



## Evidence at a Glance

### Issue 1: Shared activities between day programme staff and people with dementia

Welcome to *Evidence at a Glance*. We are planning to produce this resource on regular basis. Our hope is that sharing research findings will be useful to you in supporting what you already do, and in providing ideas for how to improve our service.

This issue focuses on a **study that showed how sharing cognitive resources supported a group activity**. Supportive and meaningful communication with people who have dementia can be the cornerstone of relationships, activities and connection with the world and other people. Communication becomes more difficult as words become hard to find, recent memories are lost, and it becomes hard to interpret conversations.

In this study collaboration between staff and people with dementia overcame cognitive and communication barriers, enabling people with dementia to participate successfully in a group activity.

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#### Cooking together – Brussels sprouts au gratin

A study by Hydén (2014)<sup>1</sup> used video recording to closely observe the interactions and conversations of a group (2 women with dementia and 2 day programme staff) preparing a new dish: Brussel sprouts au gratin. The researchers found that the women with dementia could collaborate well in preparing food when they were supported by staff with cognitive actions (planning and carrying out) and the conversation skills of other people.

The communication and coordination required to complete the recipe was supported with:

- **shared attention** (staff keeping the focus on the task).
- **following a plan** (in this case a recipe which relieves the cognitive load).
- **scaffolding the task** (the task was explained by staff in a practical and verbal way with active monitoring and support).
- **Using physical objects** (kitchen utensils in this case provided external memory support).

The focus was on what people can do together rather than on individual abilities.

#### Learnings from the research included:

- The need for a positive, supportive work climate.

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Hydén, L (2014). Cutting Brussels sprouts: Collaboration involving persons with dementia.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Aging Studies*, 29, 115-123, doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2014.02.004.

- Make use of the skills the person is good at.
- Tasks can be split into smaller partial tasks appropriate to what a person can manage - “cognitive and linguistic resources can be lent to a person in order for that person to accomplish a task.” (p. 122) so everyone can participate through help and support.
- The analysis showed the need for clear guidance from staff, practical and oral instructions, monitoring what is going on, providing suggestions to fix up mistakes, giving ongoing feedback, and supporting the person emotionally.

### **Key points**

- Shared activities between people with dementia and staff are useful communication strategies.
- Collaboration involves staff redefining and redistributing tasks and resources.
- Collaboration enables people with dementia to participate successfully with complex activities such as cooking.

### **Questions for discussion**

**1. What are the shared activities involving people with dementia in our organisation?**

- Club/day programme activities?
- Co-designing opportunities to develop services?
- Audit activities involving people with dementia?
- Dementia Friendly Recognition Programme?
- Other activities?

**2. How are our shared activities supported by staff? Do the findings from this study fit with what we do?**

**3. How could we use findings from this study?**

- Do the findings support what we already do as useful evidence?
- If the findings provide new information how could we incorporate these ideas in what we do?
- Do these findings contradict what we do? If so how are we sure what we do works?
- Are there other ways we could use the findings?