HSE | Men's Health & Wellbeing Webinar

WEBINAR INVITATION

Making a Difference Together International Men's Day

With guest speaker Andy Moran, Mayo Football Manager



Tuesday 17 November 2026

12:00pm – 1:00pm

To mark International Men's Day 2026, HSE Health & Wellbeing, in conjunction with the Men's Development Network, SETU and the Men's Health Forum in Ireland, are hosting this Men's Health webinar.

Join us for a discussion on men's health and wellbeing, hear about current initiatives across Ireland, and gain practical tips and support.

The webinar will include:

- An interview with Andy Moran
- Updates from partner organisations (SETU, Tosú, Lads & Dads and Movember)
- Men's health and wellbeing initiatives in Ireland
- Practical takeaways and support information

The Time Together Guide



Launched by Engaging Dementia, the Time Together Guide is a practical resource to help family, friends, volunteers and caregivers spend meaningful time together and stay connected.

Register Here

HSE | Men's Development Network | SETU | Men's Health Forum in Ireland | Tosú | Lads & Dads | MOVEMBER

TIME TOGETHER

A simple guide for visiting someone with memory difficulties or dementia



CLICK HERE TO OPEN THE BOOKLET

TIME TOGETHER

A simple guide for visiting someone with memory difficulties or dementia

Engaging Dementia
Let's Keep Connecting



Engaging Dementia
Let's Keep Connecting

About Engaging Dementia
Engaging Dementia's mission is to facilitate communication, engagement, and connection for people with dementia and their carers through education, resources and community activities.

Engaging Dementia is a not-for-profit organisation and registered charity (Registered Charity No. 20033439, Revenue CHY 11938).

This resource was developed by Engaging Dementia in collaboration with Mary Threadgold RSC. Engaging Dementia would also like to thank ALONE, who facilitated the involvement of ALONE befrienders in this project.

www.engagingdementia.ie

@EngagingDemIrl EngagingDementiaIreland EngagingDementia

Mary Threadgold RSC

Mary Threadgold was born in Dublin and joined the Religious Sisters of Charity in the 1950s. After her Profession as a Religious Sister of Charity (RSC), she qualified as a Speech and Language Therapist in London, later doing an MSc in Human Communication at the University of London.

Mary worked with a wide variety of people with communication disorders until she moved to Ballybane, Galway in the 1980s where she specialised in supporting people with intellectual disabilities. In the absence of meaningful language, she noticed the positive effect of music and touch as a facilitator of communication for young people with intellectual disabilities.

She was often struck by the sight of older people living with dementia in nursing homes, gathered together in day rooms without interaction, activities, or communication. Influenced by her training and her personal conviction that love and respect needed to underpin any professional approach to meeting the communication needs of such a group of older people, she turned her attention to them.

In 1990 Mary decided to design a therapeutic intervention for this group. Drawing on her expertise and experience, she designed a communication activity which was based on sensory engagement, structure and repetition, with an emphasis on non-verbal communication and quality.

Mary passed away on 22 August 2026 at the age of 87, but her legacy lives on through her teachings, the Sonas Programme, and the many people whose lives have been touched by her work. Her belief in the importance of connection, dignity and truly seeing the person behind dementia will continue to inspire us.



Dedication

This guide was inspired by Mary Threadgold's visits to her brother, who lived with dementia. Her experience shaped the ideas and practical tips in this booklet.

Fr. Jerry Threadgold was a people-centred man of spirituality and music, who identified with the work of Engaging Dementia, and lived his final years with Lewy Body Disease.

Mary Threadgold RSC



Contents of this booklet

- Who is this guide for?
- Why this guide?
- Understanding dementia
- Communication
- Ways to connect
    a. Using routine
    b. The senses
    c. Music
    d. Poetry
    e. Reminiscence
    f. Nature
    g. Spirituality
- Your role as a visitor
- A simple 6-step guide
- Real-life example



"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, 'What! You too? I thought I was the only one."
C.S. Lewis

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone visiting a person with dementia. You might be:

- A family member
- A friend
- A volunteer or befriender

Your role is simple:
Spend time together and build a meaningful connection.

Why this guide?

This guide gives you a simple structure for visits.

