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Learning scenario of ABA: Music path

Introduction to the location

Location

The National Polytechnic Museum (NPTM) is located in Sofia, Bulgaria, and is Alzheimer Bulgaria's associated partner.

Five people were working on the AIDA project. They were trained on working with people with dementia. They led the tours around the museum during the sessions. The team was very positive and managed to catch the attention and interest of our participants. Moreover, the museum is very accessible and suitable for people with disabilities. NPTM remains open for any person with dementia who would like to visit the museum.

https://polytechnic-museum.com/

Location

The Ostrich Farm museum is located in the Sofia region. Three people were working in the AIDA team. They were trained on working with people with dementia. They led the tours around the Ostrich Farm and engaged the participants with the different activities on the site.

Project Number: 2021-1-IT02-KA220-ADU-000027077

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Learning scenario of ABA: Music path

Introduction to the partners

Associated partners

The National Polytechnic Museum (NPTM) is Alzheimer Bulgaria's associated partner. It is a cultural institution whose mission is to collect, study, preserve and present the heritage of today's Bulgarian lands - with an emphasis on the development of technique, science and technology. The museum also works on projects related to education through cultural heritage and innovations in museum. For its participation in these projects and initiatives, the museum has won a number of awards.

НАЦИОНАЛЕН ПОЛИТЕХНИЧЕСКИ МУЗЕЙ

Associated partners

Blocks Day Care is the other associated partner of Alzheimer Bulgaria. Blocks Day Care is a daycare center for elderly people (and people with dementia) in Bulgaria which provides the needed care in a safe environment when it's needed. They provided opportunities for dissemination of the project among families having a relative with dementia.

Blocks Day Care

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Objects used during the sessions

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Music path – Group 1

Group 1:
There were six people with dementia in Group 1 and six caregivers. They were people from a nursing home willing to take part in the activities.

It is interesting to note that for the people from the first group, the sessions were a good way to perform an activity outside of the nursing home, consolidate the relationship caregiver – resident and improve their emotional state. The AIDA project is a good solution to the isolation of these people.

We performed the sessions of Group 1 in the so-called Ostrich farm where they learned more about the history of the farm and saw interesting exhibits of eggs and Ostriches' photos. Additionally, the participants could spend some time outside and eat a snack at the restaurant. A few things were taken into consideration when choosing a site:

- To be near the nursing home (some residents have medical problems insisting short journeys; there are no toilets during the transportation).
- To have an easy access for people with disabilities.
- To have a warm place for rest.

Participant feedback:

"It is great, it is a diversity for everybody. It is work for me, but I feel good to do it and it is a diversity for me as well." - **caregiver**

"It is great, it is a way to have something new and different." - **participant**

"I am satisfied. It is very interesting." – **participant**

"I feel thankful that there is something new for the people and they can think and have something new in their lives." - **caregiver**

"It is good for the people and for me as well. It is good that with your help we can do something like this." - **caregiver**

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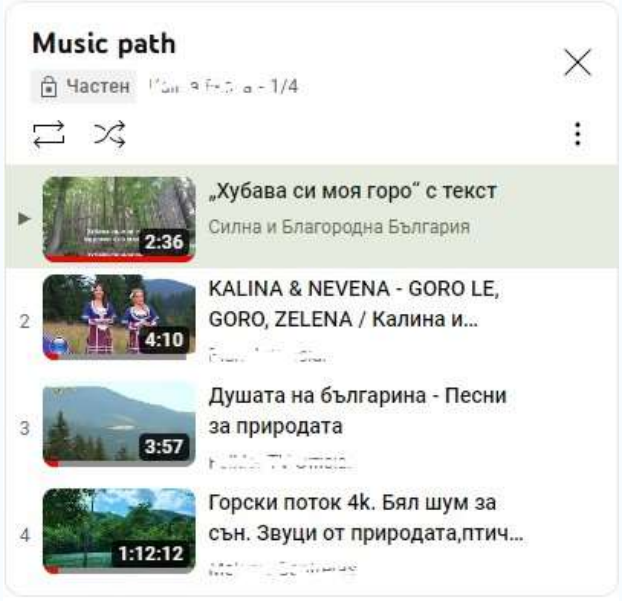
Music path – Group 1

Group 1:
The activities were implemented during the tours of the Ostrich farm. While being inside, they had the opportunity to look around the museum and see Ostrich's eggs and interesting photos. They were told about the history of the Ostrich farm.

