

LIFE CHANGES TRUST
GET OUTDOORS PROGRAMME

TOP TIPS FOR DELIVERING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

2019/2020

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Creating better lives.

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outside the box 

Introduction

In April 2018 the Life Changes Trust funded six Get Outdoors projects for up to two years with the purpose of supporting projects and activities that encourage and support people living with dementia and their unpaid carers to spend more time outside.

As a complementary publication to sit alongside the independent evaluation of the Get Outdoors projects, carried out on behalf of the Life Changes Trust by Outside the Box, here we present some guidance and top tips for delivering outdoor activities for people living with dementia. These include helpful advice for:

- People, around the benefits and practical steps for getting outdoors.
- Practitioners, in health and social care settings around the benefits and practical steps to get people outdoors.
- People and projects who are thinking about setting up outdoor initiatives.



Top tips for delivering outdoor activities for people living with dementia

The Life Changes Trust Get Outdoors projects have contributed to deeper learning about the benefits of getting outdoors for people living with dementia. This short report sets out the learning we have gathered from projects and outlines the ways in which the learning can be shared.

The COVID 19 restrictions and social distancing are likely to continue to varying degrees for the foreseeable future. We have included some learning from the initiatives about getting outside during this time.

People with dementia and unpaid carers

A diagnosis of dementia should not mean a curtailment of previous activities, especially those which the person and their partner have always enjoyed.

The Get Outdoors projects show that people enjoy getting outside and everyone benefits from being outside. The ever-changing and unexpected nature of the outdoors – observing weather, trees or animals – made every outing a new and exciting one. There were added benefits of improved confidence and wellbeing that support memories and conversations.

Practical things that support and encourage people to be active outside and take more opportunities to be outside include:

- Having appropriate clothing and footwear for the weather and the conditions, such as sun hats and cream for the warmer months, and for the colder and wetter months, waterproofs and warm layers.
- Start with small walks or activities near home and then build up from there.
- If you are going further from home – knowing where facilities such as toilets and cafes are makes things easier. It's also helpful to check out parking and bus routes too.
- Go with other people – joining a group may sound scary but there are lots of benefits to being with other people.

Practitioners

Practitioners include a wide range of people including people working in care homes, support organisations for older people and people with dementia, and health and wellbeing staff working for Health and Social Care Partnerships.

The evidence from the evaluation of the Get Outdoors projects shows that practitioners learned by participating in outdoor activities and supporting people. They learned more about dementia and about the people they were supporting. They saw how being in the outdoors, and revisiting past experiences rekindled memories for people who were able to tell stories or demonstrate a previously hidden physical skill.

Practitioners reported greater job satisfaction from participating in the sessions, giving them a greater understanding of dementia, and also the opportunity to enjoy being outside themselves. For health professionals who took part, it was a way in which they could have informal conversation with family or people with dementia, who felt more comfortable in the natural setting about broaching issues of concern.

There are practical elements for practitioners who support people living with dementia to be more active outside more and these include:

- Developing and guiding staff through risk assessments around the practical aspects of taking people to outdoor venues and using outdoor spaces like gardens builds up staff confidence.
- Checking out and reviewing regularly activities, sites and venues, with people and carers on how much they are enjoyed, helped to make everyone feel involved and contributed to the success of projects.
- Developing and nurturing good partnerships with organisations that can facilitate outdoor activities and venues is an effective approach.
- Development and planning time are a crucial part of developing activities and often take much longer than anticipated especially when projects develop and change over time.
- There is a need for flexibility, both in the longer-term planning, and in the day-to-day fluctuations of weather and other unexpected factors.
- Small groups of around 4 or 5 people with dementia work well for outdoor activities supported by care workers, volunteers and family members. People with advanced dementia may need one to one support.
- Have a collection of cold and wet weather clothing, footwear and equipment for ready use on poorer weather days.

Projects

The Get Outdoors initiatives have demonstrated the benefits of supporting and encouraging people with dementia and their carers to be active outside. In developing and delivering the projects many key aspects of learning have been developed around the benefits.

The projects had or developed practical measures which could serve as learning for other outdoor initiatives, practitioners, and people with dementia and their carers.

Practical elements for success included:

- Have ways of keeping warm (extra clothing, blankets or a fire), ways of having shelter (outdoors or indoors) and providing sturdy furniture and handrails, and spacious, even areas.
- Have a range of activities ready and go outside when the weather is good and come back inside when it's not so good.
- Have alternative indoor activities and competitions for the days when you simply can't get outside.
- Have a social time to share tea, biscuits or even lunch – this was more than just a 'tea break' – it was a very important chance for friendships and peer support, both for people with dementia but even more so for their family carers.
- Activities that have a range of people in different roles, like paid carer, family member, volunteer and paid staff to support them, work well for people living with dementia.
- Small groups of people work well, especially when they are supported by a mixture of workers, volunteers and unpaid carers. People want to help out and contribute and having a role and tasks really helps increasing confidence and wellbeing.
- Develop relationships that are respectful, trusting and nurturing between everyone – staff, volunteers, people living with dementia and their unpaid carers.

About the activities

- It helped to have visual aids such as photo cards to show how bird boxes or flowers might be used – rather than abstract talk about birds or bees.
- Holding a simple mood checking and review session at the beginning and end of sessions using stones and feelings pictures is a simple and effective way of understanding how people feel and seeing impacts.
- Carry out informal capacity assessments over a few sessions so you gain an understanding of an individual's experience of dementia and continue to review it.

- Regularly review the sessions with staff, volunteers and partners to check what works well and so you can respond to emerging issues and circumstances.
- Holding sessions regularly – especially for people with more advanced dementia – helps to build relationships with participants and also amongst participants.

Working with partners

- Using and developing local partnerships around sites and locations and ways to transport people works well and has the additional benefit of supporting the local economy.
- Developing relationships with health and social care partnerships takes time and work.
- Gaining feedback and holding separate feedback sessions for partners on how the sessions worked for people, carers and practitioners helps develop useful and meaningful sessions for everyone.

Context of Covid-19

The restrictions in place during the spring and summer of 2020 (and likely for the foreseeable future) have had some impact on the projects and the activities, people and unpaid carers and partners. In addition, many other projects which previously met indoors are now looking at ways of meeting safely and this could involve holding meetings outside. Many of them could learn from elements of the Get Outdoors projects. What we are learning during this pandemic is that:

- Meeting with small numbers of people is generally safer than large numbers of people. The projects found that it was more effective for them to work with smaller numbers of people.
- There is also some safety from being outside or being under shelter outside. People feel safer meeting in an outdoor space but it is always reassuring to know there is a way of taking shelter; in the outdoors this could be a simple roof leaving open sides for ventilation and social distancing.
- There are also ways of staying warm against the elements in the outdoors, and safe ways to have snacks and hot drinks in an outdoor space.
- All the projects supported and encouraged people to be outside more and enjoy the simple pleasures in life. They proved that we do not need expensive day trips to take part in cultural activities in busy places. This is important learning for these times.

- We understand that people (including some from the project) are continuing to walk in Evanton Wood. And Evanton Wood have managed to have a socially-distanced 'ceilidh' with people sitting comfortably apart in the woods.

Sharing the learning

The purpose of sharing the learning from the Get Outdoors projects is to reach as many people and organisations as possible to show the benefits and the practical steps that support more outside activity. It is also to support and influence practitioners, policy makers and funders to support changes in values and approaches, and practices to encourage more outside activity for people living with dementia in their own home or residential care.