury. The programme brings live and interactive music to people with dementia over the course of seven weeks. It takes place in the orchestra's rehearsal space in the CSO Centre.

CSO Head of Community Engagement Cathy Irons said she was inspired by seeing the Christchurch Art Gallery's art programme with Dementia Canterbury and wanted to create a similar platform with music. "Music is something that people recognise and remember," she said. "We wanted to provide a platform where not only can people hear music but also interact with it."

CSO musicians have worked very closely with Dementia Canterbury in planning the programme and undertaken specific education so that they are prepared when it came to communicating and working with people with dementia.

It was the highlight of my year. We met the orchestra and heard about the different instruments. It was very special

Partners

Orchestra

Arts venue

In their own voices: Flourish

Wendy talks about her experience with the Flourish group run in collaboration with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/aHNY5yqxzFo

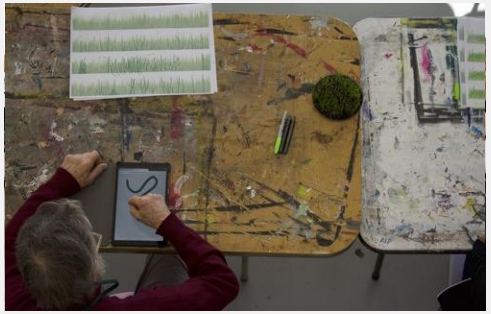
More examples



University of Auckland

CeleBRation Choir

The CeleBRation Choir is a therapeutic community singing group for adults living with an acquired neurological condition. Research shows that singing may help people with voice, speech, language or memory problems and provides positive social experiences.



Massey University, L'Institut Claude Pompidou, Dementia Wellington

MindArT

MindArT: Dual care involves art therapy sessions for eight weeks that combine the principles of mindfulness with drawing that then expands into drawing on a digital interactive tablet. The care partners take part in meditation sessions at the same time.

