

# BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

How to make the most of group work opportunities  
(for staff in elderly residential settings)

- 1** Wherever possible, **seat participants so they can see**, especially if they are in a wheelchair - angle it towards the leader of the activity.
- 2** Ensure **Fire exits are not blocked** by the provider or their equipment, participants, or their chairs.
- 3** **Include everyone and encourage as many participants as possible to join** the event to enhance the atmosphere. A person's ability to 'enjoy meaningful activity' could be simply being there listening or watching. Do not automatically exclude less able participants.
- 4** Be prepared to **move individuals to a more calming area** if they become agitated by increased noise or other changes in the environment that may be caused by the activity.
- 5** **Ensure the timing of tea/coffee breaks are planned** with the provider before the event starts; they may need to hand round items to hold; something that can't take place if residents are trying to juggle tea and biscuits as well! Tea given out from a trolley may also be a noisy distraction - check first.
- 6** At least one **member of staff needs to stay present** with the residents during the provider's visit. This means that any of the residents' care needs can still be met during the event and that health & safety is monitored if there is unusual equipment around. Also, if the provider does not respond appropriately to your residents during their visit, or someone wishes to leave, a member of staff present can avert any further upset to your residents if necessary. They will also know how to call the alarm in any emergency.
- 7** Any professional visiting provider **should be able to show evidence of**; CRB/DBS check, Public Liability Insurance, Health & Safety risk assessment, PAT tested electronic equipment if used and personal enthusiasm of working with the elderly. Is the visiting provider **competent and experienced** to deliver their activity to residents with dementia? Check first. If not, (they may be a volunteer) can you help them prepare?
- 8** **Do not carry on conversations over** the person leading the activity; people with dementia need only one stimulus at a time; other things going on are not only a distraction for them, but add to any confusion they may have and diminish any joy or other gain for them. e.g; if there is a Hoover in the corridor outside - shut the door.
- 9** For staff at the event, the most vital part they can play is to **encourage participation with the least able to communicate** by helping them to join in with musical events by:
  - a) holding residents' hands and moving in time with any music** - like a stationary dance partner. This can trigger physical memories of dancing with a partner.
  - b) Residents often don't applaud or clap along until staff/visitors do** - they might have forgotten social convention or just need a lead to follow because it has become tiring working out what to do. You can **recreate the social habits they used to do** naturally by being the first to respond to live music events for example. If this doesn't happen, they might think it is only a radio on.
  - c) helping the least able to hold things** that may be difficult with arthritic hands etc.
- 10** Feel the fun - **joy and enthusiasm rubs off on others**. Staff who cheerfully engage with what's going on and bounce around to any music

## BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

and clapping is simply a joy for the residents to see too. Enjoy watching the residents enjoyment, 'and start spreading the smiles around.'

**11** [The sensation of moving can be enjoyed by those in wheelchairs](#) if someone moves them appropriately with any music happening.

**12** [Be nearby ready to help](#) participants who are more independent, to ensure their care. They may try to dance unaided (especially round obstacles) or hold unusual equipment.

**13** After a musical event [Keep the moment alive and let people ruminate about what they've absorbed](#). Don't kill the atmosphere by putting the radio back on at the end. A sudden change of music/sounds can abruptly finish the sensation of the event and leave no room for follow up discussion about it (or further singing etc) by those whose memory has now been jogged.

**14** Residents would wish, were they in their own home, to [offer a good welcome](#) and consideration to working visitors. This can be done by staff as an extension of residents' hospitality if they are unable to do so.

**15** It always used to be protocol to [offer a 'vote of thanks'](#) at the end of an event - ask residents if they would like this done or if one of them would like to do it. If so, make space and quiet for this to happen at the end.

*This document was formulated with the input and help of;*

**Rowena Wilson**

*Musical Reminiscence Specialist in elderly residential care/nursing homes*

**Heather Manktelow**

*Occupational Therapist, Trainer and Consultant activitiesforhealth.co.uk*

**Bernice Tape**

*Resident of a care home, aged 90*

**Tina Naldrett**

*Dementia Clinical Lead and Assistant Director of Nursing Community Hospitals and Community Nursing, Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust.*

**Julia Glover**

*Hospital Matron, North Devon Healthcare NHS Trust*

**Erica Wilson**

*Educational document adviser*

**TH Design**

## SUMMARY

- Ensure participants can see with comfort, keeping exits free
- Encourage as many as possible to come and join in; include everyone
- Do not distract participants from main focus
- Time event well and organise refreshments for afterwards, not during
- Ensure at least one member of staff is present. Be ready to move anyone who becomes agitated with the changed environment.
- Help people to participate; thereby enhancing capabilities and enjoyment
- Keep cheerful and upbeat about the activity - your joy will rub off
- Help those in wheelchairs to participate fully
- Ensure safety for everyone without restricting enjoyment of unusual movements
- Afterwards, utilise the change of mood/stimulation rather than end it
- Check visiting activity provider works safely with consideration
- Lead participants in social niceties like clapping, welcoming and thanking visitors on behalf of residents.