It helps you:

- Plan your visits
- Communicate more easily
- Find ways to connect

You can use a journal and a small bag of items to support your visits.

Understanding dementia

Dementia affects memory, thinking, and communication. Each person's experience is different.

People with dementia can still enjoy relationships and meaningful time with others.

Your role is to help them feel:

- Connected
- Valued
- Comfortable

What matters most is how you communicate, not what you say.

Focus on:

- A warm tone of voice
- Eye contact
- A calm presence

Even if details are forgotten, feelings remain.

Communication: the most important part of your visit

"It's the way you talk to us, not what you say that we will remember. We know the feeling, but don't know the plot. Your smile, your laugh and your touch are what we will connect with."



Christine Bryden
who has Alzheimer's, in her book Dancing with Dementia

Try to understand the feeling behind what the person says:

For example:

- Longing for mother or home can demonstrate a need for comfort, safety or security.
- Anxieties about children can be an expression of identity as a caring, nurturing individual.
- A person who was constantly busy throughout the day might be expressing a need for occupation and stimulation.
- The person who is looking for lost objects, like a handbag, might be expressing the need for attachment.

Always respond to the feeling, not just the words.

Nonverbal communication?

You communicate even when you don't speak.
This includes:

- Facial expression
- Eye contact
- Tone of voice
- Body language

A smile, a gentle tone, or holding a hand can mean a lot.

Tips for Engagement and Communication

- Sit close and at the same level
- Make eye contact
- Speak clearly and slowly
- Use short sentences
- Give time to respond
- Don’t rush
- Use silence when needed
- Change activity if conversation is difficult

Use routine

Routine helps people feel safe. Try to:

- Visit at the same time each week
- Be on time
- Follow a familiar structure

This builds trust over time.

Use the senses

Sensory experiences can help people engage and remember.
You can use:

- Music
- Photos
- Food or treats
- Hand massage
- Familiar smells (e.g. coffee, perfume)

Keep it simple and safe.

> *“If the loop of communication has any beginning, it starts with our senses.”*
>
> *Joseph O’Connor and John Seymour, Introducing Neuro-Linguistic Programming, 1990*

> *You know what music is? God's little reminder that there's something else besides us in this universe; harmonic connection between all living beings, everywhere, even the stars.*
>
> *Robin Williams (in August Rush)*

Music



Music is a powerful way to connect. Choose music the person enjoyed when they were younger.

You can:

- Play songs
- Sing together
- Talk about memories linked to music

> *Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.*
>
> *Robert Frost*

Poetry

Poetry can be calming and familiar. People may remember poems from school.

You can:

- Read a short poem
- Say it together



Reminiscence can enrich relationships, improve communication and enhance caring.

Faith Gibson

Reminiscence

Talking about the past can bring comfort.
You can talk about:

- Childhood
- Family
- Work
- Hobbies

Listen with kindness and interest.

"Self knows the self is not enough"

Brendan Kennelly

"We usually refer to our spirit as soul…the soul is our innermost being. Everybody has a soul whether they believe in God or not…we know our soul best as the part of us that loves."

F. MacEoinin

Spirituality

Spiritual needs are important for many people.
This might include:



- Prayer
- Hymns
- Quiet reflection
- Enjoying beauty (music, nature, art)

Keep it simple and respectful.

Nature

Being outdoors can improve mood. If possible:

- Go for a short walk
- Sit outside
- Look at plants or flowers

Bring nature indoors if the person cannot go outside

> *There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.*
>
> *Rachel Carson*
>
> *I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order.*
>
> *John Burroughs*



Qualities to bring to your visits

- Be yourself
- Be calm and patient
- Listen carefully
- Be kind and understanding
- Be reliable (keep your visits regular)
- Be fully present
- Be yourself

Your attitude matters more than any activity.