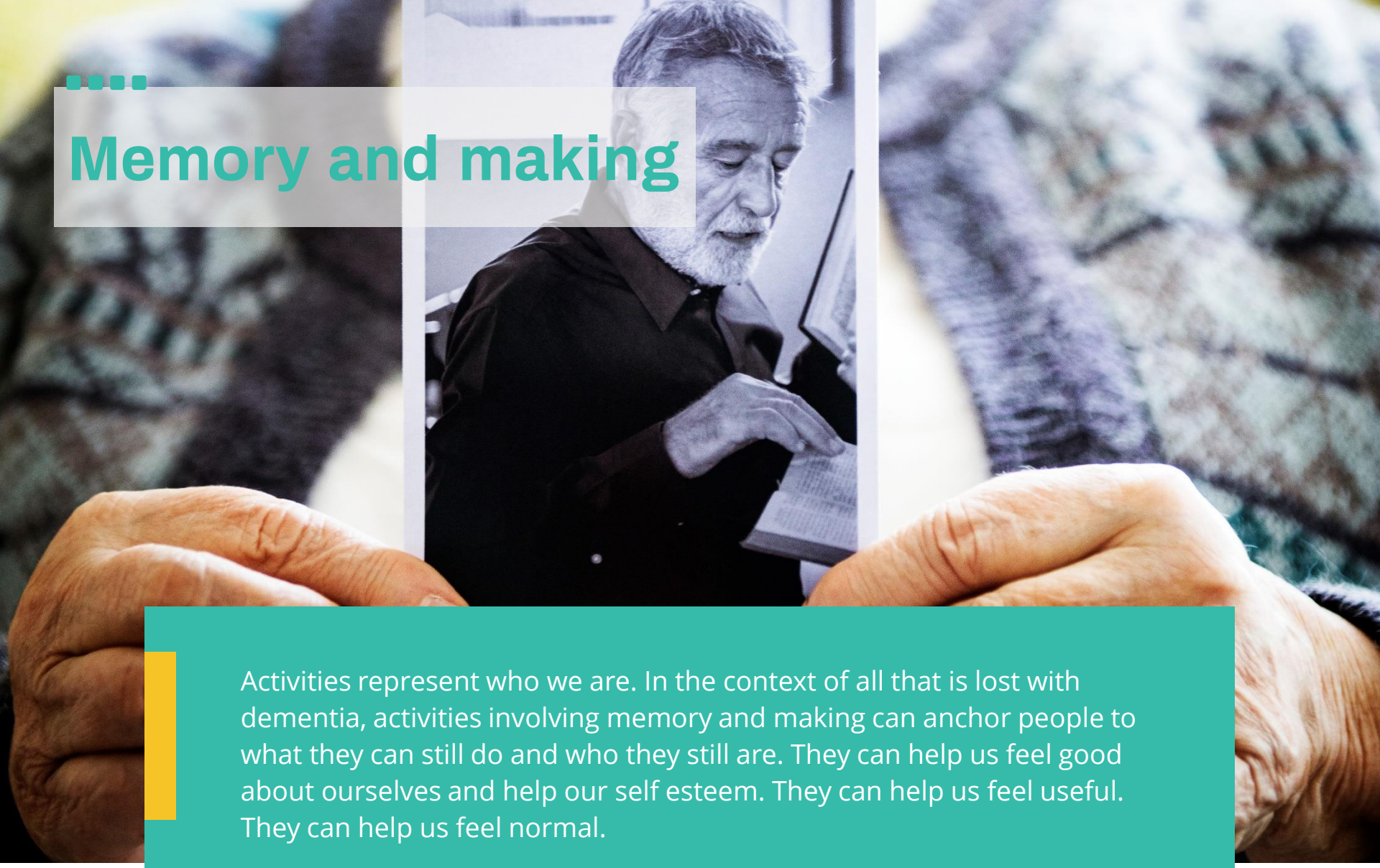


Connect the Dots, Dementia Auckland, Auckland City Council

Making Moments

In the Making Moments programme arts educators facilitate art tours and art making workshops at local arts venues. The group discusses particular works of art and then creates something that links with the themes or techniques. There is also time for a shared morning tea.

Memory and making



Activities represent who we are. In the context of all that is lost with dementia, activities involving memory and making can anchor people to what they can still do and who they still are. They can help us feel good about ourselves and help our self esteem. They can help us feel useful. They can help us feel normal.



Next Chapter

A great idea for…

Reminiscence involves sharing life experiences, stories and memories. Recalling these types of memories is often a strength that remains even as short term memory becomes problematic. Talking about the past in a supportive environment can be an opportunity to engage in an activity that is based on maintained strengths, to talk and give rather than receive and listen, and to relive happy memories and pleasant times. For people with dementia tapping into all the sense can help to trigger memories. Looking at a picture, listening to a poem, touching an object, or even a smell or taste, can all take someone back in time [40,41].

For example…

Next Chapter groups are run at eight public libraries throughout Canterbury and the west Coast. Each group meets fortnightly and is facilitated by the librarians, with support from a Dementia Canterbury staff member.

The librarians set a theme for the group for example Anzac day, spring, dance halls, the beach etc. Literature related to the theme, such as poems, short stories and diaries, are read by the librarian and the group to spark discussion and recollections. Archival resources and other props related to the theme are also utilized to make a very multi-sensory stimuli, including items from the libraries' memory boxes and clips and images played on-screen. The focus is on gathering together people at a similar stage of dementia, and presenting them with a range of evocative library and digital resources, in a stress-free environment that fosters discussion, memories, and humour. The group enjoys refreshments together at the completion of the activity.

I loved it, absolutely loved the reminiscing. It was fun!

Partners

City council libraries



Life Stories

A great idea for…

Life story work involves the person with dementia being supported to gather and review their past life and build a personal life story or biography. The process helps people share their unique and rich stories and positively enhances their sense of identity. It provides opportunities and support for individuals to celebrate their life and reinforce and communicate their identity. This can be a way to help those around them to connect and understand them as a person, and to develop closer relationships. [42-44]

For example…

Life Stories is held weekly for six weeks. Library staff facilitate discussions at the beginning of the session to orientate to a general theme or stage of life. The group of eight to ten story-tellers are each paired with a volunteer and a computer, and over the six-week period, life story books are created using stories and photos. These booklets showcase the story-tellers' lives, evoking memories, and rekindling feelings of self-worth and significance. At the end of each session participants gather together to share stories.

