

## Living memories: guidance checklist for heritage sites Using reminiscence therapy with your elderly visitors

Reminiscence therapy is a treatment that uses all the senses – sight, touch, taste, smell and sound – to help elderly individuals, especially those with dementia, remember events, people and places from their past lives. Heritage sites with historical collections, are THE places that elderly people can visit to experience this.

In many cases, recent memories deteriorate first for elderly people. With minimal prompting – including simple questions, treasured objects, photos, songs or the beginning of a family story – individuals may recall memories from childhood and young adulthood.

Reminiscing about memories can help people feel more confident in their abilities and provide them with the opportunity to talk about what holds meaning for them. In addition, engaging in conversation about the past can provide relief from boredom and symptoms of depression, and it helps preserve stories for later generations.

Reminiscence therapy doesn't have to be complicated, it can include simple activities, such as conversation, as well as more advanced clinical therapies to help bring memories from the distant past into present awareness. Storytelling about past events can help individuals feel less isolated and more connected to the present.

### What's in it for you?

- They will spend money with you
- They will become an advocate of yours
- They will bring repeat customers and loyalty
- They will add knowledge to your understanding of your sites and collections
- Their families and carers will know about you and can spread the word
- You will have contributed to your social responsibility

### What to do:

This simple checklist is designed for heritage site staff as a starter to begin to consider where their site and collection can add value to an elderly person beyond simply visiting.



Choose 5 spaces or artefacts in your collection (The best ones are those within living memory):	What can they see?	What can they touch? (if permitted)	What can they hear?	What can they smell?
1. Old bicycle (example)	Old bicycle on display in our transport gallery	The handle bars, the wheel	The ringing of the bicycle bell, the wheel turning and chain clanking	The oil from the chain, rust on the bicycle
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

**Themes, spaces or artefacts we found that worked well:**

- Work e.g. mining, textiles, factories, offices
- Family e.g. children, weddings
- Toys, games and sport
- Household items
- Food
- Clothing
- Holidays
- Health and beauty – particularly things associated with a smell e.g. soap, perfume, medicine, ointment
- Movies and TV
- Icons e.g. Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley
- Songs and music

## Now use this information you have gathered to:

- Start a conversation with an elderly visitor, their family or carer or entire visiting group
- Theme an event
- Create a booked session, short talk or workshop
- Put on themed food or drink in your café
- Write or rewrite the object labels/information
- Update your website
- Create a memory scrapbook for elderly visitors to look at
- Put on a film screening
- Add music and smells into your displays
- Record the memories or conversations on a digital camera or voice recorder

## Starting the conversation:

- Make eye contact
- Try and come down to their level if in a wheel chair
- Show interest and patience
- Use prompt questions - do you remember...? Where were you when...? Did you use one of these...? What's this for...? What was your favourite...? How much were...? What was your first...?