



Sporting Memories Handbook



THE Alzheimer
SOCIETY OF IRELAND

DSiDC
Dementia Services Information
and Development Centre

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understand together



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Introduction and acknowledgments

This Sporting Memories Handbook is designed to raise awareness of dementia and promote activities that support people with dementia in the community. It gives an overview of the Sporting Memories programme. It aims to support its implementation in communities across Ireland. The Handbook includes information on dementia and a guide on how to develop a Sporting Memories programme in your club.

We hope this resource provides you and your club with the information and inspiration you need to organise Sporting Memories groups within your local community.

For information on Sporting Memories and how to get started in your community contact: The Alzheimer Society of Ireland at communityengagement@alzheimer.ie

This Handbook is based on Sporting Heritage, a comprehensive guide for Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We sincerely thank our colleagues at Sporting Heritage for their support and sharing of their resources as we bring Sporting Memories to Ireland. We thank Hugh Dan MacLennan, Michael White and Dr Justine Reilly whose hard work forms the basis of this Handbook.

We would also like to thank the team at Stirling University for supporting the development of this Handbook.

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland works across the country in the heart of local communities, providing dementia services and supports. It advocates for the rights and needs of all people living with dementia, their carers and supporters. We work closely with a range of organisations to reach out and support those living with dementia.

Dementia: Understand Together

Dementia: Understand Together is a national public awareness and stigma reduction campaign. It aims to inspire people from all sections of society to stand together with more than 500,000 Irish people whose families have been affected by dementia. It is one of six key priorities of the Irish National Dementia Strategy. The campaign is led by the Health Service Executive (HSE) in partnership with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Age Friendly Ireland, Age and Opportunity, Healthy Ireland and the Dementia Services Information and Development Centre. The campaign is supported by many national organisations across Ireland and thousands of community champions who are leading the way in creating communities that welcome and include those living with dementia and their families.





01 | What is Sporting Memories?

Sport plays a big part in the lives of many people. Whether a person played a sport in their youth or later life, was a member of a local club, or watched and listened to matches and games, sport creates a sense of identity and a set of memories that can last a lifetime.

Sporting Memories is an awareness and support programme involving remembering and talking about sports to help improve health and wellbeing, especially of people living with dementia.

It brings people together to reminisce about their lives through the medium of sport. The programme uses images, video and other tools to spark memories and encourage social engagement.

Each session is led by people with a passion for sport and a desire to help people with dementia, their families and supporters to stay engaged with their communities. The programme aims to tackle dementia, depression and loneliness through safe, friendly sessions.

Sporting Memories sessions tend to focus on people for whom sport is/was a major form of recreation and social activity. Group members talk and remember common sporting memories to create a sense of camaraderie and belonging in their community. Some attendees of Sporting Memories events may be living with dementia.

Sports memorabilia, photographs, videos of past sporting events, physical activities, quizzes and guest speakers can be used to create discussion around sporting memories.

Running a Sporting Memories session is hugely rewarding and enjoyable. By using sporting cues, it is possible to stimulate memory, improve communication and social skills among members. It creates a sense of belonging within a local community. Organisers and volunteers have an opportunity to engage with and learn from members' own life experiences and sporting perspectives.

02 | Understanding dementia

The idea behind the Sporting Memories programme is to use the power of sport to bring people together, especially those living with dementia, to help improve their health and wellbeing.

Organisers and volunteers do not have to be experts in dementia. They should have a basic understanding of dementia and how it impacts the lives of people living with dementia, their families and carers. Through running a session you will meet people with dementia and their families and learn first-hand how it affects people in different ways at different stages.

What is dementia?

Dementia is not a single condition. It is an umbrella term for a range of conditions caused by diseases of the brain. It can have an effect, for example, on memory, thinking, language, and the ability to carry out everyday tasks.

There are many different types of dementia. Alzheimer's disease is the most common one. Vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy Bodies and frontotemporal dementia are others.

Anyone can get dementia - even people in their 30s / 40s / 50s. Everybody's experience of living with dementia is different and their support and needs will vary over time.