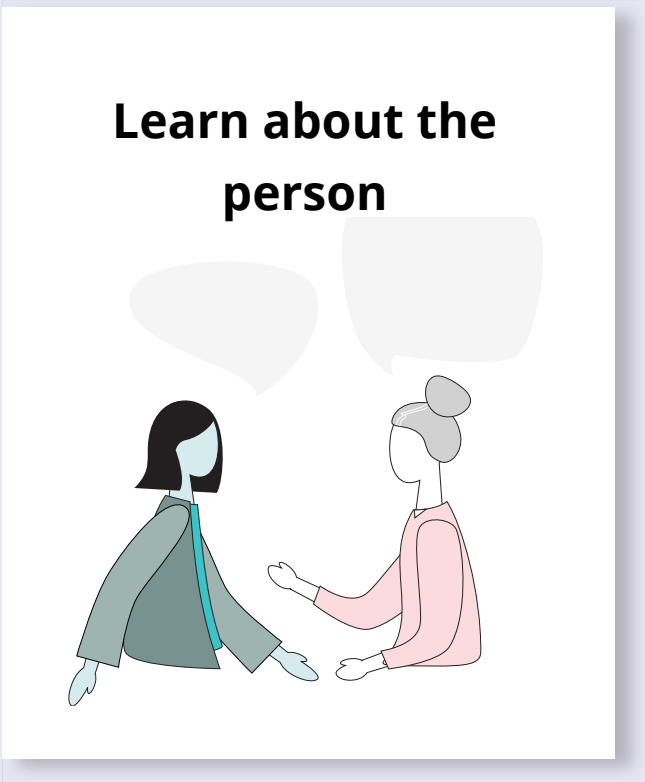


6 Simple Steps for Each Visit

1. Learn about the person
2. Plan your visit
3. Bring a few items
4. During the visit
5. After the visit
6. Reflect and improve



Step 1:

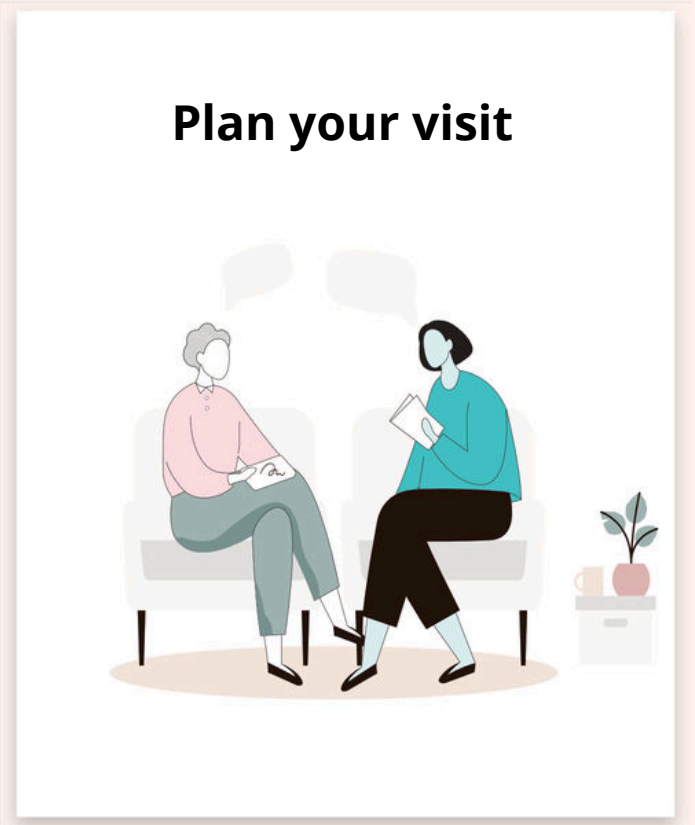


Even if you know someone well, there are still things to discover about them. Find out:

- Their background
- Interests
- Likes and dislikes

Use this to guide your visits.

Step 2:

