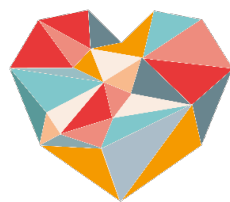


# Weekly art classes for people with dementia

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A good practice nominated by

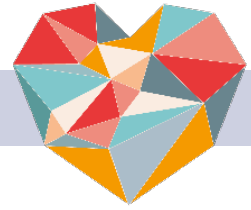


Dementia  
in Cultural Mediation



With the support of the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

# The activity



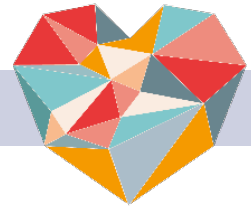
## Name of the activity

Weekly art classes for people with dementia.

## Summary

Weekly art classes for people with dementia, embedded in the regular program of the art school. All visual media are explored (painting, drawing, printing, ink, charcoal, mixed media, ...).

# Content



## Target group

Both people living at home and in residential care homes, and their family/caregivers belong to the target group. We reach people between 60 and 92 years old who are in different stages of dementia.

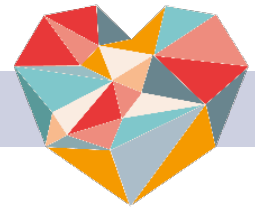
## Objective

The primary goal is to explore art together and to induce a 'flow state' in the participants. We also notice that the activities improve the relationships between people with dementia and their family/caregivers.

## Partners

- We work together with a local social partner to design the program. They have expertise in the field of elderly people and/or people with dementia.
- We work together with several local residential care homes and day centres. They bring their residents to our classes.
- We put great emphasis on building an informal network with the caregivers and relatives of the people with dementia and communicate directly with them. They can encourage the participants to come or to continue working on their artwork at home or in the residential care home. Therefore, we consider it important to involve them in the work of the participants and to evaluate it together with them. Finally, being in touch with them allows us to react quickly when necessary (if for instance someone gets sick, if we need to find a driver last minute, ...).
- For recruitment purposes, we initially distributed posters to doctors, pharmacists, ..., who could inform their patients about our project. More recently, we opted for a more personal approach. We go to residential care homes and visit people who show an interest or invite them to drop by to learn about what we offer.

# Practical



## Venue

The art classes take place in a classroom at the Academy of Bruges DKO and are offered within the regular program. We work in a space on the ground floor with big windows and plenty of natural sunlight. All necessary furniture (tables, chairs, easels, ...) and art tools are present. Sometimes we work outside, in the garden.

## Day, time & duration

The art classes take place weekly, at a fixed time during the week. Each lesson lasts about 100 minutes, with a short coffee break in between.

## Group size

The ideal number of participants is 10. That way you can give everyone enough attention. We ask people to come independently as much as possible, so without caregivers or companions from the residential care home (with a maximum of two). This requires trust but is less distracting and works better.

## Supervisors and hosts

The workshops are given by a visual art teacher, in cooperation with a remedial educationalist. Two volunteers are also present to help where necessary. More important than the number of facilitators, is that these four people are perfectly attuned to each other.

## Materials & facilities

We work on a tailor-made basis because tastes and preferences can differ from participant to participant. We therefore provide many (and different) art books and images that can serve as inspiration. We also bring specialised art material to be able to work in different media (different types of paper, paint, pencils, crayons, ink, charcoal, clay, ...). Recently we started working with background music. So we always have a music installation or Spotify playlist. We ask the participants which music they like to hear.

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## Costs

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There are no costs for the participants.

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## Name tags

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As the participants come on a regular basis, we know them all by name. However, we do put name tags on the tables in front of the participants, because new caregivers from the residential care homes come along regularly. It is nice if these people also get to know the participants and address them by name.

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## Memento

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We always give the works of art, but also the photographs we take, to the participants. They can be published in the newsletter of a residential care home, for example, or adorn a wall and thus serve as a conversation starter.

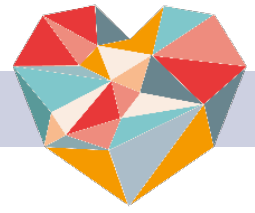
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## Afterwards

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Every year, we organise an exhibition at which we show the participants' works of art.

# Communication & Registration



## Communication

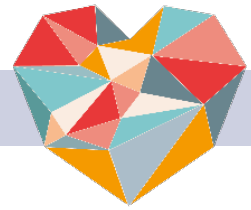
To recruit participants, we initially distributed posters to doctors, pharmacists, ... so that they could inform their patients/clients about our project. Now, we choose a more personal approach.

As we work with a small group of people who (ideally) come every week, our main focus, besides recruiting new participants, is on developing lasting relationships with the participants once they come, as well as with their families and caregivers. Our work does not stop after the class. We communicate regularly with the participants or their caregivers/families: via WhatsApp, phone, ... We also encourage the participants to continue working on their art at home or in the residential care home. In this way the participants, their caregivers and family also become 'ambassadors' of the program.

## Registration

We have an official mailing that we send out from the academy to, for example, the residential care homes, but contact is mainly personal: via WhatsApp, text message, ... We have the personal numbers of the informal caregivers, family, dementia coach, ... and hear through them when someone can or cannot come.

# Description & Program



We start the activity by offering techniques. We also provide a lot of books and pictures that are very different in style (figurative, abstract, ...), colour, medium,... and that can inspire the participants (and give them a wide range of examples).

We usually work around a theme (for instance water). We let the participants choose a picture that inspires them. We pay close attention to the preferences of the individual participants in terms of visual style, materials, ... and let them take the lead.

Each participant creates a work of art of their own.

Our role and that of the volunteers is one of a sparring partner. This means that we listen, we look, we ask friendly questions and we put the participants on the way, but we always make sure that we do not take over the action. We listen to them and start from their visual language and encourage them to explore things further. For example, if someone draws a heart, we will suggest that they look for another way to express love.

It is important to give short, clear instructions and to start quickly. They need to feel challenged to act.

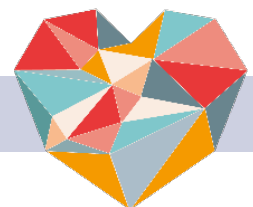
As they are exploring something new, it can be tiring for them. Therefore, it is important to follow their rhythm and not to take too many steps at once, but to build up.

We usually start with a very simple question and work further on their input.

Finally, it is important to remember these three things:

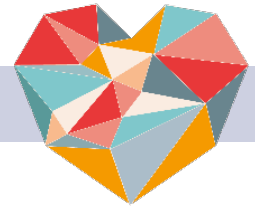
- Show patience and motivate the participants.
- Having fun is also an important part of the classes.
- The participants can also be proud of their work.

# Evaluation



At the end of the lesson we plan a short discussion, preferably also in the presence of the family/ caregivers.

# Checklist, when to do what



As this is a regular, weekly activity, it is important in the first place to prepare the content of the lesson and to ensure that all materials are available. Furthermore, arranging transport is important, as are other practical arrangements such as getting people there and back, providing wheelchairs and walkers, ...

## Corona

During corona, lessons continued, initially one-to-one. Later, when regulations became more flexible, we organised sessions with four people with dementia, with everyone wearing a face mask.



# Points of attention

