Using sound recordings for reminiscence sessions

Sounds Familiar Toolkit 2

Getting the best out of your session

▶ **Ensure that people enjoy the moment** – they may not remember what they have heard but they will know whether it gave them pleasure and how it made them feel.

▶ **Allow enough time to recruit guests** for a group session and understand their situation, their background and their digital literacy prior to the session running. This will give you a better idea of how people are engaging i.e. non-verbally, nuances of facial expression and body language, how people react when they are engaged e.g. whistling. Observing people over time helps you see behaviour subtleties that indicate their level of engagement.

Top tips when using technology

▶ **Switch everything on well in advance** of the session. Make sure that the slides are already downloaded on to the machine you are delivering from. Make sure the PowerPoint runs smoothly and that all the embedded music and sounds work ok.

CLICK LINKS TO OPEN

► **Make sure you've got back up:** someone on a different internet network that you've shared your presentation with AND make someone else a co-host so that the session does not disconnect if the host loses connection.

► **Assume the lowest level of digital literacy** and avoid using chat / polls / breakout rooms. Only use mute on people's behalf if you know that they can unmute themselves.

► **Send the same Zoom link for every session** in a series (new links are complicated and harder to find in your inbox).

► **Assign clear host roles and responsibilities:**
(1) Facilitator to lead
(2) Technical (screen share and mute / unmute)
(3) Observer
(4) Volunteers (steer and maintain conversation)

► **Make sure that co-hosts have access to all the material** and can share it if the presenter's technology fails. It will happen, and it is important to keep calm and carry on!

► If possible, **check what technology participants are using** (mobile phone, tablet, laptop) prior to the session – encourage them to use their devise with the largest screen.

► The **introductions and icebreaker activity** give everyone a chance to check their technology. Check that people's microphone and speakers are all working and be prepared to talk them through making any necessary technical changes. Ensure that people with hearing impairments have turned up their volume.

Top tips for using sounds

► **Select sound clips and images** which are era appropriate and fully inclusive to your audience.

► **A mixture of sounds and spoken word** work well together.

► Where possible **pick up on local connections and interest** (e.g. sounds of shopping could lead to discussion about shops on the local high street in days gone by; sounds of the world of work could lead to discussion about local industry).

► Ensure that the sound clips are **not too long** (max 2 minutes) and **not too 'busy'** (i.e. sounds with multiple layers could be confusing to listen to for some people – for example, sounds in an amusement arcade, crowded streets etc).

► Explore sounds using a **quiz approach** - matching sounds to pictures.

CLICK LINKS TO OPEN

- **Make the sounds more immersive** by putting them together as a story with images.

- **Images are essential** for people living with dementia, not just sound on its own. The use of carefully selected pictures stimulates memories. The use of pictures is particularly important for those with a hearing impairment. For advice about selecting images, see the booklet 'Too Late to Learn to Drive' by Helen J Bate.

- **Introduce the listening activity** and prompt people that they are going to hear a short recording of someone talking (who is not someone in the group). Remind them that there will be a chance to chat about it afterwards.

- Make sure there are **no interruptions** to the sounds as they're being played. Put everyone on mute.

- It's fine to **group 3 or 4 recordings** around a theme but it's best to play them individually and give people a chance to respond to each one before moving on to the next.

Top tips for running your session

Preparation before the session

- **Base a session around an appropriate theme / era**. There are a number of themed activities on the Culture Leicestershire website, but you can design your own too. **https://www.cultureleicestershire.co.uk/unlocking-sounds/**

- **Follow a session plan** - there are some ready-made plans available on the website. Make sure there are enough activities and a small amount of choice if there is an interest in a particular topic.

- Make sure you **listen to all the sounds before the session** so that you know what sounds are coming and what the sound conversations are about. Decide on some lead questions that are open ended. See the question starters at the end of this toolkit.

- **Set team roles** - Who is doing the tech? Who will be the facilitator in charge? Are there volunteers to keep the conversation moving? Is someone in charge of muting and contacting participants if they fall out of the session? Is someone observing and evaluating the session?

- **Hold a briefing session** with the facilitation team immediately before the session starts to quickly run through everything.

