

Creative Spaces Project



The Sensory Trust makes places more accessible, attractive and useful for everyone regardless of age, disability or background.

Location

Trevarna Care Home, St. Austell, Cornwall



Aim



Reconnect older people with dementia living in care homes with their local community through the use of outdoor environments and outdoor activities



Creative Spaces is a partnership between Sensory Trust and Cornwall Care. Older people with dementia, care staff, relatives, young people and community members are all involved in achieving the aims of the project. It is helping to remove the fears and social stigma attached to dementia.

Trevarna House is located near St. Austell town centre; close to amenities such as the park, train station, library and leisure centre. As the level of care required by the residents changes they become increasingly isolated (socially and psychologically) from the community that surrounds them. Common misconceptions surrounding dementia only aggravate this, along with a lack of social integration. People with dementia are still valuable members of the community. The creative part of the brain is one of the last areas to be affected by the disease, allowing people to acquire new skills as well as continue to use and share a lifetime of knowledge for longer.

Creative Spaces' outdoor activities are helping to re-establish connections between the community and the residents of Trevarna; bringing them together and breaking down social barriers. These have inspired new ideas and triggered memories relating to outdoor environments which have been incorporated into a new garden at the care home that will not only enhance the quality of their lives but will also provide a place where community events and activities can take place.



Engagement techniques



Outdoor activities and interests that require hands-on use of natural materials can help make stronger emotional connections for people with dementia than those activities that involve simply looking and talking. For those who are losing their verbal skills this is vital and also helps provide a means of communication. These activities help us, as friends, carers, or relatives to reconnect with individuals suffering from dementia and discover what they find attractive outdoors.

Memories also play an important role in maintaining our connections with people and places. This is particularly important for older people with dementia. We can use memories to help people with dementia communicate about the past, present and future. Memories are not always about dwelling on the past but can help us to understand a person in the present and lead to conversations about someone's hopes and dreams.

The activities in the Creative Spaces project used both of these elements to connect older people suffering from dementia with their community and to train care staff in using them to improve the quality of life for their residents. Below are a few examples.



Nature Palettes



This activity is used to connect people, stimulate memories associated with a place and create new memories. It's simple to do which makes it an ideal activity for people of all ages and abilities to do together. Before you start the activity, briefly check the area and ensure that there isn't anything sharp or toxic that the participants might hurt themselves with.

Materials

- A strong, thick piece of card
- Double-sided sticky-tape
- Access to an outside space

Instructions

- Cut the cardboard into any shape you like; we cut ours into the shape of an artist's palette
- Put the sticky-tape in long strips across the card
- Take your palette and find a lovely outdoor space to wander around!
- Pick up anything that appeals to you from the area you're in and attach it to the sticky tape on the palette.



Collecting material for the palette



This builds up a picture of the elements in the landscape that participants find attractive. It's fun to make it a competition: the first person to find a green petal or the first one to fill their palette with six different colours.

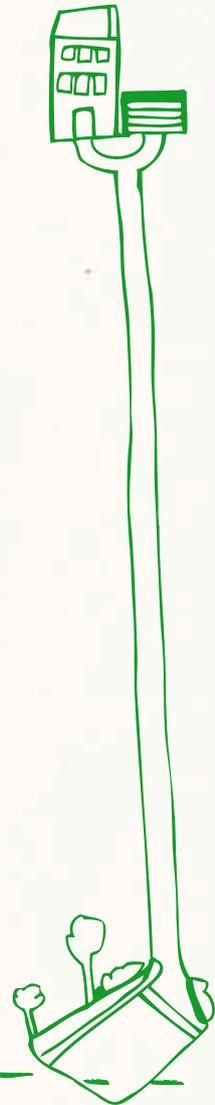
Remember: if you're on someone else's property then make sure your group only picks items off the ground, unless you have permission.



Finished palettes



Finished palettes



After the event, Nature Palettes can be framed as pictures, or made into hanging mobiles or simply hung as a window decoration. Creating Nature Palettes throughout the year builds up an amazing picture of what our local outdoor spaces have to offer.

Memory postcards



The aim of this activity is to help people communicate a memory about a specific subject. For example you may want to find out if people have memories associated with a specific local landscape. This activity is suitable for a one-to-one situation or a small group of 3-4 people.



Making memory postcards

Materials

- A4 blank paper
- Piece of card – any length you want as long as it allows space for several images
We use an A3 card cut into 3 pieces, roughly 35cms x 14cms
- Selection of images relating to the topic (magazines, postcards, old photos, calendars etc., are great for providing these); sort them into categories before the activity
- Glue sticks
- Scissors
- Pens

Instructions



- Lay everything out on a table before you begin
- Cut the A4 paper in half length-ways and fold one piece in half
- Glue this to one side of the card
- On the other side of the card, use the images (and if you can provide smells and textures too even better!) to tell that memory or story. Start on the left side and go across the card
- Once the story has been told through the images write the memory on the back inside the folded paper
- Now you swap memories. Try to guess each other's before looking at the back!
You can use the finished card any time to reconnect someone with a place or just as fun to look at the images and make more memories

Bulb planting



This was a workshop activity for carers of people with dementia, demonstrating how they could add a creative twist to a straightforward task.



Making memory postcards

Materials

- A selection of bulbs
- Plant pots
- Compost (ensure that they contain John Innes and not peat; it holds the water much better)
- A selection of paints (sample pots from your local DIY are great for this)
- Tins of spray paint
- A selection of small paint brushes
- Images (cut out from those trusty magazines, postcards and calendars again)
- Glitter, feathers, anything you can stick to the side of the pot to decorate it
- Garden canes
- Blank, plain index cards
- Pens
- A hole-punch

Instructions



- Use the spray paint to cover the pots in a background colour before you begin (if you don't have much time for the activity prepare the pots the night before) to give them time to dry
- Lay out the paints, images and other items for decorating the pots
- Give everyone a pot, some bulbs to plant in it, an index card, a pen and a garden cane
- Using the images, paints, etc., everyone decorates their pot, basing the design on a memory associated with a particular outdoor place or a time spent outdoors, for example a lady at the workshop designed her pot around her Christmas wedding
- After the pots are decorated then the bulbs can be planted in the pots
- Once this is done, punch two holes along one side of the index card before writing the stories on it. Then thread the garden cane through the holes, making a flag, and insert it into the pot without disturbing the bulbs.

The index card itself can be decorated up before it's made into a flag for added creativity! Everyone then gets to take their pots home which will help them to remember their lovely afternoon spent sharing memories and the place where it occurred.



Bulb Planting



Bulb Planting

Key concepts



- Outdoor spaces and activities that help people connect through memories are valuable resources in engaging people with dementia. Hands-on activities that use images, smells and tactile elements allow people with diminishing verbal skills to participate on an equal basis
- Everyone has a memory associated with an outdoor place or time spent outside, either with family, friends, or by themselves. Making better use of outdoor environments or interests that relate to them will encourage people with dementia to participate
- It is essential to engage people on an equal level
- If you want to understand what people with dementia really value about outdoor spaces you need to support them rather than lead them