The one on one helper to story teller ratio is essential to this group, with each story-teller paired with a consistent support person to help gather the stories and fill in the life story book. Close alliances are formed and volunteers and family members find it incredibly rewarding. At the end of the six weeks a booklet containing an illustrated version of your "life story" is presented to each participant in a ceremony that includes family, friends, volunteers, and staff.

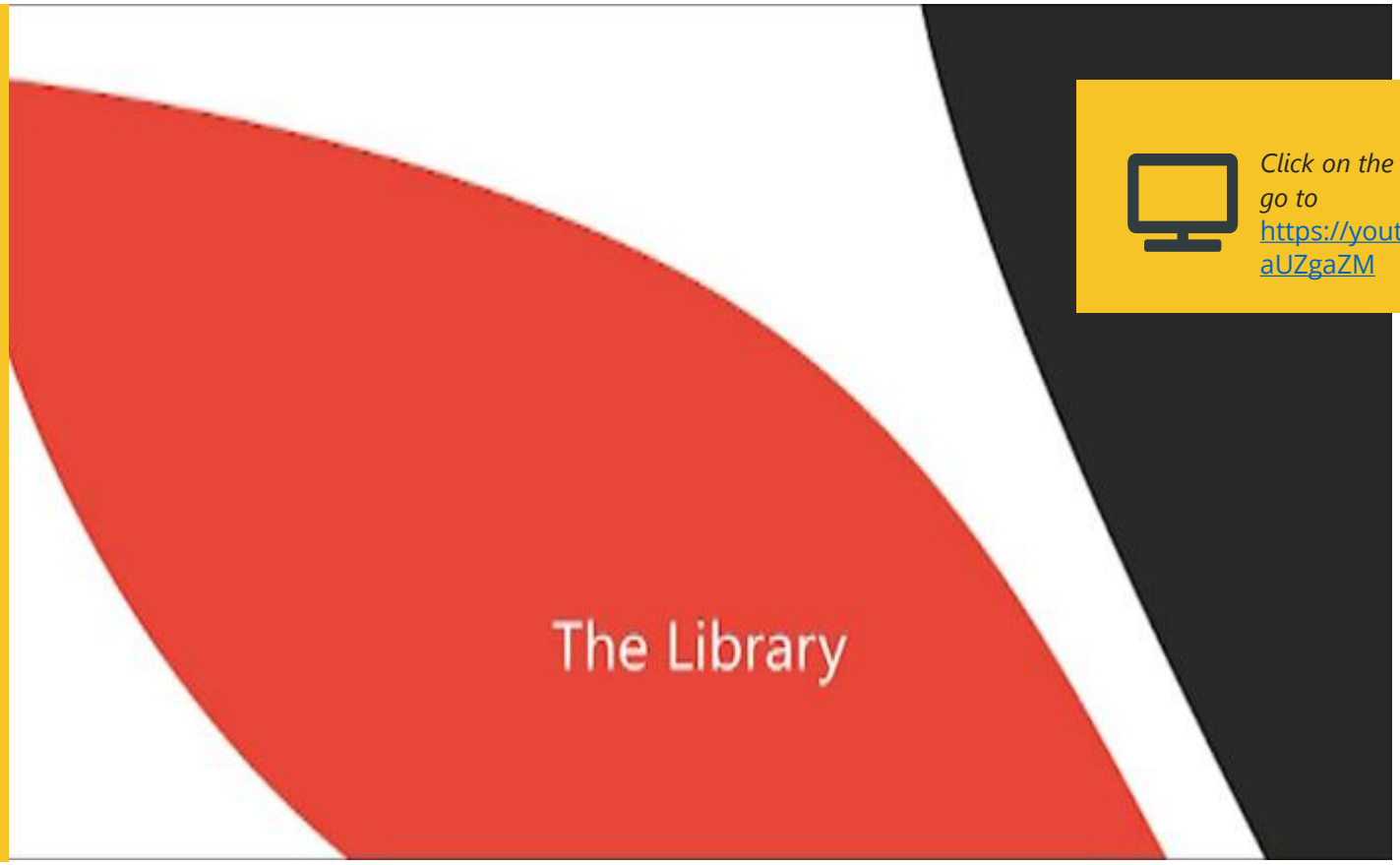
It's lovely to be able to remember all of this. I feel alive again.