- Just before facilitating the session, all **take 3 breaths** together, to ground yourselves and enable you to bring the right level of energy to the session to be able to keep it upbeat.

- **Have some props to hand** if there is a need for it, for example, objects that relate to the sound clips.

CLICK LINKS TO OPEN

During the session

▶ **Promote good listening** from the start by doing some mindful breathing exercises and asking participants to become aware of sounds around them. Using mindfulness helped us all to connect and feel grounded. It helped people to feel a sense of belonging.

▶ **Outline the theme** at the start of each session.

▶ **Following the same starting format** every time will help participants to recognise that the session is beginning and pay attention.

▶ **Give time to the welcome and introductions.** Allow new people to join the group with ease. Making everyone feel welcome is critical to the success of your group.

▶ **Ice breaker activities have a huge value** and help people feel involved especially online it also gives everyone a chance to check their technology particularly with muting and unmuting. It's an opportunity for the organisers to talk about Zoom etiquette and to remind people not to take muting personally.

▶ **Start with an ice breaker** and invite everyone to contribute. If people choose not to contribute later in the session, at least their voices have been heard early on.

▶ **Keep the pace relatively slow** so that people have time to make a response. Don't be tempted to rush through it.

▶ Using a digital platform is a challenge compared to having a physical session. It's not as smooth and it doesn't generate the same warmth - it's not as easy to pick up the energy. Whoever is delivering the session needs to keep the energy levels high in order to reach people through their screens.

▶ **The facilitator needs to 'hold' the space** – they need to carry the group but also allow the volunteers to keep the conversation going and keep the energy levels high. Brief them about the theme prior to the workshop so that they can bring conversation starters, objects, stories or even dress up or choose an appropriate background.

▶ **Use carefully selected music** in between the sound activities. This re-engages people, especially those who are nonverbal. It also encourages movement, breathing, swaying and an emotional outlet. Movement stimulates alertness, is pleasurable, is an acceptable outlet for energy and an opportunity for self-expression.

▶ **Mute the whole group** whilst listening to sound clips and singing together. This improves the sound quality for everyone. Most people can unmute themselves after a listening activity in order to join in the discussions again.

- **It is OK for people to be positively disengaged.** Some people choose to listen rather than to contribute. People have the right to choose not to participate but they will still enjoy the session.

- As a facilitator, **make sure everyone has time to speak** especially when people are spread over 2 screens - monitor this carefully. For example, it may be useful to have a record of all participants and operate a tick list.

- **Encourage connections between people** by listening to them and fielding their contributions.

- People accessing the sessions from their own homes can enjoy finding and sharing their own resources, for example important objects with significant memory triggers.

At the end of the session

- **Discuss what it is coming** up in the next session and as far as possible, tailor the sounds and songs to people's suggestions and interests.

- **Use play out music** to bring the pace down at the end of the session. This gives people an opportunity to leave when they feel ready. It ends your session in a slow way and it gives people ownership about the way they leave. Offer to stay online in case people want to ask more questions or tell you something that they didn't get a chance to during the session. It avoids an abrupt end.

- Immediately afterwards, it is useful to **have a debrief** with all the support team. There is value in writing up some reflections about what went well and what didn't. Also, you can pick out any interests that individuals have acknowledged which you can theme future session around and you can resolve any technical issues that have arisen.

- If possible, **follow up the following day** to enable re-engagement with the topic and get any feedback. This keeps the momentum going and gives you a chance to generate more conversations.

Useful conversation starters for people with memory issues

▶ A common trap when starting conversations with people with dementia is saying

"Do you remember…?"

This can create unnecessary pressure and be a distressing reminder if people are struggling to remember things so here are some alternatives:

- ✔ **Does this sound/look familiar to you?**
- ✔ **Does this remind you of anything?**
- ✔ **Have you ever…..?**
- ✔ **Was there ever a time when…..?**
- ✔ **What does this sound/look like to you?**
- ✔ **What do you like about….?**
- ✔ **What sound/colour would you say this is?**
- ✔ **What would you say is going on in this sound clip/picture?**
- ✔ **What do you think of this?**
- ✔ **What do you like best about this?**
- ✔ **I wonder what this could be…?**
- ✔ **How might you use this?**