After that, they listened to music connected to the topic – **natural melodies**. We also used **Bulgarian traditional music** where the topic of nature is essential such as: "Hubava si moya goro (My forest, you are beautiful)" and "Goro, le, zelena (You, green forest)". We gave opportunity to the participants to choose a song on their own.

Materials:

- All resources to listen to music were online.
- Songs were prepared beforehand in an online playlist.
- An outdoor Bluetooth speaker was used during the activities.
- Wi-fi or Mobile data was needed to play songs chosen by participants.



Learnings

The participants had an opportunity to visit the animals in the farm after the session as an additional activity. However, this turned out to be rather distracting and they got too tired after this.

Keep it simple!
Even though the cultural sites have many entertainments, try to divide them into different sessions.

There is no need to prepare too many songs. Having one-two "ice-breakers" was great, but it was more important to play the songs the people liked and wanted to hear.

Facilitate and listen!
Be sure to have access to the Internet in order to play different songs according to the preferences of the people.
At the same time, facilitate the discussion and help the participant choose a song.

Working with professional caregivers, it was challenging to find incentives for them. Adding an extra responsibility was not the most beneficial for them.

Incentives
Provide professional caregivers with incentives such as: training, additional break, food and drinks, additional payment.

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Music path – Group 2

Group 2:
Group 2 started with five people with dementia and five caregivers. However, there were two drop-out pairs due to personal reasons.

We performed the sessions with Group 2 in the National Polytechnic Museum. It is a place providing access for people with disabilities (we had one person in a wheelchair). The museum is spacious and provides all the needed facilities for people with dementia and/or disabilities (clear signs, big toilets, ramps, etc.).

Special consideration was taken regarding:

- Provision of chairs in front of the exhibits;
- Exhibits which can be associated with music and with the culture and history of the participants;
- According to their previous jobs and the gender the male part of the group was more interested in one kind of exhibits while the female part of the group – to other.

Participants feedback:

"I love such things. I love these things, I feel energised. I like the idea of going to a museum and the opportunity to share and bond [with the person with dementia]. Moreover, I feel quite important." - **relative**

"I can see how good it is for my dad to meet new and unknown people. He is very happy when he can share his knowledge in a particular area. He enjoys being the centre of attention outside the family circle. These encounters rejuvenate him and stimulate him to keep working with his mind." - **relative**

"I am happy to be able to join the activities. I like cars and I like the possibility to go to the museum. I am happy to be here." - **participant**

I am very happy and satisfied with the way we spent these days. And it would be great if it could happen more often. - **relative**

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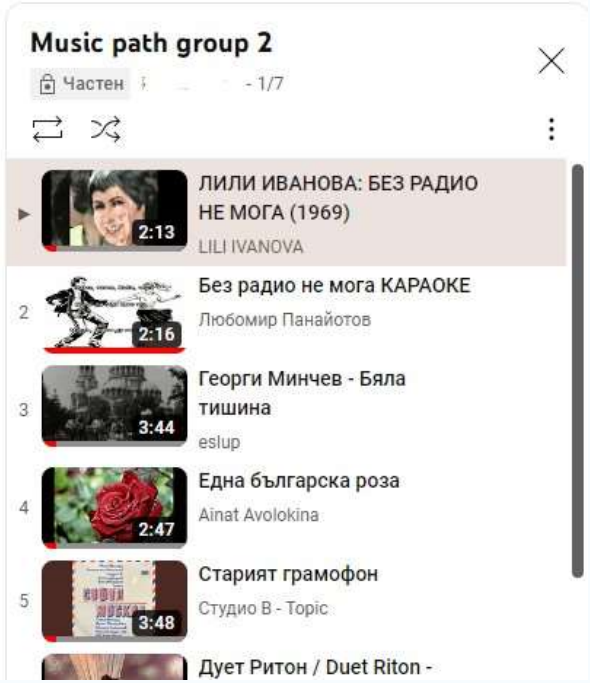
Music path – Group 2

Group 2:
We started the tour by singing a happy birthday song to one of the participants. It was a great introduction to the session. Then, we continued with a second song encouraging the participants to sing along.