Partners

City council libraries

In their own voices: Life Stories

Wendy and Sally talk about their experience their experience with the life story group, run in collaboration with Christchurch City Libraries.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/LVChaUZgaZM

Community partner view

In this video, Kim Slack talks from Christchurch Public Libraries talks about establishing the Next Chapter and Life Stories initiatives.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/xZ2lPgr2_l8



Museums

A great idea for…

Museum collections offer a wealth of objects that can spark memories of people, holidays, cultural meanings and history, and provide links to the present. The chance to engage first hand with artefacts and share stories in a small group can foster social inclusion, a sense of belonging, new learning, and sensory, emotional, and cognitive stimulation. [18]

For example…

The museum guide leads the group to quieter areas of the museum and talks about the background of the exhibits, while the group is encouraged to share their memories and stories.

For the example in one session, the group looked at the ironmongers in the historic Christchurch street and then headed behind the displays for a closer look at some of the exhibits. Memories of their childhood kitchens were ignited, and one or two in the group admitted to having some of these 'historic' items in their kitchen cupboards at home! In another session about early Antarctic explorers the guide dressed up in the clothing that the early explorers wore and led the group through a discussion of their experiences. Group members really enjoy the group: "The guide is very good, full of patience, humour and knowledge. It is one of my favourite things to do in the month."

The information is very interesting and I enjoy being in the museum; hearing about history and seeing the exhibits.

Partners

Museums

You can read about some international museum initiatives here.



DIY

A great idea for…

"Men's Sheds are a safe and friendly environment where men are able to work on meaningful projects at their own pace in their own time in the company of other men. A major objective of Men's Sheds is to advance the wellness and health of their male members by reducing their social isolation and increasing their social engagement… Just like other members, [men living with dementia] can be an asset to their shed as well as greatly benefiting from membership themselves. Being engaged in such a social way has been shown to increase the quality of life and self-worth of men with dementia." [45]

For example…

DIY groups are run twice a month in a partnership between Dementia Canterbury, Bunnings, and Men's Shedz. The sessions see eight enthusiastic men and helpers set to with drills, saws and screws, and within an hour and half to build a project to take home, ranging from bird houses to gumboot stands.

Some men have skills from years in the building trade and clearly enjoy the opportunity to be back using tools again. For others it is an opportunity to try something new, with support from those facilitating the group and also from the other more experienced group members. There is a great sense of comradery and lots of fun is had, alongside many cups of tea and biscuits.

I really enjoy it, it's like being back in my workshop!

Partners

Men's Shedz

Hardware stores

You can read more about dementia and men's sheds here.



Baking

A great idea for…

According to national data, the amount of time spent volunteering peaks in later life [46]. This likely reflects not only the availability of time but also generations of people who have been brought up to value "good citizenship". The most commonly reported benefit of volunteering for older people is experiencing satisfaction [47]. A sense of purpose and self-worth are important components of quality of life, including for people living with dementia [48].

For example…

The McBakers Group operates in the kitchen / dining area at Ronald McDonald House to prepare baking for sick children and their families staying at the facility. The group members are involved in the planning and decision making around food preparation, in addition to actively contributing to the baking process. A Dementia Canterbury staff member and volunteers assist the members of the group to undertake a task of their choosing. One helper to every two to three clients ensures that everyone remains involved in useful tasks.

As volunteer bakers, the group participants have the opportunity to experience the benefits of feeling needed and valued, in addition to enjoying being part of a social group. Some people spoke of enjoying baking again after years of not doing it. Some clients have re-gained confidence in cooking ability and repeat the recipe at home.

I enjoyed going out to baking group…it was an experience… good to get out of the house. [I] reminisced about not knowing how to cook!

