Minds in Motion: engaging people with memory loss

Opening:
Presenter: Jeffie

Powerpoint screen: Jeffie’s mother, Olivia “Ebbie” Tharpe

Script:
Hello. I’m Jeffie Mussman, a docent at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri and I'm here today because of the woman you see on this screen. Her name is Olivia, better known as Ebbie, Tharpe and she is my mother. She was a working mom--managing volleyball leagues in the evening for the YMCA--before the phrase “working mom” was part of our lexicon. At the peak of her career, she served on the selection committee for the USA Women’s Olympic volleyball team. Perhaps all you need to know about my mother is that once, when my husband was picking up a package for her from the local meat market, the butcher asked him, “Does that woman ever stop talking?” She loved people and she loved to talk.

Until she didn’t. Later in her life she developed vascular dementia and it became increasingly challenging to engage with her. She talked in circles, and frankly, it was work to be around her. There were fewer and fewer activities that we could enjoy together. Then I was introduced to Minds In Motion during tour training at the Nelson Atkins. I thought, “this might be something I could try with my mother”, so on a beautiful fall day during my next trip to St. Louis, I gave it a try. I put her in a wheelchair (assuring her it was for my convenience, not because she needed it) and we wheeled into our first gallery. As we viewed the art together and I asked her what she thought was going on in the paintings, we had the first real conversation we had enjoyed in four years. I don’t
remember exactly what she said, but we had a delightful time just sharing what we thought the people in the paintings might be saying to one another. What a gift! And it’s a gift you can give to countless people with memory loss and their care partners. Sue…

**Transition to: Our communities need our support:**

**Presenter:** Sue

**Powerpoint screen:** “This is more than personal; our communities need our support.

**Script:** Hello. My name is Sue Krebs and I am also a docent at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Like Jeffie, I, too, have experienced firsthand having loved ones struggle with dementia. I had a grandmother we lost to vascular dementia and an uncle to Alzheimer’s. I am sure many of you in this room have also been touched by this cruel condition. Please raise your hand if you have a family member who has or had dementia. Keep them raised, please. Thank you. Now, raise your hand if you have a friend, colleague or neighbor that has or had dementia. Everyone take a look around you. Most (all) of us in this room have been touched by dementia.

Now let’s back up for just a moment and let me say that dementia is not a specific disease. Dementia is an umbrella term describing a wide range of symptoms caused by a variety of diseases and conditions that develop when nerve cells in the brain die or no longer function normally. The death or malfunction of these nerve cells causes changes in one’s memory, thinking, language and social abilities, severe enough to reduce a person’s ability to perform everyday activities.

Alzheimer’s is the most common cause of progressive dementia representing 60-80 percent of cases. That is why many people use the terms “dementia” and “Alzheimer’s” interchangeably. Scientists are still not sure of the exact cause of this disease.

Vascular dementia, the type that my grandmother and Jeffie’s mother had, results from strokes or damage to or clotting in the blood vessels of the brain. It is the second most common type of dementia.

The Alzheimer’s Association does an excellent job of collecting facts and figures each year on Alzheimer’s specifically, and dementia, in general. Here are some startling facts they released just a few months ago.
To view this video go to: https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures

Script: The Dementia crisis is staggering and it’s growing at a rapid clip. There are many challenges facing a person with dementia and their care partners. What can we do as museum docents and staff to help with this problem? Let’s watch this clip from one of Kansas City’s local news stations to find out.

To view this video go to: https://fox4kc.com/?s=making+k%20k+dementia+friendly

Script: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art is proud to be one of the Kansas City institutions that is dementia-friendly. Our Minds in Motion tour for those with memory loss and their caregivers provides a safe and caring environment for people with memory loss to explore art with specially trained docents sensitive to the abilities of these visitors.

I’ve had the pleasure of giving many of these tours over the past six years and have grown very fond of several of our regulars. Robert, the husband and care partner of one of these regulars beautifully shares what the Minds and Motion tours have meant to both he and his wife, Jean.

Powerpoint: run first segment of Robert video (from 0-1:27) Video length: 1:27
To view this video go to: https://vimeo.com/372120645

**Powerpoint screen:** The Tour Experience

**Script:** Robert has been a great partner in helping us discover what it takes to make these tours accessible for our museum visitors. Accessibility is an important goal for museums today. It means enabling all visitors, including those with memory loss and the early to moderate stages of dementia, to participate in an enriching museum experience. Let’s take a look at what it takes to deliver that enriching tour experience. Jeffie...

