



Our Summer-themed object-handling session ends with a starfish for each person to hold

RAMM + memory problems

“People ask me why enjoy myself, if I’m only going to forget it. I say why not enjoy myself, even if I forget it... I’ve loved every minute.”

Participant

Case Study: Living Each Season

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Living Each Season: Making RAMM more dementia-friendly

The challenges

The Westcountry around RAMM is home to large numbers of older people, both long-time residents and retirees. In Devon alone, the Alzheimer's Society estimated that 13,847 were living with the illness in 2013.

Museum objects provide the perfect stimulus to experience and talk about the moment, regardless of age or background

Carers and people with dementia are welcomed as equals together.

The background

RAMM is working to become more dementia-friendly, both for the general public and in its services for targeted groups. Museums offer a safe, fun and yet stimulating place for people at all stages of life. Objects spark conversations which reinforce the personal identity of people with dementia for themselves and those around them. Research by Newcastle University and University College London demonstrates that museums can have a significant impact on people's wellbeing.

The project

RAMM's Living Each Season programme offers a combination of object-handling sessions, creative activities and gallery tours inspired by groundbreaking methodology from the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York.

Conversations are themed around the seasons. A Summer session might examine shells and preserved sea creatures; wooden carvings and paintings of trees could be appropriate for Autumn; Winter can focus on Arctic peoples or cosy textiles; and in Spring the group might look at stuffed birds and flower patterns from other times and places.

The nature theme and the eclectic mix of artefacts is engaging for people of any age and cultural background. Carers are invited too, and sessions provide a rare opportunity for couples

to experience something on an equal level, in an uplifting and supportive atmosphere.

Objects sometimes trigger memories, but the emphasis is on the moment. "Living Each Season" follows the ethos of 19th-century American philosopher and nature writer Henry David Thoreau, who wrote, "Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each."

RAMM's dementia-friendly services have been shaped since 2013 by feedback from people with dementia and their caregivers and advice from NHS representatives, the Alzheimers Society and Innovations in Dementia, a national consultancy working to improve provisions for and attitudes towards people with dementia.

RAMM has piloted tailor-made talking photo albums which provide pictures of objects alongside recordings of conversations, museum information, birdsong and poetry.

What do people say?

"Being close to real objects is wonderful. It makes you think about the people who made them."
Participant

"It's about tapping into what people can do rather than what they can't." *Carrie Clarke, occupational therapist, NHS Franklyn Hospital.*

"It was such an enjoyable experience and... has given [us] much to discuss at home." *Wife of participant*

What next?

The museum is offering dementia-friendly sessions to the public from and is seeking funding to develop self-led activities for visitors with dementia and their relatives.

RAMM collaborates with a dementia assessment ward and local memory cafes, and has a blog at <https://rammlivingeachseason.wordpress.com>

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