



Co-funded by  
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# Case studies for Learning Scenario 2 Storytelling activity.



## Introduction to the location and our partners.

### Location:

**Castletown House in Co. Kildare, Ireland** is a Palladian mansion built in 1722. It is surrounded by extensive parklands that are well used by the local community. The house has a wealth of artefacts and art works that tell the story of the house and its occupants. It also has rooms suitable for art making and the psychological assessments.

There were five OPW tour guides working on the AIDA team. All five were trained in the Azure methodology of running slow looking art tours for people living with dementia. The AIDA team worked in conjunction with the guide staff on site at Castletown House for assistance and information on the art and artefacts. They also provided additional engagement opportunities with other areas in the house. Each time we

were in the house for a slow looking session, participants were introduced to other aspects of the house in a relaxed and casual way. This increased their enjoyment of the experience and was particularly beneficial to the participants spouses.



Castletown House, Co Kildare, Ireland.



THE Alzheimer  
SOCIETY OF IRELAND



### Associate Partner:

We partnered with the **Alzheimer's Society of Ireland (ASI)** to recruit participants and support the AIDA

sessions. ASI provided a support worker whose role was to support the participants to complete the session. She was also able to provide feedback and suggestions that have informed these case studies. This was a successful partnership and we hope to build on this relationship in the future to support future AIDA sessions in OPW sites.



We partnered with **Dr Louise Hopper at Dublin City University (DCU)** for the psychological aspects of the project. She prepared and submitted the Ethical Approval application for the Irish piloting, carried out the assessments in session 2 and session 7, anonymised the resulting data and submitted it to the AIDA project. An assistant psychologist and psychology student carried out all the VAS assessments before and after each session,.

Dr Hopper has been invited to speak at the multiplier event at the conclusion of this project.



VIBORG  
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OPW  
Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí  
Office of Public Works



FONDAZIONE  
PATRIZIO PAOLETTI  
PER LO SVILUPPO E LA COMUNICAZIONE



Spominčica  
ALZHEIMER SLOVENIA



Innovation Frontiers  
Mind is the limit



CRHACKLAB F4D

## Group 1 – Slow Looking Heritage Tour.

### Learnings:

#### Participants:

**3 participants plus spouses, a total of 6 people.**

The group engaged well with each other. The spouses were keen to maintain contact with the group afterwards. Within the slow looking sessions, a group of 6 people worked well in terms of space and room layout.



#### Heritage artefact:

**We gave a slow looking tour of Collen Coach. Afterwards, one of the Castletown guides gave the group an introduction to an exhibition on the career of showjumper Diana Carew Conolly.**



The group were very engaged with the coach and the stories of the lives of those who had travelled in it. The spouses were really interested in the life of Diana Conolly-Carew, as they remembered when she competed for Ireland.

#### Setting:

The first time we used the coach, we placed the seating back against the wall. However, we realised that it was difficult for some people to hear the tour as the space was tall and sound did not travel well. The second time we used the space, we put the chairs closer to the coach in a semi-circle.

#### Group 2: Connection question

Where would you like to go on the coach? Who would you bring?

The sound dynamics were difficult in the stable, due to the height, layout and building materials of the stable.

Test out the seating layout in advance to ensure that everyone can see and hear everything.

One participant got tired as we walked through the stable area looking at the traps. Heritage properties often do not offer many opportunities to sit down.

Arrange some seating areas in advance or alternatively facilitators can move chairs into the areas with the group.

Room temperature could be cooler in some parts of the heritage site.

We advised people to keep their coats on.

Different participants and carers will have differing levels of energy for walking around the heritage site.

We needed to find the balance of offering participants and carers a stimulating experience and stretching people's ability to keep going. Have staff available to return participants to the studio space if they have had enough of the slow looking heritage tour.

## Group 1: Storytelling sessions

### Set up:

We laid out the storytelling objects before the group arrived. We sat everyone at the same table along with three facilitators and the support worker from ASI. We started the session with a demonstration of the storytelling technique.



### Participant stories:

- Reminisce from an amazing hiking holiday over 30 years ago.
- A story about drinking water and taking tablets.
- An imaginative story about animals and people.



## Storytelling stages:



1. Invite the participant to choose one or more objects. This task engages the sense of touch and sight.
2. Invite them to describe the object.
3. As they start talking, use verbal prompts as appropriate to keep the person in the flow of the story.
4. As the story is told, a facilitator writes it down exactly.
5. At the end, the participant is invited to give their story a name.
6. The facilitator who wrote the story down, then reads it back to the person. This gives the participant an opportunity to reflect on what they have created.
7. The story can be typed up if the handwriting is not clear enough.
8. Finally the story is given to the participant to bring home.