**Powerpoint screen:** graphic with four categories shown in a square.

**Presenter:** Jeffie: **Tour Enhancements:**

**Script:** The reassuring thing to keep in mind when putting together a tour for people with memory loss and their care partners is that you can take just about any tour you currently give at your museum and translate it for this population. There are a few
tweaks you will need to make when it comes to the logistics, and Sue will be covering the logistics in detail next...But first I’d like to talk about how to take those tours you are already doing, and enhance them for this audience.

**Powerpoint screen:** zoom in on color photo of woman in front of record albums.

**Script:** One big way we have done that at the Nelson-Atkins is with the addition of music. Sue and I gave a Minds in Motion tour last August in our photography galleries. This is one of the photographs we talked about, discussing words to describe her and how she might feel about herself...

And this is the music we played.

**Play audio:** Aretha Franklin’s *Respect*

**Script:** Suddenly we were transported back to a time referenced in the photo. All sorts of memories came flooding back for our visitors. One shared about how tumultuous a time it was for the country; another was reminded of their first love and the marriage that ensued but for another, a caregiver, it was a reminder of a time of service to this country. You can’t predict where the memories will take you but you can be assured that playing music will evoke emotions that bring memories to mind.

Carol and Diane, two docents at the Nelson-Atkins, used music in another way that they found very effective. They were in front of an American piece of art and spent some time exploring the symbols of America in the painting and then tried something they had tried during a fifth grade tour…

**Powerpoint screen:** Carol & Diane

To view this video go to:  [https://vimeo.com/372089784](https://vimeo.com/372089784)
So go ahead and break into song! Research shows that not only is singing engaging, but musical aptitude and appreciation are two of the last remaining abilities in people with dementia. It’s an excellent way to reach beyond the disease and reach the person.

In addition to music, tactile enhancements work very well. Sue was giving a tour at our “Gates of Paradise” and had her group don gloves and actually touch the sculpture. Having always been told we can’t touch the art, they were almost giddy when they learned the special accommodation being made for them that day.

Powerpoint screen: Show picture of Sue and Alan in front of Gates of Paradise

Another tactile concept you might want to try is using a materials board. We used this one, which was originally created for an elementary tour in the Native American galleries. It provided our guests the opportunity to touch the same materials the artifacts are made from. There’s something about the simultaneous touching and viewing that helps to spark conversation. Similarly, I once brought in a wooden sculpture my father had carved for me as we were viewing another wooden sculpture in our Japanese gallery. This also allowed me to segue into a discussion of any special objects they might own that have sentimental meaning for them.
I urge you not to be intimidated by another concept we asked our visitors to try...we gave them a pencil and paper to express their thoughts. Denise, another docent, shares her experience using this technique.

To view this video go to:  [https://vimeo.com/372089804](https://vimeo.com/372089804)
Script: In fact asking your guests to use all of their senses is a great way to stimulate thought…even your sense of smell. We didn't bring in a dead fish with this one, but we did ask visitors to use their imaginations. Probably best to stick to pleasant smells as we did when we brought in a vial that smelled like incense as we were viewing one of our Buddha sculptures.

Powerpoint screen: painting of cat and fish from Rococo gallery with words Stimulate all 5 Senses

Script: For all the fun you'll have adding enhancements to your tour it is also important that you do the hard work of making sure the logistics work. Sue…

Presenter: Sue  Logistics

Powerpoint screen: Have Walker Will Travel
When it comes to logistics we understand that every museum is unique so each of you will require your own unique approaches to logistical concerns. But we thought it would be helpful to share some highlights of how we approach giving our tours at the Nelson Atkins. We have uploaded the Docent Training Manual for our Minds in Motion Tour to the nds website so you will be able to refer to everything I am going to share with you.

For this next part of the presentation I am going to talk about the challenges this population faces and then the accommodations we make to meet those challenges.

The first challenge is of course

- Memory Loss

As soon as we greet our guests, we make them a large name tag. It makes them feel welcome to be addressed by name, and gives us the opportunity to establish a rapport.

