

**回艺 (huí yì): Exploring art-based life review to support the relocation process for older adults with dementia in nursing homes**

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## **回艺 (huí yì): Exploring Art-based Life Review to Support the Relocation Process For Older Adults with Dementia in Nursing Homes**

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### **Abstract**

Relocation to a nursing home can be a highly stressful process for older adults with dementia, yet programmes to support them are limited. This study developed an art-based life review programme (Project 回艺; *hui yi*) and examined its capability to support the process of relocation into the nursing home for older adults. The programme took place over 6-weeks with 12 older adults in two nursing homes. Each session comprises art-making and storytelling activities to create content that contributes to an individualised life review artbook. Data were gathered through qualitative interviews and observation of participants in sessions. Constant comparative analysis of qualitative data revealed three themes: empowering environment, identity reconstruction, personal biography. The three themes provide guidance for future art-based life review projects through a proposed practice framework.

### **Keywords**

art-based life review, arts and health, dementia, nursing homes, relocation, wellbeing

### **Introduction**

Relocating into a nursing home can be a stressful process for older adults and is found to cause physiologic and psychosocial disturbances such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, and hopelessness (Walker et al. 2007; Carpenito-Moyet 2012; Holder and Jolley 2012; Hertz et al.

2007). In severe cases, relocation stress has resulted in higher post-relocation mortality rates (Castle 2001). In this study, we defined older adults as individuals age 50 and above, as they would qualify for long-term care service subsidies in Singapore (Gove et al. 2016). Over the years, demand for nursing home care for older adults with dementia in Singapore is on the rise concurrently with the growing prevalence rates of dementia (Chen et al. 2013). While clinical and personal care aspects of services in nursing homes appear satisfactory, current care services lack resources to support the psychosocial and emotional needs following their relocation (Richards 2011; Yoon 2018).

Older adults with dementia can benefit from having a structured daily routine, which helps reduce agitation and improve mood (Alzheimer's Association n.d.). Changes in environment and daily routines resulting from relocation can increase stress level and reduce psychosocial and physical health and wellbeing (Ryman et al. 2018; Brown et al. 2012). Extant literature on relocation to nursing homes recommends staff provide opportunities for residents to express themselves, through sharing about their feelings on their personal life and relocation experiences (Johnson et al. 2010; Fraher and Coffey 2011). Although activities that promote social connections between staff and residents aid in the relocation process (Marshall and Mackenzie 2008), literature focusing on programmes to support relocation remains limited (Brandburg 2007; Sullivan and Williams 2017). Findings from these studies indicate a need for institutions to provide adequate support to alleviate relocation stress. Hence, this study proposes and evaluates art-based life review as a potential programme to support relocation of older adults with dementia into nursing homes.

### ***Life Review and Art Participation for Older Adults with Dementia***

Despite the lack of cure to alter the progressive decline of dementia, non-pharmacological approaches provide effective measures to improve quality of life (Kong et al. 2009) and quality of care (Cabrera et al. 2015) for older adults with dementia. Life review refers to the guided therapeutic practice for older adults to examine their memories as they reintegrate or reconstruct their life experiences while reconciling with unresolved conflicts (Caldwell 2005; Haber 2006). As a non-pharmacological approaches for older adults with dementia (Azcurra 2012; Cotelli et al. 2012), life review is appreciated for improving quality of life, cognition, mood, communication, and autobiographical memory (Subramaniam et al. 2014). Furthermore, the life stories gathered through life review also enable care staff to better acquaint themselves with new residents and tailor care for them (Smith and Kreklewetz

2015). Lastly, life review supports relocation by improving resident's outlook on life and their perception about living in nursing homes (Wren 2016).

With an understanding that engaging in participatory arts can empower and enhance psychosocial and emotional wellbeing amongst older adults with dementia (McLean et al. 2011; Tan 2018; Grant et al. 2012), this study expands on existing life review approaches to incorporate the elements of art-making. Although most life reviews were implemented through verbal interviews or written accounts, there are two studies that support conducting life review through creative expressions for older adults (Bohlmeijer et al. 2005; Misluk and King 2017). However, they only provided quantitative support based on a single construct (i.e., depression). Given the many recognised benefits to art engagement and life review for older adults with dementia, art-based life review could potentially support relocation experiences through improving individual psychosocial and emotional wellbeing.

### 回艺 (huí yì) – An Art-Based Life Review Project

回艺 (huí yì) is an art-based life review programme developed to support older adults with dementia in Singapore who are newly admitted; those with residency under 12 months. ‘回艺 (huí yì)’ incorporates ‘回忆 (huí yì - to reminisce)’ and ‘艺术 (yì shù- the arts)’ into life review to encourage individuals to reminisce through creative engagements to promote the psychosocial and emotional wellbeing of the relocating individual.