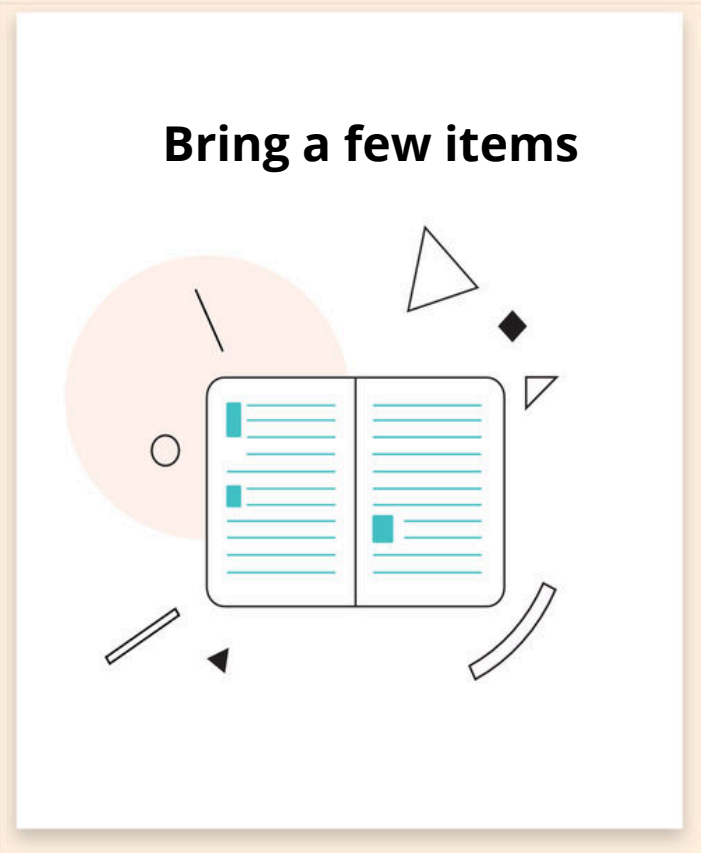


Think about:

- What you might talk about
- What you might do

Keep it simple, but have a few options planned.

Step 3:

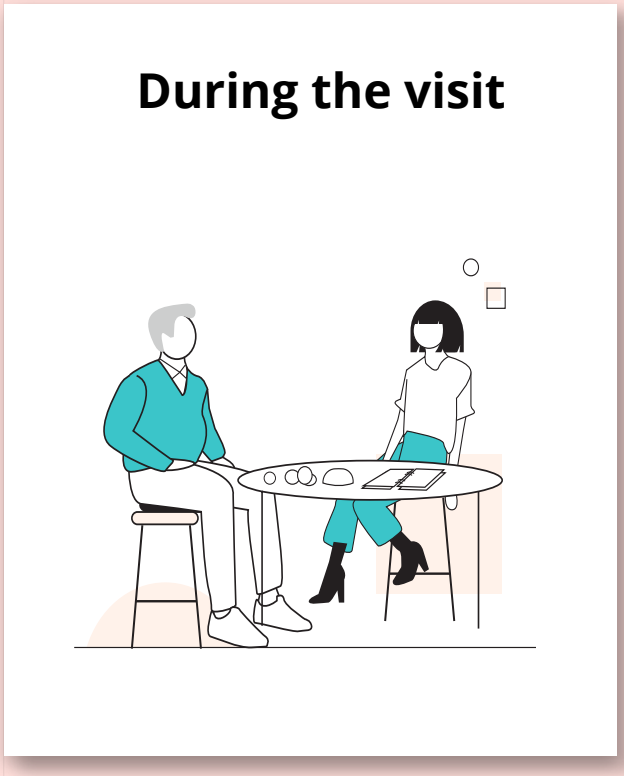


Bring a small bag with:

- Photos
- Music
- Simple objects

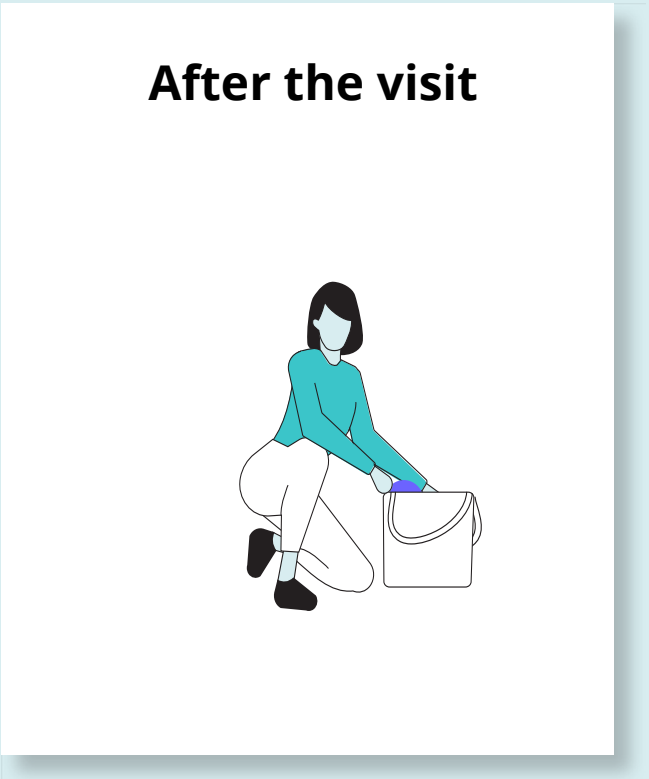
These help start conversation. You can record these item in the Visit Planner.

