

# THE POWER OF VIRTUAL EXPERIENCES

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## WHAT IS A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE?

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- A virtual experience allows the participant to gain an understanding of what it might be like to have a form of dementia
- It is time limited
- Voluntary
- Involves sensory modification (vision, hearing, tactile)
- It is **not** virtual reality

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## KEY ELEMENTS OF THE VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE

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- Preparation and gear
- Providing the task list
- Experience room
- Empowerment/Debrief session
- Providing resources

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## GROUPS THAT COULD BENEFIT FROM THIS EXPERIENCE

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- First Responders
- Long-Term Care Staff
- Family Caregivers
- Students
- Local Businesses
- Faith Based Organizations

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## FIRST RESPONDERS

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- First responders often see people living with dementia when they are in crisis
- Crisis often involves many strangers and lots of commotion
- Behaviors people living with dementia are demonstrating may seem confusing or threatening
- Escalation may occur due to these factors
- First responders are often called to facilities to “remove problem residents”
- First responders work in these fields because they want to help others

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## LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

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- A large percentage of LTC facility residents have a form of Dementia
- Gives staff a better understanding of what their residents might be living with
- Creating a more compassionate and empathetic style of care
- Better understanding of certain behaviors
- Enlightenment of the need to slow things down

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## FAMILY CAREGIVERS

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- Often have difficulty understanding the impact of dementia
- Person might seem “normal” most of the time
- Manipulation vs changes due to dementia
- Unrealistic expectations of the person can cause challenges
- Communication changes
- Role confusion or reversal

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## STUDENTS

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- Hands on Educational experience
- Teaches Empathy and Compassion
- Awareness of Dementia for future sectors of the work force
- Awareness of Dementia Friendly Communities and Advocacy for Business and Organizations to get trained
- Encourage students to think about a career in Caregiving/Aging workforce

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## LOCAL BUSINESSES

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- Statistics show some of their customers have dementia
- It is the goal of dementia friendly communities to have people access local business they are used to and where they are known
- Having people be as independent as possible but receiving support when needed is key
- Good customer service includes assisting people with cognitive challenges
- They may have staff, volunteers or family members that are having cognitive changes also

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## FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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- Difficulty following service, finding selected pieces (hymns, scriptures)
- Behavior might not be “normal” or appropriate during service
- Navigating the environment could be challenging
- Common practices might be forgotten (communion)
- Impact on other members
- Transportation needs, can lead to isolation or loss of connection

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## CONSIDERATIONS FOR LIMITING THE EXPERIENCE

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Individuals with:

- A cognitive impairment
- Anxiety
- Poor balance
- Impaired mobility that limits movement/standing
- Seizure disorders

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## ALTERING THE EXPERIENCE FOR OTHERS

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Dementia Day Experience: Working with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Sound as a distraction
- Working with interpreters
- Giving instructions
- Creating more distraction
- Lessons learned

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## ALTERING THE EXPERIENCE FOR OTHERS

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Working with students during the school day

- Only had 5 or 6 Students physically go through the simulation. The rest recorded their observations and were located at the side of the simulation room
- Reduced time in the simulation to allow for their Class Schedule
- The pressure of being watched and needing to “perform.” This can be addressed during the debrief about Humor being a defense mechanism

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DEBRIEFING SESSION

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- How do you feel?
- What “behaviors” did you exhibit?
- What sensory alteration impacted you the most?
- What does this mean for your job?
- What surprised you about this experience?
- What might you do differently now?
- Linking the experience to real life

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## FIRST RESPONDERS

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- The first comment often heard is “we are doing it wrong” or “that’s not what we were trained to deal with”
- They often have issue with their hearing being compromised during the simulation
- Their ability to link this simulation to real life “frequent flyers” they see is high and they are often interested in talking about specific scenarios for ideas
- Training first responders can give caregivers the confidence in calling 911 during an incident and hoping things are de-escalated. It can also reduce unnecessary hospitalizations

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## LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY STAFF

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- Staff might discuss how certain behaviors they modeled are similar to a resident’s that they currently have or cared for in the past.
- Discuss the importance of slowing things down and making sure we communicate everything that we are doing with the resident
- Boredom can present itself in various ways. Discussion of how the smallest of things can turn to positive engagement with a resident that is in need of activity

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## FAMILY CAREGIVERS

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- Greater understanding of the impact of dementia
- Right sizing activities/tasks
- Behaviors as a form of communication
- Realistic expectations
- Communicating effectively
- Asking for help
- Planning for the future

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## STUDENTS

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- Debrief is a vital aspect of the Empathy/Compassion Education Lesson
- Have the students that participated in the Simulation upfront so students that observed could ask them questions specifically
- Facilitator will need to have specific questions or scenarios that they witnessed to help encourage discussion
- Encourage students to advocate for the business they work at/frequent to get Dementia Friendly Training

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## LOCAL BUSINESSES

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- Good to debrief on how their business would handle certain situations
- Include some dementia friendly environmental considerations in debrief
- Thank them for helping our communities to be more dementia friendly
- Encourage them to consider dementia friendly business training for their staff
- Provide resources on dementia friendly community efforts they could support

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## FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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- Understanding the significance of faith-based practices for persons living with dementia
- Consider how to adapt the service
- Recognize how to support persons living with dementia during the service
- Awareness of environmental modifications
- Explore ways to keep all members connected and involved in services/programs

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## SUMMARY

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- Virtual dementia simulations can be a powerful tool in raising awareness
- The impact of a simulation can be retained longer as they experienced it personally
- These simulations can trigger people to want to learn more about dementia, its symptoms and how they can help
- We need people to be more empathetic to the symptoms of dementia to decrease stigma
- We are grateful you are interested in learning more about these tools

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## RESOURCES

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THANKS FOR  
JOINING US!

QUESTIONS?

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