Partners

Community / charity recipients

Community venue with cooking facilities



Meeting online

The COVID-19 lockdown meant that face to face groups could not be run in their usual form. Dementia Canterbury rose to the challenge by taking several of the groups online using zoom. This section looks at the potential and challenges of meeting online that were encountered and some practical tips.



Going online in lockdown

A positive response…

Online groups provided a way for people to see people that they didn't live with and engage in enjoyable routines and activities through lock-down. Dementia Canterbury staff and community partners adapted quickly to keep up some activity groups going through the lockdown by going online using the Zoom videoconferencing platform. The response to the online groups was enthusiastic. Rosie, whose husband Ralph is living with dementia, commented that:

"Lockdown has been more traumatic for people with dementia because they can become confused when their routine changes and they can't go to the things they are used to. The groups have provided continuity for Ralph. The format has worked really well, and they are very well-managed so that everyone can contribute."

A rapid learning curve…

Some group activities transferred more easily to an online environment, particularly the discussion orientated groups. Other activities were more challenging online without the individualized support of helpers.

Some people did not have access to the technology or the support to participate. Care partners were often gatekeepers to access, and some care-partners found the idea of learning how to set up and use zoom too daunting.

Humour and flexibility came to the fore to adapt to the new challenges, for example when a group member headed off to make a cup of tea mid-meeting.

It made me feel so much better to be able to see everyone'."

Going online

Here are some useful thing to consider when taking a group online [29]:



Upskill

You will need to be familiar with the platform, and ready to help people from a distance.



Have a helper ready

Some people might have trouble connecting. Have a helper ready who can call them to talk them through any issues to help them connect, without disrupting the group.



Check in

You will need to check in with your audience about their access to the internet, speakers, microphone, and camera as well as their level of comfort and / or support in using technology.



Ask how the group is going

It is harder to pick up body language and other signs to know how the members are finding the group. You may need to check in more explicitly.



Provide instructions

You will need to provide clear instructions about the steps to join the meeting, how to use the programme, and who to contact if they need help.



Help the conversation

Until the group gets comfortable with the online format, you may find that you need to provide more support to keep the conversation going.

More examples

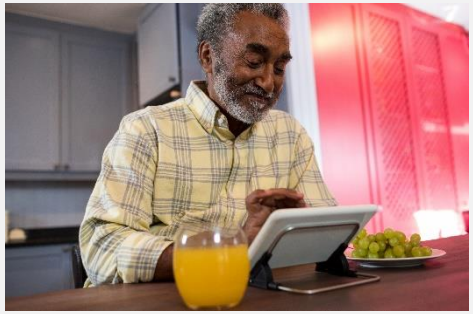
These examples of groups going online show how appreciated a chance to maintain connection was during lockdown. A common theme was the value of pre-preparation of extra resources such as recorded sound tracks and powerpoints to help make the online experience work smoothly.



University of Auckland

CeleBRation Choir

The CeleBRation Choir became an e-choir on Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. 'Lag' issues meant the whole choir couldn't sing songs together but rather sang along while on mute. The facilitators ensured opportunities for the whole group to engage musically and socially.



University of Auckland

CST

Some NZ facilitators took Cognitive Stimulation Therapy online during lockdown. The facilitators made a number of adaptions for the new format including shortening the sessions due to fatigue and providing more cues through powerpoints.



