

South Gloucestershire Second World War Stories

The Value of Reminiscence

Reminiscence encourages people to recollect and share memories. It can be stimulating, promote great social interaction and help to strengthen friendships. Wonderful, touching and unexpected stories can bubble to the surface through this work



Feedback from our Second World War Reminiscence Sessions

I don't normally talk about the war but I did this afternoon - I enjoyed it! Roland

I liked going back through memories and looking at the pictures. Margaret

The best things was listening to other people's stories and being able to tell my own. Ray

I have learned things about the residents that they have not spoken about before. Sophie, Care worker

They discussed lots and compared stories with each other. The group really came together. Mandy, Care worker

It was brilliant. The residents came alive when they saw the objects. Debbie, activity worker

The quiet residents came out of their shells to talk which was very good. Colleen, Care worker



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Preparing for the session

- Decide how long the session will last. An hour is probably ideal
- Decide if you would like to turn the session into more of an event, perhaps with cake and vintage china
- Advertise beforehand and remind on the day
- Invite participants to bring something of their own items (maximum of three items)
- Decide if staff and family are welcome to attend (This can be really beneficial as people might hear stories they've not heard before and loved ones can help tell stories)
- Borrow suitable items for memory triggers. Find items in charity shops. The Imperial War Museum does good replica items of posters and ration-books
- It's important for the session to be multisensory:
- **Sight** – photographs, gas masks, games, ration books. Squares of ripped newspaper threaded with string brought back memories of outdoor toilets and toilet paper!
- **Sound** – music from the era on phone or CD player. Print out a few songs sheets with words. Can also download recordings of old sounds such as milk being delivered by horses
- **Taste** – tea from old tea service, jam tarts
- **Smells** – medicine, carbolic soap, old books, perfume, food, mothballs
- Audio recorder, note pad and tissues (just in case)
- **Touch** – make sure items are safe enough to hand around

On the day

- The room needs to be warm, quiet and comfortable
- Arrive early. Set up room in small circle or semi-circle with objects on a table in middle
- Have music playing. Refreshments reflecting the era
- Cups of tea (no rushing required)
- Welcome with a smile and invite people to sit down
- Recording the session can be difficult. If there is someone else who can help it can be lovely to note down memories to create a record after the event

Skills needed

- good listening skills
- receptiveness
- curiosity
- sensitivity
- an accepting attitude
- a reasonable memory
- a sense of humour
- adaptability
- courage
- caring

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Sample Session

1.00pm	<p>Introduce yourself and what today's session is about</p> <p>Talk about ground rules. There is a need for mutual respect and confidentiality. Ask people to listen attentively to one another and be willing to share stories in a non-judgemental atmosphere</p> <p>Let participants know that they only have to share what they want to</p> <p>If you are recording, check everyone is happy. If you think you would like to create a record for after the event, make sure that everyone is happy with that.</p> <p>Name labels if necessary</p> <p>Enjoy! Laughing over shared memories can be a real boost</p>
1.05pm	<p>Start with some singing. Singing is a great way of stimulating memories. Hand out song sheets and accompany with CD or phone. 'Hang Out the Washing on the Siegfried Line' and 'Run Rabbit Run,' both always go down well.</p>
1.10pm	<p>Invite people to introduce themselves. Say whether they were born before, during or after the war, where they lived at the time.</p>
1.20pm	<p>Open the memory box and take out a few objects. Pass them around. If they don't trigger memories or stories immediately have a few questions ready. Invite people to take turns to talk. Repeat for the rest of the group if you think that everyone didn't hear. Make sure quieter participants have their turn</p>
1.35pm	<p>Break briefly. Perhaps take out a few more objects for passing around and sharing. Gauge whether it works better for the group to talk more informally. Take the opportunity to take some photos</p>
1.45pm	<p>Bring the group back together. Allow any of the triggers to be talked about</p>
1.55pm	<p>Bring the session to a close. Summarise what has been covered. Thank everyone. Ask again if everyone is happy to the session to be written up. Perhaps close with a song 'We'll meet again,' always goes down well.</p> <p>Ensure that if anyone has been upset by session that they are supported</p>