

group you'll be working with, they are the best people to make such decisions. It might be nice to build breaks into the sessions, getting the young people to interact socially and to serve the elders tea, coffee and biscuits.

### **Planning**

It is best to be as thorough as possible in your planning, make posters which widely promote the activity taking place, ask people to sign up and once they have done so, get in touch beforehand. This all helps to build a strong and trusting relationship in advance of any practical sessions.

It is always good to meet with your group in advance, to talk through what you are doing and what you are trying to gain. This can also be an opportunity to talk through any concerns, make sure everyone has the same information and highlight any special requirements.

### **Ensuring Sessions are accessible**

When working with older people there are things to consider in order to make sure the activity is accessible to everyone. Participants may be hearing or visually impaired and may have problems with mobility. In planning an oral history project Teachers and Young people should consider in advance the best ways to support the needs of participants.

If the group you will be working with is from a particular cultural background (like the South Asian elders we worked with) you may need to think about translation needs. You may need to involve interpreters in your sessions (most Council's will have translation departments) or to encourage young people or community members to act as translators. It should be re-iterated that when dealing with highly personal experiences the translator has a responsibility to be as faithful as possible to the individual's words.

### **How long should we plan our project for?**

The longer a project runs the more comfortable participants feel and therefore the more likely they are to share their personal experiences. Over time strong bonds can develop within sessions and relationships nurtured over time may prove to be more beneficial in terms of building mutual trust and communication. However, one- off reminiscence sessions are entirely valid and can prove to be a valuable way of engaging student groups with a particular idea from local or national history.



## **Setting up a Reminiscence session: Schools and Community groups**

### **Why do you want to get involved in reminiscence work?**

It is beneficial to any project to set clear aims and outcomes, 'why are you doing this?' and 'How do you want to approach it?' Are you keen to engage older participants in discussion about one element from the past or are you happy that the discussion is led by whatever is important or interesting to the participants. Both of these approaches are valid but if you have a specific idea or curriculum aim in mind this will help you to target participants and to structure questions later on.

Think about what you are trying to find out, here are some ideas:

- Migration to your town or city
- Life during the war
- Childhood now and then
- A specific event that impacted your town or city
- Your town or city and the changes that have taken place there

### **Where to find your time witnesses?**

You need to think about getting together an appropriate group of older community members. Each council will have a specialist department dealing with the needs of the elderly locally, they should also have a list of all the voluntary organisations providing services for the elderly in the area. Get in touch with Age Concern, who have branches in towns nationally and will have good ideas about who to talk to. You could approach family members of students or active community members individually or build links with an established group.

### **Where can your reminiscence group take place?**

Where do you want the activity to happen? Getting older community members into schools or locations other than their usual setting can prove difficult and you will need to consider, access to the space you are using, appropriate toilets nearby and the transport needs of the elderly people involved. Local charities may be able to help arrange transport.

Reminiscence work is sensitive and can be painful for those discussing their past. It is essential therefore that session spaces feel safe, without lots of interruptions or noise. It may be nice to work in a more concentrated space with smaller groups of young people/ elders at a time – a whole class working together in one space can be very noisy!

### **How long should sessions be?**

The timing of sessions should take into consideration the needs of the group, each group will be very different dependent on their participants. Timings should be devised alongside members, taking into account their difficulties and commitments. It may prove difficult to try and fit sessions into normal class times, so you might have to be more flexible than normal. Ask the