The museum team prepared a special tour around exhibits of familiar objects from the past of the participants. For each object, there was an appropriate song played.

At the end of the tour, the museum team let the participants use some of the exhibits (like the piano and the gramophone). One of the participants could play the piano and he played a song for us. It was a good idea to explore the skills of the participants.

The music making turned out to be the most successful part of the tour. However, the participants were also interested in learning more about the prepared exhibits.



Learnings:

Even though a lot of things were improved for Group 2, we discovered that music making by using musical instruments, is a very successful approach.

Be creative!
Using all resources for music making is important part of the session. It is not only singing that is possible. You could use musical instruments (if available), clapping, knocking, etc.

The music played was not the essential part of the tour. The participants were curious enough to hear about the exhibits and then to create music.

Don't get discouraged!
Even if participants do not pay attention to the music played during the tour, it doesn't mean they are not interested. Focusing on only one thing is easier for the participants, but playing music during the tour creates an atmosphere. However, discuss music themes and make music only after the end of the tour.

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Challenges	Solutions
Working with participants from a nursing home The participants in the nursing home might feel more depressed and even obligated to participate. The administration has to be aware of the activities and willing to help. The relatives have to be contacted.	A solution to this challenge is: 1. Talk to the administration first. Be sure that they are willing to help actively (involving their staff, helping out with predisposing the participants, and providing access to the nursing home). Provide them with incentives to participate (financial, educational, promotional, etc.) 2. Ask the administration to talk to the relatives and receive their written agreements. It is important to be sure that there are no legal or moral issues connected to the activities. 3. Be sure that each participants understand his role in the project and is willing and happy to be part of it. Sometimes participants cannot understand well the written agreement. You (or even a psychologist) need to talk to them and discover whether they really know what they will be involved in.
Working with professionals Even though it is generally beneficial for the caregivers to take part in the sessions, some of them may feel underappreciated or see the sessions as an additional work.	It is important to provide incentives for all sides engaged in the project – caregivers, nursing homes, relatives, psychologists, museum workers, etc. These can be: 1. Education – providing them with training for working: with people with dementia; with art tools; with technology 2. Financial incentive – if possible, you can provide the workers with an additional bonus for their work. 3. Break – you can provide the workers with additional break days/hours 4. Promotion – you can suggest to nursing homes and museums to promote their work on your channels or within your network

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Challenges	Solutions
Working with people with dementia at different stages of the disease The symptoms of dementia are different for every person. Defining the stage of the disease might be hard. Excluding participants just because they are at a moderate or late stage of the disease is also not the best opportunity.	1. Respect the willingness of people with dementia to participate even if they are at a moderate or late stage of the disease. They might not be very talkative, but they also enjoy being outside doing exiting new activities. 2. Don't push the people with dementia to participate actively in the activities. You shouldn't forget that the emotional wellbeing of the participants is the most important and the main goal of the activities. 3. Having people at different stages of the disease may make it harder for them to communicate with each other. Moreover, the facilitator might find it hard to prepare activities for everybody. A good solution is to either divide the participants into different groups, or to hire more facilitators splitting the group into smaller ones. 4. Even if people are diagnosed with dementia at a certain stage, don't be prejudiced – they might be able to do a lot more than expected. You should always give a chance to the participants to participate (actively).
Receiving feedback from participants Having in mind that the participants are people with dementia and their caregivers, we need to take into consideration how to receive feedback from them and evaluate their wellbeing.	1. Provide very simple evaluation and feedback forms for the caregivers to fill in. They might not have the time for long and detailed feedback. 2. People with dementia may find it hard to express how they feel or show it on a scale. Even if they manage to do it, the answers might not be corresponding to how they really feel. The best solution would be to use indirect evaluation (from their caregivers or a psychologist participating at the session). 3. Do not push the participants to fill in the evaluation forms. You can try to find how they feel through direct communication – asking simple questions such as "Do you like the session?", "Do you feel happy or rather sad?".

