



# Sporting Memories Handbook



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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 and 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](mailto: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 the Handbook, and the HSE's Dementia: Understand Together campaign for supporting its creation in Ireland.

## Dementia: Understand Together

Dementia: Understand Together is a public support, awareness and information campaign led by the HSE in partnership with The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Age Friendly Ireland, Age and Opportunity and the Dementia Services Information and Development Centre.

A total of 40 national partners and over 400 local community champions have joined the campaign and are taking actions across communities to make them dementia inclusive. The campaign aims to inspire people from all sections of society to take actions to ensure that our communities are respectful, supportive and inclusive of people with dementia, their families and supporters.

## 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.

We partner with the Dementia: Understand Together campaign.



## 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 - alongside some physical activity - 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, using images, video, and other tools to spark memories and encourage social engagement. The programme aims to tackle dementia, depression, and loneliness through safe, friendly sessions, led by people with a passion for sport and a desire to help people with dementia, their families and supporters stay engaged in their communities.

Sporting Memories groups tend to focus on the age group for whom sport was a major form of recreation and social activity. Images and references used can be from the past - the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s - or more recent ones from the 1990s and 2000s depending on the group. Sports memorabilia, past sporting events, physical activities, quizzes, and guest speakers can also be used to create discussions around sporting events and memories.

Running a Sporting Memories group is hugely rewarding and enjoyable. By using sporting cues, it is possible to stimulate memory, improve communication and social skills among members as well as create 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 together people, especially those living with dementia, to help improve their health and wellbeing. Group members talk and remember common sporting memories to create a sense of camaraderie and belonging in their community.

Many but not all the members of Sporting Memories groups will be living with dementia. Organisers and volunteers do not have to be experts in dementia, but they should have a basic understanding of the condition and how it impacts the lives of people with it and their loved ones. This understanding may be built upon in time, and through running a group you will meet people with dementia and learn first-hand how it affects people in different ways at different stages.

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## 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 conditions which fall under the umbrella of “dementia”. Alzheimer’s is the most common one. Vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy Bodies, and frontotemporal dementia are other types of dementia.

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 in 2021.**
- ▶ **Each year 11,000 people are diagnosed with dementia - that’s 30 people a day.**
- ▶ **The number of people with dementia will more than double in the next 25 years to reach over 150,000 by 2045.**

## Symptoms of Dementia

Although there are many different forms of dementia, the thing they have in common is that they progressively damage the brain. In many cases the main symptom of dementia is memory loss, but others include losing track of the time, getting lost in familiar places, or changes in mood or behaviour. People living with dementia may also lose their ability to reason clearly and may find making decisions very hard. Dementia can also cause personality changes, which can be particularly upsetting for those who care for a person with the condition.

Most types of dementia progress gradually, and 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 or 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: remembering the need to get up in the morning, wash and dress, eat and drink, keep cool or warm, and go to the toilet. It also includes remembering how to do other basic daily tasks such as cleaning the house, shopping and cooking. Memory is an important part of a person's identity; remembering your family, the role in your family, likes and dislikes, attitudes, hobbies, fears; it encompasses everything that makes the person a unique individual.

Reminiscence is the practice of improving communication with people affected by memory loss by engaging them in conversation using sensory stimuli as triggers to spark memories and recall of past experiences and events. It is a positive intervention in that reawakening feelings of self-identity and group identity can have a positive impact on quality of life, behaviour, and communication.

It is widely recognised that people affected by memory loss can engage and communicate very successfully if the conversation sparks a memory from their past and they are given the opportunity to recall the details of that memory.

## The importance of maintaining social connections

Sometimes for people with dementia attendance at matches might no longer be possible, and so these Sporting Memories events try to re-establish that connection with their sport clubs and the match-day experience. Where and when possible, it is usually an advantage to be able to take people to places and situations with which they were familiar - going to local sports grounds outside of a match being on or visiting the clubhouse.

It is important for people living with dementia, that their interests, skills, and routines in life are supported and maintained for as long as possible. In recent years, a range of accessible and non-medical interventions have been developed to help support people living with dementia; applying sporting reminiscence is one such intervention. Meaningful social engagement like that created by Sporting Memories groups is recognised to benefit people living with dementia.



## 03 | How to set up a Sporting Memories group

A Sporting Memories group can be based on any sport - soccer, golf, Gaelic games, rugby 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 a Sporting Memories group in your local community, a good first step is to contact the Alzheimer Society of Ireland who can provide guidance on setting up a group and engaging with people living with dementia in your locality.

They can also provide helpful resources and support you in communicating your Sporting Memories events.

**Contact the Alzheimer Society at [communityengagement@alzheimer.ie](mailto:communityengagement@alzheimer.ie)**

### Engagement and Communication

To be a facilitator of a Sporting Memories group you will need good communication skills as well as sensitivity, empathy, and patience. Good communication is as vital for people with dementia as it is for anyone else. Communication and social skills of people with dementia can improve when communication is encouraged. Any way you can find to help people with dementia communicate and connect socially will make a big difference to their quality of life.

### Use of images

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

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

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## 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 in the group.
7. Share and join in the laughter and the banter.