- It is estimated that there are 64,000 people with dementia in Ireland.
- Each year 11,000 people are diagnosed with dementia - that's 30 people a day.
- By 2045 it is predicated that there will be over 150,000 people living with dementia in Ireland.

Symptoms of dementia

In many cases the main symptom of dementia is memory loss. Other symptoms include losing track of the time, getting lost in familiar places, or changes in mood or behaviour. People living with dementia may lose their ability to reason clearly and may find making decisions very hard. Dementia can cause personality changes, which can be particularly upsetting for those who care for a person with the condition.

Most types of dementia progress gradually. With the right help and support the majority of people living with dementia can stay at home and enjoy a good quality of life for a long time. Early in the condition, a person may need support such as reminders and memory aids as well as help with managing money and making decisions. Later, they may need more help with their daily activities.





Memory loss

Memory loss is not only about remembering events or appointments. It is about being able to remember how to do things for yourself - such as getting up in the morning, or keeping cool or warm. It also includes remembering how to do other basic daily tasks such as cleaning your home, shopping and cooking. Memory is an important part of a person's identity: remembering your family, your role in the family, your likes and dislikes, attitudes, hobbies and fears.

How reminiscence can help with memory loss

Reminiscence means recalling events and experiences from the past. Encouraging people with memory loss to reminisce can make communication easier for them. You can use cues such as images or sounds to trigger their memories of past experiences and events. The memories can re-awaken feelings of self-identity and the sense of belonging to a group. This can improve their quality of life, their confidence as well as their communication skills.

We know that people affected by memory loss can join in a conversation very successfully if the conversation sparks a memory from their past and they have the opportunity to recall the details of that memory.

The importance of maintaining social connections

It is important for people living with dementia to keep up their interests, skills and routines for as long as possible. Meaningful social activities such as Sporting Memories sessions can be of benefit for people affected by dementia.

People with dementia may no longer be able to attend matches as they used to do. Sporting Memories events try to reconnect them with their sport clubs and the game-day experience. Where and when possible, it can be good to take people to places they are familiar with - for example, going to local sports grounds while no match is on, or visiting the clubhouse.



03 | How to set up a Sporting Memories session

A Sporting Memories session can be based on any sport - Gaelic games, soccer, golf, rugby, tennis etc. Many of the groups in other countries have been established by local sports clubs or community organisations as a way of reconnecting older people and people with dementia with their peers and their community. Coming together for companionship and friendship with people with common interests - in this case sports - is beneficial in terms of health and wellbeing.

Getting started

If you are interested in starting Sporting Memories in your local community, a good first step is to contact the Alzheimer Society of Ireland. They can advise you on how to set up a session and how to engage with people who are living with dementia in your area. They can also provide helpful resources, and support you in publicising your Sporting Memories session.

Contact the Alzheimer Society of Ireland at communityengagement@alzheimer.ie

Engagement and communication

Social engagement and connection is important for a person's overall health and wellbeing as well as quality of life. By organising a Sporting Memories session you are supporting the person to connect and engage.

Good communication as well as sensitivity, empathy and patience are helpful skills to have. Sometimes people with dementia may need a little bit more time to gather or verbalise their thoughts. By being understanding and encouraging you can help build confidence and encourage conversations.

Use of images

The use of images in Sporting Memories has been shown to improve recognition, understanding and recall in people with dementia.

Pictures can trigger memories, genuine excitement and interest. One image can take the person on a journey down memory lane and bring out associated stories about work, school, family life, travel and social events.



Tips for involving those living with dementia in a group session

1. Concentrate on the person - not the dementia.
2. Focus on what they can do, not what they cannot.
3. Watch out for facial expression and body language. Keep eye contact.
4. Encouragement is essential.
5. Expect the unexpected. Some of the stories are fascinating.
6. Share the enjoyment of the group.
7. Share and join in the laughter and the banter.