Step 4:



- Start with something familiar
- Speak gently
- Use the person’s name
- Follow their mood and pace
- Focus on being present

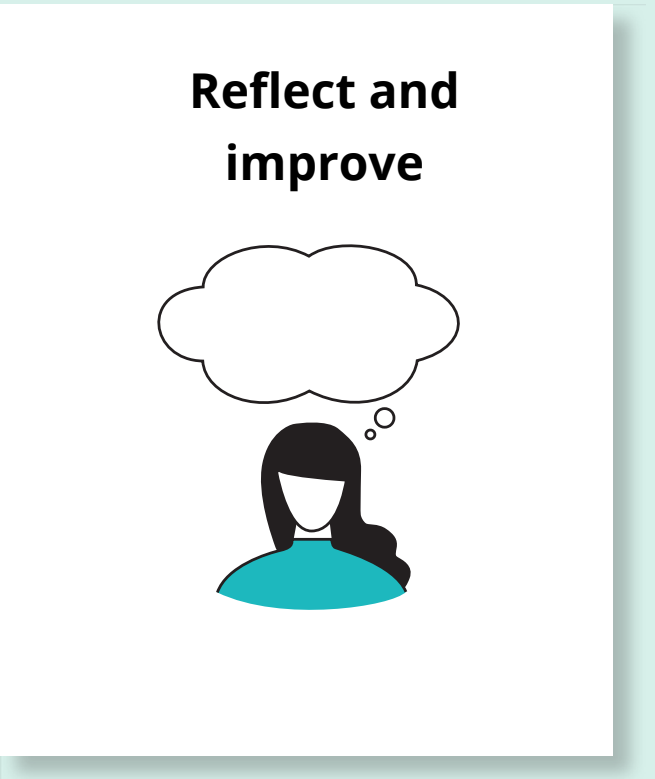
Step 5:



Write down:

- What worked well
- What the person enjoyed
- Any new information you gathered

Step 6:



Review your notes from time to time and think about:

- How the visits are going
- What you can change
- What to try next time

Life Story

The life story sheet is a place to gather information about the person's family, their occupation, where they grew up, activities they enjoyed either in earlier years or now. Photographs and personal memorabilia are especially valuable.

Here are some questions to get you started with learning about the person during your first visits:

- Full name
- Nickname
- Where and when were you born?
- Father’s name, describe him
- Mother’s name, describe her
- Brothers/sisters
- Grandparents
- House/neighbourhood you grew up in
- Games/Pets
- School memories
- Favourite music
- Married?
- Children?
- Grandchildren?
- Job? Career?
- Hobbies? Interests?
- Favourite books or movies?
- Travel? Favourite trips?
- Special events?
- Favourite holiday?
- Favourite season?
- Religion/Faith?
- What makes you Happy? Sad? Safe? Angry?

Learning about the person's cognitive or sensory difficulties

Things you might ask

- Does the person wear a hearing aid?
- Are the batteries charged?
- Does the person wear glasses?
- What type of communication difficulties does the person have?
- Does the person have other health issues that you would need to be aware of?

Record all of this information in your journal

“True listening requires a setting aside of oneself and a total acceptance of the person”

M.Scott Peck

“Visiting is for nourishing love and relationships”

Eileen Shamy

A real-life example

Mary visited her brother regularly while he lived with dementia.