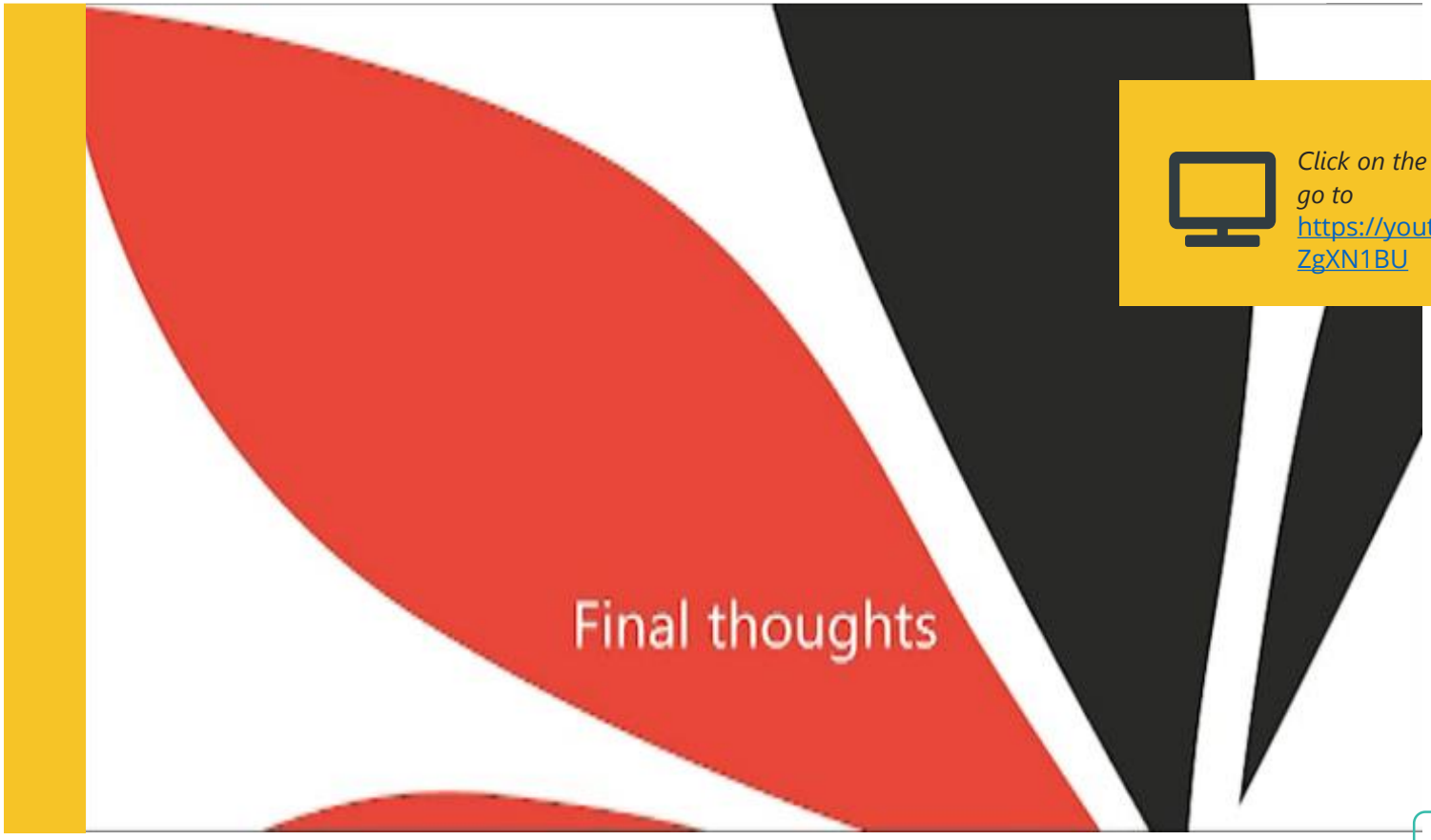
Instructions

A number of organisations have developed simple instructions for using Zoom including:

- Dementia Voices
- Dementia Australia
- Ryman Health Care

In their own voices: Final thoughts

Wendy, Sally, and Lester share their final thoughts about their experiences with the community activity groups.



Click on the video, or go to https://youtu.be/cCwEZgXN1BU



Over to you

...Those who are the helpers here
Are so special and very dear...
So all of you thank you
For meeting each one
I feel so much better
And glad I have come...

From a poem by Joan
A group participant

We hope that this resource has helped you to envision how your organisation could partner a community activity group, to help people with dementia in our community to live well with dementia, have fun, and lead meaningful lives.

If you are interested in starting a community group programme and you would like to talk to Dementia Canterbury about their experience, they would welcome a call.

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- https://www.dementia.org.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/A-Guide-to-Using-Zoom-for-Meetings.pdf
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