Short term memory is the first thing people with dementia lose so it is essential that we not ask questions that require them to use it. For example, if we are going to do a compare and contrast of two artworks we make sure that they can both be seen at the same time.

It’s also important to summarize longer discussions often to compensate for short term memory loss so our visitors can more easily track the conversation.

Because most of the visitors on our Minds in Motion tours are elderly, another challenge this population faces is

- Mobility Issues
We make a point to always greet our visitors near the doors to the museum so they don’t have to travel far before encountering a welcoming face.

Many of the tour participants show up with their own wheelchair or walker. For those sitting in a wheelchair we make sure we get down and greet them at eye level and let them know we are delighted they have come out for the tour. For those who don’t bring their own device we stop at the coat check and pick up manual wheelchairs or motorized scooters for those who will need them. There is often one or two who do. After that, our next stop is to pick up folding stools to sit on. The majority of our visitors on a Minds and Motion tour, both those with memory loss and their care partners, either sit in a wheelchair or on a stool throughout the tour.

Keeping their mobility in mind, we also choose a gallery that is not too terribly far away. We stick to one gallery or two adjoining galleries, to cut down on travel time.

- Hearing loss

Again, because many of our visitors attending the Minds in Motion tours are elderly, hearing loss is another challenge many of them face. With this in mind we make sure to project our voices when we are speaking and to not speak too quickly. We also make sure that our face and particularly our mouth is visible to everyone in the group.

- Language difficulties

This population also has language difficulties; so, we repeat and reinforce key ideas or themes frequently and repeat the points we are making by wording them in more than one way. This is helpful for people with hearing loss, too. We are also aware that many of these visitors may also have trouble coming up with the words to express their thoughts and feelings about the art and that’s okay. They may still be very engaged.

- Social challenges

And social challenges can also shake some of the peoples’ confidence about speaking out in front of a larger group. The visitors with dementia may feel safest just turning to their care partner to make a comment. Even if the visitor makes a mistake or does not make sense in the context of the conversation, we do not correct them. We just paraphrase what they have said to acknowledge them. They need to know that they
have been heard. Nothing encourages participation more than being heard and respected.

Powerpoint Screen: Team Touring - Picture of Carol and Diane

Script: It is because of all of these challenges, that we always give our Minds in Motion Tours in pairs. In the example we mentioned earlier, the one where we played Aretha Franklin’s Respect; while Jeffie was standing up in front of the group presenting that photograph of the woman in front of the record albums, I was standing amongst the visitors and leaning in and listening to their responses and any side conversations they were having and encouraging them to share with the larger group. Because most of our visitors on the Minds in Motion tours are elderly they may also have trouble projecting their voice so this can really be helpful.

When planning for a tour we always try to choose a theme...in fact we have uploaded the last three years of tour titles and theme descriptions to the NDS website. A few of the tours that were given this past year include:

   Different Strokes for Different Folks - the group discussed works by the French Impressionists
   As Pretty as a Picture - the group talked about colonial portraits and the stories they told
   Faithful Companions in Art - the group explored the portrayal of a few pets in art and the docents encouraged the visitors’ long-term memories of their own pets

As a special treat, the docents for this last tour, Fran and Cheryl, who also happen to each own therapy dogs, surprised the group with a visit with their dogs in the lobby of the museum after the tour was over. Here is a photo of Cheryl with her dog, Otto and
Fran with her dog, Monty. As you can imagine, this was a huge hit and they hope to repeat it again next year.

**Script:** As far as timing goes, we usually spend a good 12-15 minutes with each piece. We try to not be in a hurry at any point of the tour. A calm, relaxed atmosphere is key. This relaxed atmosphere translates to everyone having fun on the tours, including the docents! The tours run about an hour and definitely no longer than 75 minutes. We make sure to stay in touch with the energy level of our group and let that be our guide.

With regard to gallery selection and some other logistical considerations, here are docents Laura and Gerry...

**Powerpoint screen:** Run clip 1:22-2:13 (51 seconds)

**Video Content:** In this video Laura and Gerry talk about choosing a gallery. They consider the gallery’s placement within the museum, the ease of getting around the
gallery and choosing a gallery that features art that has a narrative. One of their favorite pieces to talk about on a Minds in Motion Tours is a piece by Thomas Gainsborough titled *Repose*. It features several large animals including two horses, three cows and a dog. With this particular painting they have the group use their five senses. They tell the group to look at the picture and then they ask them to imagine they are stepping into the painting. Then they ask: what could you see, what could you hear, what could you feel, what could you smell…?