1. Getting to know the person

Mary's brother Jerry was a Catholic priest and a musician with a Masters in Sacred Music for which he studied in Rome.
He developed a great interest in all things Italian (including Italian food) as well as in foreign travel. His interest in music was eclectic.



Although he was a very sociable person, he did not enjoy group activities in the nursing home, apart from parties in the auditorium.
Over time Mary learnt new things about Jerry, especially things that he enjoyed and that engaged him.

2. The visit

Mary visited every Monday, Tuesday and Friday at 2pm. The visit was about 90 minutes.

Mary drew on the key elements of the Sonas Programme, which are sensory stimulation, familiarity, repetition and a structure to the visit. She developed a visit planner, which became the basis for the visit planner included in this resource.

Mary also drew on what she knew about her brother's interests, preferences and personality. Over time, Jerry became familiar with the routine and this helped to build his sense of confidence and comfort during the visit. Mary adapted the structure and elements of her visit over time as she came to know his preferences, and in response to his changing needs with the advancing dementia.

Props and prompts

Because of Jerry's interest in food and food preparation, Mary brought a lunch box containing food items that would constitute a snack. She noticed that he watched as she prepared this snack, which helped his concentration. The snack included cream cheese and cheese biscuits, grapes, dates, crisps, cooked ham, salami, olives. Mary arranged them on a china bread plate from his cabinet and offered them to him one by one.

For years this became the opening routine of the visit. When swallowing became a problem, these items were replaced with yogurt with fruit until that too had to be discontinued. Jerry also liked good coffee, so Mary made him a cup of Lavazza in the nearby kitchen. Then she washed the dishes in his ensuite bathroom. Mary felt that hearing this activity focused his attention and triggered memories for him, even if they were not always expressed.

The food preparation and enjoying it together involved stimulation of all five senses: taste, sight (the plate of food), hearing (washing the dishes – a homely sound), touch (the texture of the food items), and smell (the coffee). There was quality interaction through small talk while the food was being prepared, supported by the unhurried nature of the experience. Mary used non-verbal communication, listening for clues from Jerry and responding to them.



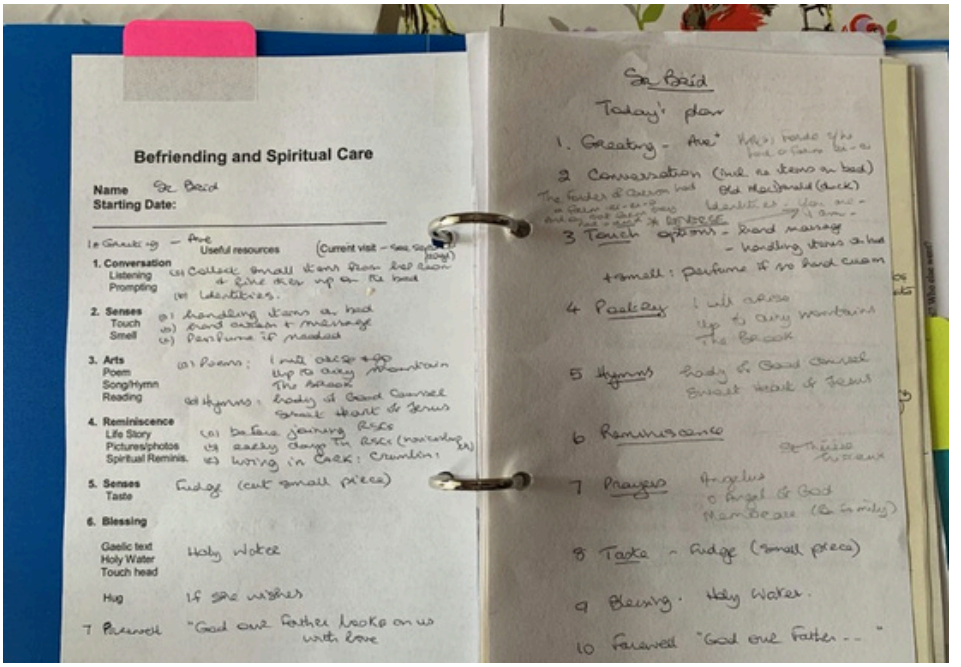
For example, he became tired of cream crackers at one stage and although he never said that to her, she could tell from his non verbal communication. The non-verbal communication also included Mary's own tone of voice, body language and facial expression as she listened to him. She tried to be aware of maintaining love, respect and understanding in her non-verbals.

