

Memory Box Network

By Donna Holford-Lovell

Memory Box Network (MBN) provides an online reminiscence service to people affected by dementia, their families and their carers. Based in Dundee, MBN has built an online resource bank that allows users to upload, share and easily manage content that can be used in reminiscence sessions. This content includes still and moving image, audio and text.

The service, which is called Our Big Box, is very intuitive in the way it works. It can find and suggest relevant materials extremely quickly. By simply providing basic information about the person, such as the decades they have been alive and the places they have lived, you can search for the most relevant interesting material. Our Big Box will then build a digital memory box for each individual. Content such as images, film clips and music can be used to help people and their families affected by dementia to conduct their own reminiscence sessions.

We are working in collaboration with a number of museums and archives to gain access to digital content that can be added to the resource bank. This accessibility to a wide variety of rich media content is what makes Our Big Box extremely successful.

This year (2014) we are working with the University of Dundee Archive & Museums services and the Special Collections team at the University of St Andrews. We are accessing their digital content in different ways to enable their materials to be used within Our Big Box Sessions. We are also working with day care centres and care homes as well as families across Dundee and Perth to ensure the quality and relevance of the resources.

The system goes live in June and once live it will be available globally and forever.

The primary aim of this project is to acknowledge and help address the global increase in dementia and problems of online access for our ageing population. Additionally, we hope to advance the quality of life and improve mental health of individuals living with dementia by providing a reminiscence resource which can be used by their family, friends and carers to create a stimulating and enjoyable experience.

MBN has also been working with local schools to raise awareness of the impact of dementia and the use of reminiscence. By doing this we hope to encourage intergeneration understanding and communication between young and old.

"It helped to stimulate conversation about the past, family and friendships. It brought humour and laughter through and helped to strengthen the bond that has been weakening." Participant in pilot scheme

"I'd like to get the rest of the family to use it, as I find it brings our Gran back some of the awareness she used to have, even though sometimes confused and short lived, it is a blessing to have some technology which aims to address this horrible sickness." Family member