**Presenter:** Jeffie:  **Unexpected Behaviors:**

**Script:** There’s that sense of smell again! In addition to being prepared with your logistics, another factor you will most likely deal with is challenging or unexpected behavior. How will you handle challenging behaviors and unexpected situations when they arise? Keeping calm and carrying on, as they say, is very important to delivering a successful tour experience. You will learn in a few minutes why we titled this section: “Sensei Sensation”.

**Powerpoint screen:** “Sensei Sensation”
Script: Two of our docents, Rosalie and Judy, have mastered the technique of keeping calm and carrying on… in fact, Rosalie recently told me, the relaxed atmosphere of these tours makes them almost impossible to “mess up”.

Power point screen: Run clip of Rosalie and Judy in front of *Baseball 3:12-3:44 with fade between then 4:32-5:42*. (1 minute, 42 seconds)

![Image of Rosalie and Judy](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

To view this video go to: [https://vimeo.com/372236168](https://vimeo.com/372236168)

Script: As you can see, you never know where these discussions are going to go. The key is to remain flexible and go with the flow.

Some of your discussions will be lively, with others, you’re concerned that your guests aren’t participating.

Powerpoint screen: Run clip of Rosalie and Judy in front of *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness 5:58-7:19* (1 minute, 21 seconds)

![Image of Saint John the Baptist](https://via.placeholder.com/150)
Video Content: In the video, Judy shares her experience of not really always knowing if you are “connecting” with your audience or not. On one of her tours, two women sat in the front row of their tour group and did not utter a word the entire tour. When the tour was over, however, the women (who were from two different care facilities) stood up and embraced one another. Judy realized the women had shared an experience that was meaningful to them. Likewise, Rosalie had been trying to encourage the participation of a woman on another tour. She did not engage during the whole tour. When the tour was over, however, and Rosalie walked her out, the woman shared, “My brother calls me every night and tonight I will have something to tell him…” She didn’t stop talking all the way down the elevator and out the door. So you never know how you may touch your audience.

Script: You have to be ready for everything...even challenging behavior. Joann shares her experience.

Powerpoint screen: Run clip of Joann 0:00-1:29 (1 minute, 29 seconds)

To view this video go to: https://vimeo.com/372089815

Script: Hence our title, “Sensei Sensation”! The person Sue was talking with was very enthusiastic but not a threat. We ask that all visitors with memory loss be accompanied by a care partner. In this instance, the care partner helped our guest back to her seat. We will always defer to the care partner to deal with any challenging behavior. In the meantime, Sue made sure to keep herself between the visitor and the art so active arms didn’t have a chance to touch. Sue...

Presenter: Sue

Powerpoint screen: “A Little Help from My Friends”
Script: As you can imagine, there are countless touching stories we could share from our Minds in Motion tours. Just for fun, here are two, with a little help from our friends.

Powerpoint screen: Run clip of Judy and Rosalie in front of Augustus the Strong on eyebrows :29-1:36 (1 minute, 7 seconds

Video content: Rosalie and Judy thought their group (including several from one family) would want to talk about the rich clothing of Augustus the Strong. Instead, the first thing they noticed was Augustus’ eyebrows. Rosalie said “Eyebrows? Look at me...I don’t have any eyebrows.” The family replied, “We don’t either!” and started laughing.
Apparently they always notice people’s eyebrows, so the tour pivoted to looking at everybody’s eyebrows.

**Script:** As Judy and Rosalie’s riff on eyebrows demonstrated. These tours can be spontaneous and fun. They were willing to follow the groups’ lead and just followed the discussion where it lead, which in this case was eyebrows!

Here again, with another gem, are Laura and Gerry...

**Powerpoint screen:** Run clip of Laura and Gerry in front of *Repose* on Snowball

To view this video go to: [https://vimeo.com/372090558](https://vimeo.com/372090558)

**Script:** That video was a perfect example of what can happen on these tours. Although short-term memory is the first to go for a person with dementia, they often have very vivid long-term memories and spending time looking at art on one of these tours in a safe and encouraging environment can help them tap into those memories. Jeffie...