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Challenges	Solutions
Recruiting participants Recruiting participants can be very challenging as they might not feel confident to attend or might find it hard to spend time on such activities	1. When organizing the sessions, be sure that you don't cause any additional stress or work to the caregivers. If possible, propose to transport them or buy them food for the tour. 2. Keep the sessions short – up to 1 hour, so that both the caregivers and the people with dementia won't get too tired. Moreover, this will help for the caregivers to manage to do all their tasks for the day. 3. Have a psychologist at the sessions. He can be helpful not only for improving the experience of the people with dementia, but can also encourage the caregivers and provide them quick pieces of advice, etc. This will add value to the sessions. 4. Be sure to have a very clear schedule of the meetings so that the participants can organize their days. 5. Don't push the participants to participate in all sessions. Give them freedom to choose in which sessions they want to be and how much time they want to spend in the museum. However, make sure that they always feel wanted and invited to the sessions.
Finding a cultural site Asking a museum to welcome participants with dementia can be a hard mission especially if the cultural sites do not have any experience.	1. Find all cultural sites in the city (or as close as possible) for the participants. 2. Contact those that have the needed facilities for people with dementia first (ramps, chairs, rest place) – they might be more open to welcoming such visitors. 3. Propose different benefits: training the staff, promoting the museum on your social medias or within your network. 4. Raise awareness on the need for engagement with the problem (after all, dementia is a universal problem for everybody in society). 5. Engage them with other dementia activities (invite them to dementia campaigns, give them an opportunity to learn more about dementia) 6. Propose help and pieces of advice to the cultural site throughout the whole planning and implementation of the sessions.

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Challenges	Solutions
Divide the activities It turned out to be a challenge to focus the participants on the “Music path” itself. Having so many interesting things to see in the museums, the music remains in the background. Adding more activities is also distracting.	A solution to this challenge is: 1. Make the initial plan as simple as possible Even though we want to show to the participants as many things and activities as possible, we need to take into consideration their abilities and needs. 2. If you want to show them different things and activities, divide them. You can either divide the activities in one session, or you can even split them for two sessions. 3. Decide what to focus on The best solution is to make the tour around the museum (with or without background music) and then to focus only on the music part.
Don’t plan too much and encourage creativity Having the sessions planned is great, but you shouldn’t exclude creativity. Let participants be creative and express themselves and show their skills.	A solution to this challenge is: 1. Prepare a schedule and a specific plan for the sessions 2. Include space for creativity within the plan (provide the needed resources for creativity – musical instruments, blank pages, etc.) 3. Ask participants questions related to their hobbies, work, knowledge (however, if they are not talkative, just let them listen) 4. If the plan changes too much, but the participants are enjoying, leave it that way. After all, the most important thing is the happiness of the participants.

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Challenges	Solutions
Don’t get discouraged if participants are not very communicative When starting the session, the participants might be pessimistic about the activities or they can even decide not to participate at all.	1. Start the session as planned and leave the participants with a choice whether to join or not. Have the opportunity to take part in the activities open all the time. 2. Don’t get discouraged if participants are pessimistic and not very communicative. When they get to know the environment, the activity and the facilitators better, they will start enjoying and will be more relaxed. Give them time. 3. If they don’t like the activity at all, you can always suggest different ideas and try different approach. You can even ask them what they would like to do (giving them options if needed).
Have a follow-up Having accumulated so much positive emotions: friendships, compassion, happiness and joy, people will surely want more.	Try to find a way to sustain the project: 1. Acknowledge the cultural side as “dementia friendly” meaning they are open to dementia visitors. 2. Talk to the families or nursing homes whether there are ways to arrange further sessions. 3. Train facilitators – informal caregivers or volunteers 4. Disseminate the results of the sessions so that more people start implementing it

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Music path

All photos are taken and shared with the consent of the participants

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