Mary knew from the time she had spent with Jerry before he moved to the nursing home that he liked to 'channel flick' on the TV. This could have been due to varying interest but also a short attention span. In the nursing home when he no longer knew how to manage the remote control, they usually spent some time browsing the channels and stopping for varying amounts of time on programmes that interested him – nature, comedy, World Wars I and II, history, music, religion, travel. On Sundays he enjoyed 'Songs of Praise', a programme consisting of hymn singing and interviews. This kept his attention for the duration of the entire programme.

In the earlier stages of Jerry's time in the nursing home they sometimes made phone calls to relatives and friends at home and abroad. They also planned and reminisced about visits to his holiday home in Co. Wexford.



Other friends of Jerry's also did activities with him. One brought flowers and arranged them as he watched, sang parts of choral works that they both knew, played classical CDs that triggered memories, and brought gourmet savouries that he enjoyed. He also liked to listen as short items were read for him out of the daily newspaper. Browsing through old photograph albums was another activity they enjoyed together. These visits drew on the visitor's creativity and appreciation of the beauty of nature. Another friend brought along her small dog. He always enjoyed this interaction.



Reflections

Mary kept a journal, where she kept notes of her visits, things she learned about Jerry, what she noticed that he enjoyed, ideas for props and prompts, and her visit plans. This resource has been developed based on all of Mary's learnings.

A sample visit plan

The visitor and person being visited live in a rural part of Ireland. The annual ploughing championships, a highlight in the social calendar of the area, is taking place that week.

	Today's visit
Meet and greet	Show my new watch
Conversation (topic)	Ploughing championships (bring newspaper)
Senses (something to see or hear)	Picture book (scenes from Ireland)
Arts (music/poem/song/reading)	Poem – I will arise now and go Song – Up the airy mountain (lyric sheet, bring tambourine)
Reminiscence (life story, pictures, photos)	Summer holidays in Tramore
Nature / spirituality	A few fallen leaves of different colours
Senses (something to touch, taste or smell)	Bring two mandarin oranges to peel together. Hand cream
Farewell	

It is important to remember that it is not necessary to complete every item you have planned for the visit. This is more of a guide to help you, with reminders of the props and prompts you might use that day, and to keep the conversation flowing.

VISIT PLAN TEMPLATE

	Today's visit
Meet and greet	
Conversation (topic)	
Senses (something to see or hear)	
Arts (music/poem/song/reading)	
Reminiscence (life story, pictures, photos)	
Nature / spirituality	
Senses (something to touch, taste or smell)	
Farewell	

You don't need to do anything complicated.
What matters most is:

- Your presence
- Your kindness
- Your time

Time together is what makes the difference.

GATHERING ITEMS FOR YOUR *TIME TOGETHER* BAG OF PROPS AND PROMPTS

Note: In your journal, keep notes of ideas for ways to connect. Look out for props and prompts you feel might be helpful for that person. Between visits try and find these items and add them to your *Time Together* bag.

Visit Plan	Life Story	Preferences/ Choices	Props and prompts you might use
Topics for conversation			
Senses: • Sight • Sound • Smell • Touch • Taste			
The arts			
Reminiscence			

“And did you get what you wanted from
this life even so?”
“I did.”
And what did you want?”
“To call myself beloved, to feel myself
Beloved on the earth”

Late Fragment
by Raymond Carver

TIME TOGETHER

RESOURCES

Engaging™ Dementia



VISIT PLAN TEMPLATE

	Today's visit
Meet and greet	
Conversation (topic)	
Senses (something to see or hear)	
Arts (music/poem/song/reading)	
Reminiscence (life story, pictures, photos)	
Nature / spirituality	
Senses (something to touch, taste or smell)	
Farewell	

ITEMS FOR YOUR *TIME TOGETHER* BAG OF PROPS AND PROMPTS

Visit Plan	Life Story	Preferences/ Choices	Props and prompts you might use
Topics for conversation			
Senses: • Sight • Sound • Smell • Touch • Taste			
The arts			
Reminiscence			

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