## Group 2 – Slow Looking heritage tour of the writing desk



**Participants:**  
4 participants plus spouses, a total of 8 people.  
The group engaged well with each other.

**Setting:**  
The writing desk was located in a side room off the Long Gallery. Participants were walked through the Long Gallery and were introduced to the special features of the room. Afterwards, we returned to the studio space via a different route, and viewed other parts of the house.

**Slow looking tour as storytelling session.**  
The writing desk was an ideal object to tell the story of the family that lived at Castletown House. We imagined the letters that Lady Louisa and her sisters would have exchanged and the news they would have shared. The desk contained a number of secret drawers which got people's imagination fired up. It was a really engaging session.



**Connection question:** Who would you like to write a letter to? or who would you like to get a letter from?

Answers ranged from politicians, world leaders, family members and famous people from history.

## Participant feedback



'I enjoyed hearing other peoples' stories. We all got on with each other'  
**participant**

'I loved the storytelling'  
**participant** who told the story of how he met his wife

'I am good at talking in a group. I liked the group'  
**participant**

'I found the group easy to be part of'  
**Participant**

'fun and light'  
How a **participant** describe the sessions

'We talked about it afterwards'  
**spouse**

'It was nice to meet different people in a small group'  
**participant**

I liked the atmosphere and the friendly people'  
**participant**

'I am very interested in meeting up with other group members in the future'.  
**spouse**

'I like going places'  
**participant**



## Group 2: Storytelling sessions

### Set up:

We laid out the storytelling objects before the group arrived at the studio. We sat everyone at the same table along with three facilitators and the support worker from ASI. Eight people plus facilitators around one table posed some space challenging. However, we felt it was worthwhile keeping the group together.

We started the session with a demonstration of the storytelling technique.

### Storytelling:

The four couples told shared stories. The first couple told the story of how they met and the early years of their courtship.

The other three couples followed and told their stories as a couple. The stories tended to be about events that the couple had shared a long time ago. They laughed and joked together as they pieced their stories back together.

### The stories:

- The Lurch – a story about a disco, the search for car keys and romance.
- Camping in France – the search for a family restaurant.
- Tigger – the cat who brought worms into the house.
- A lunatic gang going for a drive to Doolin.

## Learnings



People need to experience being in a supportive atmosphere to be able to explore new ideas through storytelling.

Build a supportive inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels supported. Seat everyone at the one table. Serving refreshments can also build social solidarity.

People tended to follow each others examples as to what kind of story to tell.

Use open questions and imagination prompts to lead participants in their own unique direction.

Some participants may find waiting to take their turn difficult.

Try to get to all the participants in a timely manner, being aware of anyone who seems tired. If time allows, call on the spouses later.

For larger groups, you will need to keep a close eye on timings.

One facilitator can be appointed time keeper for the whole two hour session.



## Data protection.

To protect all personal data and comply with the requirements of the EU General Data Protection Regulations.

1. Prepare a Data Flow Chart and Data Impact Assessment.
2. Alzheimer’s Society of Ireland agreed to register and hold all participant data, we only recorded first names and contact phone numbers. These were stored in an OPW password protected computer.
3. All psychological data was held securely by Dublin City University and communicated directly to Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti for research purposes. All names were removed and replaced by unique participant codes.
4. The data protection provisions were discussed with participants when they sign the project consent forms with the psychology team.
5. The guides also discussed the data protection procedures with the participants and their families at the first session. We wanted them to feel comfortable that this was a safe place.

## Working with other staff on at the heritage site.

They will be able to contribute to the sessions.

1. Other staff onsite should be trained in dementia awareness, as they may have contact with the participants at different times. They may be assisting the group moving around the site. We found that onsite staff were happy to engage with participants and their families, telling them additional stories about the house.
2. Engaging with other onsite staff (outside the facilitator group) is also very useful when designing the sessions and how they will operate. They will have more in-depth knowledge of the heritage site.
3. Share general feedback from the sessions with the wider staff group at the heritage site. This helped build an understanding of the sessions with the whole organisation and support future sessions.



## Photographing the sessions and the outputs.

Consider whether to take photographs of the participants art works. These can be used to record the work carried out, be part of the final report of the project or be used to create digital galleries of the project.

1. Taking photographs of the art works produced can only be done with the permission of the participant. Where someone has dementia, it can be difficult to establish whether they are giving informed consent. If the photograph is to be used in a report or to create digital galleries, the permission must be for the stated use. It also needs to be a continuing permission for the image to be retained and used into the future.
2. The challenge with recording people's work is to retain the focus on the process of creating the art and not focus on the output. If we take photos (subject to permissions) then people will see the output as the way their work is recorded. They may then feel self conscious of how their image looks and be open to feelings of self-criticism. One participant recalled during the session feeling that he was no good at art because of comments made to him by a teacher while in school over 60 years ago.
3. In this project, we decided not to feature participants finished photographs of the output. We suggested instead that the participants take the art works home and show them to family members. This helps them to maintain control of their own work.