### Communication

- ▶ 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 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. The person is really trying hard.
- ▶ 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 a 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, "Do you, want 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 groups, ranging from sports clubs, community, church and school halls to day centres, hospital wards, and care homes.

### Key factors to consider for locating your Sporting Memories group

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

### Creating the right environment

Adequate lighting is important as many members will have visual impairments, and they 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 members. The venue should be heated, especially in the winter months, so that members are comfortable.

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

Furniture is a big consideration to ensure members are comfortable during sessions. Avoid using low tables that can be inaccessible to wheelchair users and use chairs that are supportive, easy to sit in, and get out of for other members. 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 decorating the space as this can add to the sense of the occasion and focus of the subject matter. Decorations and visual cues could include posters, replica tops, hats, scarves, rosettes, programmes, stills, magazines, tickets, and other memorabilia.

### Routines

Holding sessions according to a pre-planned calendar is helpful as it 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 dates of the Sporting Memories sessions. A regular date makes life a lot simpler for administration purposes and hiring rooms.

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

The half-time 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, and this can be a useful link between past and present.

### Second-half activities

Several Sporting Memories groups have introduced a programme of physical movement in the second part of the session. This can include light exercises linked to the sport referenced in the session and can be carried out from a sitting position or wheelchair if necessary.

### Final whistle and goodbyes

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 monthly sessions while others do weekly and even daily get-togethers.

### Group Preparation

Sporting Memories sessions need some preparation (a sample session outline and other materials are available in the Useful Information and Resources Section). Most importantly, the facilitator 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. The facilitator should be able to have eye contact with the members. Volunteers should be spread out so they can help members when needed, for example, toilet breaks. It is important that there is emergency cover on hand and that fire drills are known to the volunteers and facilitators.

## 04 | Useful information and resources

### The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

Dementia supports & services for carers, supporters and people with dementia  
1800 341 341 | [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)

### Dementia: Understand Together

Dementia inclusive communities, training & awareness  
[www.understandtogether.ie/get-involved](http://www.understandtogether.ie/get-involved)

Brain health  
[www.understandtogether.ie/about-dementia/what-is-dementia/brain-health](http://www.understandtogether.ie/about-dementia/what-is-dementia/brain-health)

### Dementia Supports Information Development Centre

Dementia information, resources and training  
[www.dementia.ie](http://www.dementia.ie)

### i) 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 based on extensive 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 men with dementia, especially those for whom generic reminiscence activity holds little appeal.”*

While in the process of developing a pilot programme for Ireland, the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) was contacted by Shelbourne Football Club (SFC) who were looking to create a programme for people with dementia. SFC had recently lost former players Tony Dunne, Tommy Carroll and Ben Hannigan, who lived with the condition after their playing days. SFC and ASI identified the positive power of football to help raise awareness of dementia while also creating fun, engaging, and impactful experiences for those living with dementia.

## ii) Feedback from the pilot programme of Sporting Memories with Shelbourne FC

Donal Murphy, The Alzheimer Society of Ireland’s Operations Project Manager (at the founding stage in June 2021):

*“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 partnership to date (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.”*

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### iii) Sample planning template

Item	Recommendation	Responsibility	Notes
1. Planning	Regular calendar meetings are preferable (First Monday, last Tuesday etc.).		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.		Organizer as key link.
5. Access	Is the building/room suitable, available, and ready for use?		Comfortable and safe premises.
6. Domestic	Heating, Lighting, Toilets, Power.		Comfortable and safe premises.
7. Resources	Starter Pack. Sets of Sports Stars cards, individual resources.		Groups can access website and new materials.
8. Volunteers	Who is coming/not coming?		Ensure there is someone who can cover when needed.
9. Professional Staff	Organizer/facilitator.		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. Second half flexible.		Arrange collection 60 minutes after start time.
13. Refreshments	Half-time break suggested.		Type of cups/mugs? Individual preferences.

Item	Recommendation	Responsibility	Notes
14. Close	Final activity suggested. Sports "Best Ever" Awards. Good ending helps.		Important to end well.
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. Domestic	Tidy room. Collect Resources.		Ready to use.
18. Review	Discuss any issues and plan accordingly.		Facilitator to collect.
19. Preparation	Any changes for next session? Any missing resources?		Contact project lead if needed.
20. Recording	Actual attendance and any significant issues.		Facilitator to keep logs.



## Sample Activities and images

Activity	Question	Image
a. Name the team	What team wears this jersey?  Answer: Real Madrid	
b. Young and Old	e.g., a famous star as a child, and later as an older person- Who is it?  Answer: Wayne Rooney	
c. Who Is It?	e.g., a famous star in disguise  Answer: Christian Ronaldo	
d. Sporting Stars	e.g., famous sports playing other sports  Answer: Roy Keane	
e. Happy Sporting Families	e.g., match brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and sons and daughters  Answer: Venus & Serena Williams	
f. Which Trophy / Medal Is This?	e.g., images of famous trophies, medals and names of Sports. Match them up.  Answer: World Cup	
h. Name the club	West Ham United- also known as the Hammers	



## iv) Evaluation

Evaluating the 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 the programme 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. Well-being  |
| e. Enjoyment   |
| f. What could we do to make this experience more enjoyable |

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

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