Communication tips

- ▶ Try to speak slowly and distinctly, using clear and simple words.
- ▶ Establish eye contact. Sit face to face where possible and use each person's name so they know you are speaking to them.
- ▶ Try to keep the conversation brief and remember to smile. Use a warm and calm tone.
- ▶ Try to use specific names for people and objects, instead of "him", "she" or "it".
- ▶ Don't dive in with the word when a person hesitates. This could lead to a lack of confidence.
- ▶ Show lots of patience and encouragement.
- ▶ It is OK to try to guess what the person is trying to say but always ask if the guess is right.
- ▶ It is OK not to recognise an image. Try clues and hints, but then move on. "Let's leave that one until later" is a good exit line.
- ▶ Allow plenty of time for response. Slow the pace down.
- ▶ One question at a time is best. Avoid multi-part questions as they can be confusing and hard for one person to follow.
- ▶ Don't try to correct the person bluntly.
- ▶ Humour works in many situations, but not always. Don't be surprised or disappointed if someone doesn't understand it.

Listening hints

- ▶ Allow plenty of time for what you have said to be understood. Silence can give time to think.
- ▶ Try not to jump in if a person is still thinking of a word. Allow them to formulate their sentence.
- ▶ Prompt where appropriate.
- ▶ Listen and take what is being said seriously, even if the person's reality may be different from your own. For example, they say "It is a cold day" when it is a really hot day. Do not correct them, just acknowledge and say "Could be..."
- ▶ Show you are listening by your body language, paraphrasing what they have said and by asking questions.

Language hints

- ▶ Keep sentences short.
- ▶ Only focus on one instruction or idea at a time.
- ▶ Use gestures, for example, point to objects or demonstrate actions, wave when you say hello and goodbye.
- ▶ Limiting choices for response will make it easier to respond. For example, "Would you like a scone or a sandwich?" instead of "What would you like to eat?"
- ▶ Say things to help the person place where they are, such as what time of day it is and what is happening. For example, it is nearly lunch time here at...



Setting the scene

There have been a variety of settings for Sporting Memories, ranging from sports and community clubs, church and school halls to day centres or hospital wards.

Key factors to consider for the location of your Sporting Memories are:

- Accessibility
- Heating
- Toilet facilities
- Lighting
- Comfort of seating

Creating the right environment

Adequate lighting is important as many members will have visual impairments. Participants need to be able to see the pictures clearly to obtain maximum benefit.

Avoid any setting with too much background noise as this can be distracting for participants. The venue should be heated, especially in the winter months, so that everyone is comfortable.

The facility to provide a break is essential during which tea, coffee, and other refreshments can be served.

Furniture is a big consideration to ensure everyone is comfortable during sessions. Avoid using low tables that can be inaccessible to wheelchair users. Use chairs that are supportive, easy to sit in and get out of. Access to a toilet, especially for those with mobility problems is also vital.

When all the basics are set up, it is a good idea to think about the sense of occasion and focus on the subject matter. Decorations and visual cues could include posters, replica tops, hats, scarves, rosettes, programmes, stills, magazines, tickets and other memorabilia.

Although sessions do not have to strictly follow a set format, it is helpful if they broadly follow a common pattern.

• Welcome and kick-off

A friendly, warm welcome is essential. An early joke or bit of banter can go down well and act as an icebreaker. The images should

be already displayed without the need for a formal start or introduction. The facilitator needs to set the pace of the session and be prepared for some interesting diversions.

• Half-time break

The break is a key moment. It provides a well-earned break as well as moving the focus away from the images to conversation. Sometimes recent stories of matches and players will be mentioned by the members. This can be a useful link between past and present.

• Second-half activities

Back to enjoying more reminiscing chats and banter. Some groups might have an interesting speaker from bygone years but it is important to keep it light and interactive. Perhaps an interview-type session or inviting the audience to ask questions could be included. Some Sporting Memories sessions include light exercises linked to the sport referenced in the session. These can be carried out from a sitting position or wheelchair if necessary, but this is totally dependent on your group.

• Final whistle and goodbye

The departure is another key moment to provide reassurance and praise to the members as well as inviting them back to subsequent sessions.

