



## How did this project come about?

The development phase of the Dynamic Dunescapes project identified a higher than average proportion of older people living in communities close to and associated with sand dune sites. It was also identified that individuals, families and groups found barriers to accessing these sites.

Original plans were to encourage and enable individuals and groups to work alongside People Engagement Officers and Site Managers to undertake site audits and develop face-to-face activities to increase participation, access and inclusion of these groups.

However, due to Covid-19, face-to-face events were suspended across the project. Elderly individuals and those in care homes were also identified as particularly 'at risk'. On adjusting plans to work within the restrictions, postcards were self-addressed, stamped, and instead sent out to care homes. Residents could then still 'scratch and sniff' and enjoy an activity intended to bring up memories and start conversations. If they chose, they could then also write on the postcard a note, or perhaps a memory, which they would like to share from the session, and post it back to our Engagement Officers. Some engagement was, in this way, able to occur remotely, through care network support staff/care home staff.

## Who did you work with? / How did you engage with different groups?

The Engagement and Communications staff at Dynamic Dunescapes received professional guidance and training delivered by Dementia Adventure (specialists in outdoor provision for people living with dementia). Dementia Adventure also signposted the project to local and national support networks. The project also worked with local care homes and care networks.

## What did you do and how?

& 2 9 , ' 3 R V W F D U G V Z H U H G H V L J Q H  
/ L Q F R O Q V K L U H D Q G : D O H V W K H ( Q J D J  
R Q E D W F K H V R I S R V W F D U G V Z K L F K Z H U  
L Q V W U X F W L R Q H [ S O D L Q L Q J W K H E D F N J  
X V H R I W K H S R V W F D U G V W R \$ V Z W D W P H X Q O H D V W  
W U D L Q L Q J Z D V D O V R S U R Y L G H G W R W K  
' X Q H V F D S H V V L W H P D Q D J H U V W R E H W W  
L Q Y R O Y H S H R S O H O L Y L Q J Z L W K G H P H Q V

3 R V W & 2 9 , ' \$ I W H U D P H H W L Q J Z  
E R R N H G Z L W K D O R F D O F D U H K R P H V  
U H P L Q L V F H Q F H E R [ I H H O L Q J W K H V D  
V S H D N H U 5 H V L G H Q W V G H S H Q G L Q J R Q  
S R V W F D U G V R U S D L Q W S L F W X U H V \$ I W  
V Z L P P L Q J F D S D E X F N H W D Q G V S D G H  
) U H T X H Q W O \ L W Z D V E H Q H I L F L D O I R U  
F D U G V D W W K H F D U H K R P H V 7 K L V D  
G D W H

It was also found that having a pre-session meeting with care home staff or activity coordinators was helpful. This way, sessions could be tailored to the group's ability and engagement level.

## **Highlight any issues/obstacles & how you overcame them?**

Too many activities were offered during the first session and it felt rushed. In future sessions, the items in the reminiscence box were focused on first. If there was time or the residents were interested, other activities were then offered.

It is different working in a care home, it's a much slower pace and you don't always get much feedback from the residents. However, that does not mean that they are not engaged or happy with what you are doing. The important thing to remember when working with those living with dementia is to not correct them if they identify something incorrectly. Correcting them can cause them distress.

## **Key Lessons**

A key message picked up from working closely with Dementia Adventure, is to build engagement activities around connecting with people's feelings and emotion - not through facts and figures. Because of this, events focusing on memories and experiences in sand dunes were designed, over sessions which might focus on learning new things, for example, about species on the dunes, which would instead be better for an audience of citizen scientist or volunteer groups.

It is also important to engage in two-way dialogue. Reach out to the potential beneficiaries and participants to find out about and understand their interests, experiences, challenges and what barriers stop them accessing events, activities or sites, to best curate engagement activities.

It is beneficial to work with external expert individuals, groups or specialist support networks to co-design solutions.

Don't make assumptions about the dementia and carers community or about any individual – it needs to be accepted that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution, and everyone's needs are different. "Once you've met one person with dementia, you've met one person with dementia" – quote from a dementia awareness ambassador.

## **How much did the intervention cost?**

Cost of the reminiscence box, jars and the postcards - these will vary depending on supplier.

## **Did the intervention work?**

Yes, the sessions produced lots of positive feedback and care home staff have continued to run the sessions with the materials left with them.

Research shows that an activity like this has a lasting effect on those living with dementia and can improve wellbeing for days after.

## **External Feedback**

The project received some lovely responses from both residents in care homes, and the activity coordinators who helped facilitate the postcard reminiscence sessions, including:

*"Thank you for the cards it was so much fun it made me think about children with buckets and spades playing in the sand."*

*"We all really enjoyed doing scratch n sniff all our residents had a good time talking about the things they remember. I told them about mine it made me remember my son's first time on the sand and how he thought you could eat it and how he could not understand why his*

*sandcastle kept falling out of his bucket as he had it upside down."*

*"I enjoyed doing this it made me think about splashing my toes in the water."*

#### **Feedback from a carer (Wales):**

"Thanks for today, \*\*\* seemed to enjoy, \*\*\* said. \*\*\* just made me have a tear in my eye, I asked him about the postcard, asking what memories he had of the sea and who did he want to send the postcard to? He said '\*\*\*\*' this is his friend he has known since he was 13. He lives in Dorset & we haven't seen them for nearly 2 years! Though have spoken to them a few months ago. \*\*\* has always loved the sea, I said 'the sea makes you relaxed' doesn't it? \*\*\* wrote this on the card (no prompting), we walked to the post box to post it! I'm so delighted he thought of his friend, he will be shocked. Thank you, good day today."

#### **Feedback from participants in the postcard sessions at care homes (Lincolnshire):**

"Wonderful coast, restful, smell reminds me of sun tan lotion."

"The Lincolnshire coast has something for all ages and tastes. The wide open beaches where children make sand castles with buckets and spades. Then off to the café for fish and chips with mum and dad. Meeting Gran and Grandad after their stroll along the promenade. Watching the world go by. Human and wildlife."

"Definitely reminds me of summer and the smell of flowers. Also reminds me of peaches and the open air at the seaside on a nice hot day, which always makes me smile and very happy too. From one happy OAP!"

"Caravans in the Isle of Wight, Scotland, on the south coast when kids were young. Cheap!"

"Ice cream smell. Beautiful beach."

**The 'Reminiscence Box' designed to be a sensory activity box, to evoke memories and inspire conversations around dunes. The postcards were originally part of this setup.**

