



Report : Engaging Elders Through thālo® with Notis Paraskevopoulos

Part II: Online Session

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The interactive online session focused on two main topics aimed at supporting the development of meaningful activities for older adults and individuals living with dementia. Mr. Paraskevopoulos emphasized two key considerations for designing such engagements:

1. Optimizing the Environment: Setting the Stage for Success

Creating the ideal setting is paramount before the activity commences.

For institutions visiting care facilities, proactive communication is essential. A brief ten-minute conversation prior to the visit allows you to gather essential information such as the number of participants, gender distribution, cognitive condition, expectations, and whether the group is homogeneous or not. **Asking demonstrates your professionalism** and helps reassure the care home, allowing them to prepare effectively.

This includes coordinating visit times to minimize distractions (e.g., capitalizing on the morning when elderly individuals often have more energy) and requesting staff assistance in reducing environmental disruptions, such as turning off televisions. To encourage interaction among participants, a horseshoe seating arrangement is generally recommended, while remaining attentive to individual comfort and preferences.

2. Prioritizing Experience Over Outcome: Focusing on the Lived Moment

The primary focus of these activities should be the participants' lived experience, rather than a specific outcome. They will mostly remember the experience, not necessarily the artworks. The emphasis should be on how they feel and how to bring them joy. **Having fun is the most important aspect.**

Cultivating an environment that fosters exchange, respect, and upliftment is therefore vital. Notis also emphasized that these activities are particularly effective when they are collaborative, encouraging interaction and shared experiences among the participants. Everyone can respond to it according to their abilities.

Importantly, he reassured participants and caregivers that the initial activity might not be perfect. The key to success lies in repeated engagement, returning to connect with the same audience in care homes on multiple occasions. This consistent presence allows for the development of trust and deeper connections, ultimately maximizing the positive impact of the activities and reigniting self-esteem, both in their capacity to appreciate art and in their personal lives.

A 40-minute visit (with a maximum of 7 artworks) is already quite intense. Keep in mind the effort these individuals have made just to get there. Ending with a friendly moment—sharing a drink or a snack while reflecting on the visit—can be a great alternative to a creative workshop, which can also be quite demanding.

Closing thoughts :

This workshop offered valuable perspectives on crafting meaningful and engaging experiences for older adults and those with cognitive impairments within cultural settings. We hope these insights will be beneficial in your ongoing work.

Notis remains available should you have any specific questions (welcome@thallo.care). His organization can also support you in developing similar activities within your museum. Feel free to reach out to him directly.