## Refreshments.

These are useful to help keep everyone's energy up. They are also an important social moment for participant and family members to connect with each other.

1. If refreshments are being served, the timing needs to be build into the session planning.
2. The social aspect of eating and drinking together is an important time to engage with others and build social connections for the future.
3. Sometimes when people are eating and drinking, they get comfortable with the social setting and may find the transition back to an activity difficult.
4. Some people may not be able to carry on an art activity at the same time as eating and drinking.
5. Having drinks on the table at the same time as the art materials could result in a spill that might embarrass someone who feels self conscious.



## Challenges

## Solutions

### Accessibility to the AIDA Sessions.

Some heritage sites are not suitable for wheelchairs or mobility scooters.

1. Castletown House has a car park beside the stable block where the sessions met. We arranged for participants to have access to the car park. Public transport was about 15 minutes walk away. When we were recruiting participants, we informed them of the transport options
2. We informed people at the recruitment stage that the site was not suitable for wheelchairs or mobility scooters. This was also mentioned in the recruitment flyer.

### Participants may have visual or hearing issues.

1. When you are taking bookings, check whether anyone has visual or hearing issues.
2. At the first session, check if anyone has hearing issues. It may be necessary to locate them so that you are on their better side for hearing.
3. Ensure that all colouring in sheets have strong lines and are printed on a series of different colours, so that participants can choose which they find easiest to see.
4. Ensure the object of the slow looking tour is easily visible.
5. At the outset of the slow looking tour, check with everyone that they can see and hear everything.

### Participants or spouses may get tired.

On one occasion, a participant went to sit on a historic chair and had to be stopped by his wife and a staff member.

1. Be mindful of the people's energy levels.
2. We moved some chairs with us as we moved into different areas, so that participants always had somewhere to sit down.
3. Refreshments will also help keep people's energy levels up.





## Challenges

## Solutions



<p><b>Some people will find the words ‘dementia’ or ‘Alzheimer’s’ difficult to accept.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Some participants or family members may be uncomfortable with the words ‘Alzheimer’s’ or ‘dementia’ either because they are unaware of the diagnosis or unhappy with the fact that they are being labelled as such.</li> <li>2. We were aware of two participants that had an issue with these words. We agreed with the guides, ASI and DCU staff not to use these words.</li> <li>3. It was however an issue with the consent forms and the title of the project. We had to explain the project in very general terms; we said we were researching whether people find it helpful to engage with arts and heritage.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Some participants may have different carers attending the sessions.</b></p> <p>One participant was supported on different occasions by her husband, daughter and carer. It may have meant that the couple were less engaged with the process.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This is the reality of caring for people living with dementia. Spouses need to be supported by wider family members and carers.</li> <li>2. In these circumstances, it is useful to stay in touch with the spouse with updates on what was included in each session.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Finding storytelling prompts that relate to the heritage site and the objects and paintings that were used in the tour.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We bought toy representations of travel and writing in toy shops, but there is a concern that we don’t want to treat the participants like children.</li> <li>2. Collect old pictures or postcards that relate to the theme of the tour or heritage site.</li> <li>3. Consider whether to get the historical artefact from the heritage site 3D printed.</li> </ol>



## Challenges

## Solutions



<p><b>Not everyone who volunteered for the study was suitable.</b></p> <p>How to decide who to include</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recruitment for the sessions was dictated by the terms of the study. We were looking for people who were living with mild to moderate forms of Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia. We needed a commitment to attend the sessions with their carer or family member and both people would engage with the program.</li> <li>2. We were contacted by a woman who felt she had some symptoms of cognitive impairment but chose not to attend for an assessment for dementia with her GP. She was living independently at home. We did not include her in the study group as she did not have a diagnosis. Her personal assessment of her situation was not sufficient to meet the terms of the study. However, there would be no reason to exclude her from sessions that were run as part of an education programme in a heritage site.</li> <li>3. We were contacted by a woman whose husband was in a nursing home. He had not been functioning well at home and she had recently taken the difficult decision to place him a care setting. She takes him out once a week for a dementia choir. She said that she felt his dementia was more advanced. We discussed what the program would involve and she felt that he would not be able to manage the tours and activities.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Promoting your event to reach your target audience.</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create links with organisations that assist people living with dementia and their families, such as the local Alzheimer's society. Invite staff from the Alzheimer's societies to attend the sessions. This will help them understand what is on offer and they will be able to explain what is involved to their clients.</li> <li>2. Contact local community groups such as Alzheimer’s choirs or dementia cafés and ask permission to come and talk to their group about what you have to offer.</li> <li>3. Use social media to advertise the sessions. However, social media alone will probably not reach sufficient numbers of participants.</li> </ol>

