

# How to evaluate your reminiscence sessions

## Sounds Familiar Toolkit 3

### Why evaluation is important.

Evaluation can provide a method through which to study the delivery of your sessions and understand how well they achieve their objectives. This process is also critical for improvement, understanding what is happening and why it is happening, so that you can make recommendations that maximise success.



### Top Tips for evaluating

- **Understand your pathway to change.** Sit down with the support team prior to starting your sessions to ensure you are clear about how your sessions and activities will contribute to your desired outcomes. Identify what information you want to collect that will enable you to track the changes you are trying to achieve. Decide how you will collect the information and maintain records.
- **One size does not fit all.** Evaluation can take many shapes. For example, the collection of surveys, interviews, focus groups, data, and other activity etc. You need to choose an evaluation methodology that is appropriate for you, your sessions, and your guests. When working with People Living with Dementia (PLWD) it is important to first and foremost be considerate of their comfort, this may mean sacrificing your comprehensive in-depth evaluation plans and that is okay.
- **Weave evaluation into the sessions.** Look for opportunities to naturally weave evaluation into other activities throughout your session. For example, consider asking a question or giving a prompt about what your guests enjoyed about a particular activity, or whether they intend to come to the next session (i.e., vote with their feet).

- **Build relationships.** Introduce yourself and your role at each session. Build your relationship with the guests so that they feel able to share their thoughts and views with you directly. Participate in the session but find a balance between being a silent observer and over-contributing.
- **Understand your guests.** Get an understanding of who your guests are, their level of dementia, and how they might display their emotions prior to the first session (e.g., through a conversation with their carer). This will allow for more accurate observation records to be made, particularly where a guest is non-verbal.
- **Well-being measures.** There are lots of validated well-being outcome measures. However, the influences contributors to well-being (broadly feeling good and functioning well) are far-reaching and it might be hard to attribute any change in score to the session itself. PLWD are also not often able to self-report on their well-being. If you are delivering face-to-face sessions, consider using a measure that has been created for short interventions such as the UCL Museum Well-being Measures Toolkit – a visual, colourful, and tangible tool that would work well with these guests. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/projects/ucl-museum-wellbeing-measures>.
- **Be careful not to open emotions up too much.** Conversations about well-being have the potential to ‘open something up’ with your guests that you, or they, may not be able to deal with. Be mindful not to complicate the situation or create unnecessary unease.
- **Have a debrief.** Immediately after the sessions, it is useful to have a debrief with all the support team. There is value in capturing everyone’s observations and reflections, not just your point of view.
- **Post-session guest reflection.** Guests may have additional insight and feedback after a period of reflection following the session. Try to avoid engaging with them directly after the session as they may be tired or overwhelmed. Whilst leaving it too long may cause problems with recall. If possible, follow up with guests within a few days of the session, this has the added benefit of maintaining momentum and gives you an additional chance to build your relationship with them.
- **Ethics and data protection.** It is important that you gain informed consent from the guests, so they understand the purpose of the evaluation and what happens to their data. Ensure their anonymity in the communication of findings, and respect data protection laws (e.g., GDPR).