Timing and frequency

The question of how often sessions should occur will depend on individual circumstances. Some groups hold once or twice yearly sessions initially, then progressing to perhaps monthly sessions. You will find some groups might naturally form and meet themselves which is an added bonus.

Routines

If you decide to hold more regular sessions, holding sessions according to a pre-planned calendar is helpful. This creates a routine for participants, carers, supporters and family members. Choosing for example “the first Monday” or “last Thursday” of each month means that other commitments can be managed around the sessions.

Preparing to host your group

Sporting Memories need some preparation (a sample session outline and other materials are available in the Useful information and resources section). Most importantly, the organiser needs to know the special sports interests of the group and the time frames of the group's interest.

Thought should also be given to who sits where, ensuring people have good visibility, and can hear what is happening. The organiser should be able to have eye contact with the participants. Volunteers should be spread out so they can help when needed, for example, with toilet breaks, getting a drink, etc. It is important that there is emergency cover on hand and that fire drills are known to the volunteers and organisers.

04 | Information and resources

For more information on Sporting Memories contact the Alzheimer Society of Ireland at communityengagement@alzheimier.ie
Tel: 085 856 6478 | Web: <https://alzheimier.ie/creating-change/awareness-raising/sporting-memories>

Origins of Sporting Memories in Ireland

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland developed their Sporting Memories programme, having observed the impact of similar initiatives in Scotland and available research conducted into the power of reminiscence.

The initial Scotland-based Sporting Heritage Football Memories pilot project was evaluated by Dr Irene Schofield and Professor Debbie Tolson of the School of Health at Glasgow Caledonian University (2010) and the Executive Summary concluded:

“...football reminiscence has the potential to contribute to the well-being of men with dementia in terms of enhancing their self-confidence, self-expression sociability, and sense of enjoyment. The context and mechanisms provided by established and supported groups with skilled reminiscence facilitators were seen to produce the best outcomes in terms of sustainability of the group, engagement, anticipation, and increased self-confidence of the group members.

In addition, strengthening mechanisms through training, provision of images specific to the lives of people with dementia, and increased organisational support for reminiscence facilitators is likely to result in a corresponding improvement in outcomes. There is scope for more extensive use of football reminiscence for people with dementia, especially those for whom generic reminiscence activity holds little appeal.”

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland is delighted to see how the Sporting Memories programme has been wholeheartedly embraced by various sporting organisations across the nation.





Introduction of Sporting Memories to the GAA

Following an invitation from The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, several GAA County Boards have eagerly participated in the Sporting Memories programme. Wexford, Donegal, Dublin and Kerry GAA were among the first counties to embrace the programme, resulting in several impactful events being held throughout different clubs across the country. Also, the programme has gained support from numerous Health & Wellbeing committees and officers nationwide.

Tony Dempsey, Age Friendly Ambassador for Wexford:

“A famous sportsman once said when recalling a famous trophy he had won: ‘A trophy carries dust memories last forever.’ At last year’s Sporting Memories event, I remember reflecting on the wisdom of that statement. Seeing firsthand, the many who were struggling with memory loss recognising former greats of Wexford Hurling, recalling the past, and reliving the good times with joy; it was a privilege to be there. I look forward, with a sense of excitement to more of these Sporting Memory events, at each event, new memories are forged as the magic of former memories is relived.”

Feedback from the pilot programme of Sporting Memories with Shelbourne FC in 2021

Donal Murphy, former Operations Project Manager with the Alzheimer Society of Ireland:

“It is wonderful that we are now in a position to introduce the concept of Sporting Memories into Ireland. These international programmes aim to provide reminiscence therapy for people living with dementia and are enjoyable events for all. The programme will involve former players speaking about their careers, sharing memorabilia, and showing clips of memorable matches over the years. These programmes have been in place in Scotland for over a decade with Scottish football clubs working with Alzheimer Scotland. We are very excited to partner with Shelbourne FC on their ‘Reds Together’ goals. It is our pleasure to support them in their work to make a positive impact to the lives of people living with dementia, and their caregivers.”