**Transition to “Out of the Starting Blocks”**

**Presenter:** Jeffie Mussman

**Power point screen:** Getting out of the starting blocks - photo of older gentleman
Script: Now, we've talked about the tour, but what about putting together the program? Every new and newly tweaked program needs it's champions--an individual, or group to get things rolling...to get the program out of the “starting blocks”. At the Nelson Atkins, that person was Alan Lubert. Alan is a docent at the Nelson Atkins who saw a need, researched programs that had filled that need, reached out to a local agency to connect to an audience, and then, just started doing tours. This, by the way, is not a picture of Alan...we'll see him in a few minutes. Together with Karen Clond, who was with the local Alzheimer’s Association office, and our own Sue Krebs, tried and refined what worked. Once they felt confident about the tours, Alan and Karen worked with David Fiegel, our manager of Education volunteers at the Nelson Atkins to formally train docents, connect with community partners and market the “Minds In Motion” tours. Here's David.

Power point screen: Video of David shares that “about 60 docents signed up”

To view this video go to: https://vimeo.com/373131822

Script: The community partners David refers to are a combination of associations, like the Alzheimer's Association and private residential communities that serve people with
memory loss. David also employed our in-house marketing department to create flyers promoting the tours to be distributed at the museum and for mailing. Social media, digital platforms including our website and bi-monthly calendar mailings were also utilized to promote the tours. David organizes docent-led tours that the public can sign up for on the first Wednesday of every month, and groups can also schedule tours at their convenience. We try to limit the tours to a total of 12. We were greatly encouraged by the feedback we received that the museum was filling a void by providing programming for their loved ones.

Script: Karen Clond, former Dementia Care Specialist of the Mid America Alzheimer Association, shares why bringing those loved ones to the museum is so important…

Power point screen: Video of Karen begins at 1:05

Video Content: “Dementia can be so isolating”. People can do fewer and fewer things, but coming to a museum is a safe and friendly environment where they can enjoy “such an embracing kind of community.”

Script: “And finally meet Alan Lubert, who led the charge within our docent community…”

Power point screen: Video of Alan Lubert: Begin at 4:56
Script: Throughout our journey, our local chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association has been a critically important partner. Karen Clond has organized groups to bring to the museum every month. Here, she shares her thoughts about one of her favorite tours…

Power point screen: Karen Clond

To view this video go to: https://vimeo.com/372732094

Transition to “Pair and Share”

Presenter: Sue

Power point screen: Large graphic of “Pair and Share” and/ or Q&A

Script: “We’ve covered quite a bit of territory, but we know many of you may have questions or good ideas to share with one another. Let’s take the next 5 minutes and do
some sharing with one or two other people sitting on either side of you. People with existing programs, be sure to share a good idea from your museum. Those who are looking to start a program, ask a question of someone who has one in place. Remember, your name tags are color-coded to make it easy for you to find one another: turquoise for those who have an existing program and orange for those of you are hoping to launch a program soon.

Call everyone back together after 5 minutes (give one minute warning)

Five minutes can sure go by quickly. Let’s do some sharing with the larger group. Who heard an idea they would like to share? (continue for 5 minutes).

Thank you for sharing those ideas. Now how about questions? Does anyone have a question they’d like to ask the larger group?

(Take questions for 5 minutes)

Thank you for your questions. Remember, if you have further questions or ideas you want to bounce off of us, you have our contact information and we would be happy to have an email exchange with you.

Now here’s Jeffie with some final thoughts.

**Transition to Conclusion and Call to Action:**

**Presenter:** Jeffie

**Power point screen:** "Call to Action"
Script: We hope we’ve armed you with everything you need to go back to your museum and either create or make an existing tour for those with memory loss the best it can be. We have uploaded to the NDS website: our Docent Training Document that recaps all the nuts and bolts about the tour that we’ve covered today, as well as "Tips for Giving Walk in Tours" and a list of all the tour topics we’ve given at the Nelson Atkins the last couple of years. But we’d like to leave you with one last thought from one of our favorite care partners, Robert…”
Power point screen: Video of Robert

To view this video go to: https://vimeo.com/372731895

Script: Okay docents and staff members…you have the tools…now go out and make a difference for all the Roberts in your communities…
Minds in Motion: engaging people with memory loss

Jeffie Mussman and Sue Krebs, Docents
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