John McGouran, Shelbourne FC, describes the original partnership (September 2021):

“Shelbourne FC and ASI began working on the ‘Football Memories’ initiative in early 2021 as part of our ‘Reds Together’ community engagement program. From the very outset, the team at ASI has been terrific to work with. ASI has guided us and shared their experience so that we can deliver our monthly ‘Football Memories’ event in the best way possible. The monthly events have been brilliant fun so far, and hugely rewarding knowing that we are helping members of our community on their dementia journey. I would encourage sporting clubs and organisations of all codes to reach out to the ASI Community Engagement team to discuss how to use the power of sport to help members of your community living with dementia. Shelbourne FC is so pleased that we did, and we look forward to building our relationship with ASI further.”



Sample planning template

Item	Recommendation	Responsibility	Notes
1. Planning	Regular calendar meetings are preferable (e.g. first Monday, last Tuesday).		Routine is important.
2. Notification	A “fixture list” is a good idea. Contacts for carers / supporters / families.		Emergency contact numbers are essential.
3. Transport	Is transport needed? Can transport be provided?		Families / Supporters / Social Work / Community Centre might support.
4. Attendance	Who is coming? Who is not coming? Contact numbers essential.		Organiser as key link.
5. Access	Is the building/room suitable, available, and ready for use?		Comfortable and safe premises.
6. Domesticity	Heating, lighting, toilets, power.		Comfortable and safe premises.
7. Resources	Starter pack. Sets of sports stars cards, individual resources.		Groups can access The Alzheimer Society of Ireland website and new materials.
8. Volunteers	Who is coming/not coming?		Ensure there is someone who can cover when needed.
9. Professional Staff	Who is the organiser?		Ensure there is someone who can cover when needed.
10. Register	Who was there? Who should have been there? Contact numbers essential.		Key point. Did anyone set off and not arrive?
11. Timing	Best late morning or early afternoon.		Depends on routines.
12. Duration	Depends on group. Suggested maximum of 60 minutes for day centre and hospital environments. Public sessions may be longer.		For public facing sessions, ensure somebody is available to collect participants.

Item	Recommendation	Responsibility	Notes
13. Refreshments	Break suggested.		Type of cups/mugs? Individual preferences.
14. Close	Final activity suggested. Sports “Best Ever” awards. Good ending helps.		Important to end well and on a happy note.
15. Collection	Carers / Families / Supporters can stay and meet staff.		Good opportunity.
16. Next Session	Ensure Carers / Family / Supporters know of any changes.		Handouts.
17. Review	Discuss any issues and plan accordingly.		Organiser to collect.
18. Preparation	Any changes for next session? Any missing resources?		Contact project lead if needed.
19. Recording	Actual attendance and any significant issues.		Organiser to keep logs.



Evaluation

Evaluating Sporting Memories programme can give insights into its benefits and for how long the effects might last. The initial pilot assessment showed that Football Memories had potential, and this encouraged a roll-out of Sporting Memories across Scotland. Each establishment has its own way of evaluating projects and activities but here are some suggested topics to include in an evaluation:

- | |
|--|
| a. Interaction |
| b. Interest levels |
| c. Participation levels |
| d. Wellbeing |
| e. Enjoyment |
| f. What could we do to make this experience more enjoyable |

It is helpful for groups to record the outcome of sessions as this can contribute to developing Sporting Memories programme further. It may be as simple as recording the date, duration and location of each session and using the above topics to note how the session was received.

05 | Contact details

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

For more information and support for running a Sporting Memories programme, please contact:

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

Email: communityengagement@alzheimer.ie

Tel: 085 856 6478

Web: <https://alzheimer.ie/creating-change/awareness-raising/sporting-memories>

Dementia supports & services for carers, supporters and people with dementia
1800 341 341 | www.alzheimer.ie

Dementia: Understand Together

Information about dementia inclusive communities, training and resources

Email: understandtogether@hse.ie | www.understandtogether.ie/get-involved

Dementia Services Information and Development Centre

Information on dementia, training and education, and research

01 416 2035 | www.dementia.ie



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