The programme consisted of six weekly sessions with groups of four participants each time. Each weekly session was led by a theme and comprised of an art-making (40 minutes) and sharing component (50 minutes) in which participants shared about their art work and life stories. The sharing sessions and artworks were recorded and summarised by the researcher for use as contents in the life review artbook for each participant. The structure of the art-based life review project was designed to follow a series of age themes based on Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development (Xiao et al. 2013). Table 1 provides a summary of the art-based life review sessions.

Table 1. Summary for the Art-based Life Review Sessions.

Session Themes	Art Work & Art Materials Used	Session Objectives
Session 1: Designing Life Review Art Book	Book Cover; Papers, Drawing/Colouring Tools, Decorative Materials, Adhesives	To build rapport amongst the facilitator and participants and acquaint the participants with basic creative tasks.

Session Themes	Art Work & Art Materials Used	Session Objectives
Session 2: (Childhood) Home: Places, Things and People	Clay Work; Air-dry Clay	To identify aspects of nursing home life which can help them achieve a sense of home in the new environment.
Session 3: (Adolescence) Identity: Me, Myself and I	Picture Collage Printed Old Photographs, Adhesives	To create in-depth understanding on participants' individuality through their varied life experiences.
Session 4: (Young Adult) Love: Family, Friends and Relationships	Tree Collage; Origami Paper, Drawing/Colouring Tools, Adhesives	To reflect on how to create opportunities for participants to strengthen their existing relationships and build new relationships in the new home.
Session 5: (Middle Adult) Generativity: Create, Influence and Teach	Dreamcatcher; Paper Plates, Yarn Strings, Decorative Materials, Adhesives	To offer a platform for participants to express their emotions through sharing about life successes, past difficulties and life lessons.
Session 6 (Older Adult) Ego Integrity: Meaning, Acceptance and Benevolence	Painting on Canvas; Acrylic Paints, Canvas Boards	To explore participants' opinion on aging and understand their experiences with growing old.

## Purpose of Research

The study aimed to develop and examine the capability of art-based life review to support the relocation process for older adults with dementia in nursing homes. Particularly, what are the key attributes of art-based life review contributing to psychosocial and emotional wellbeing?

## Methodology

### *Participants*

The participants of the study were residents from two nursing homes in Singapore. The inclusion criteria included English- and/or Mandarin-speaking older adults who were aged 50 and above, duration of admission less than 12 months, diagnosed with mild to moderate dementia, expressive, and cognitively functioning. Staff from both nursing homes assisted in the recruitment process. Of 17 residents recruited, five participants did not complete the study due to deterioration of health ( $n=3$ ) or individual reasons ( $n=2$ ). The conditions for participant's data to be included in the study include completion of more than half of the art-based life review sessions and completion of the post-test phase of the study. At the conclusion, 12 participants met the conditions stated for data inclusion (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographics of Participants (N=12).

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Duration Since Admission (mo.)	Marital Status	Education Level	Religious Beliefs
Peter	M	83	1	Divorced	Secondary	Christian
Mary	F	80	6	Single	Primary	Christian
Gina	F	58	6	Widowed	Confidential	No Religion
Amy	F	81	2	Married	NA	No Religion
Tracy	F	88	7	Widowed	Primary	Christian
Lucy	F	80	3	Separated	Primary	Buddhist
Jennifer	F	59	4	Divorced	Confidential	Catholic
Elaine	F	70	4	Married	Primary	No Religion
Helen	F	87	2	Married	NA	Buddhist
Rose	F	51	2	Separated	Secondary	Christian
Jim	M	77	3	Married	Tertiary	Muslim
Calvin	M	82	7	Married	Tertiary	Buddhist

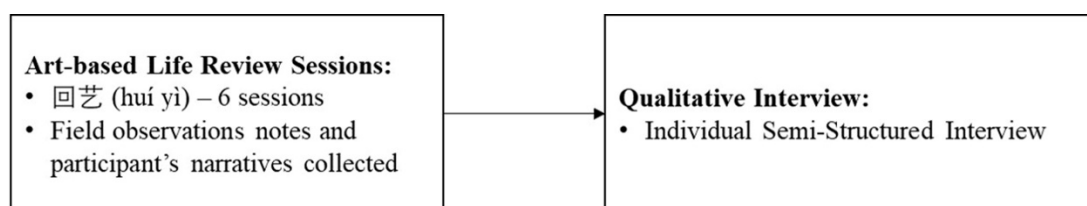
### ***Ethical Considerations***

The researcher obtained ethics approval from the Institute Review Board of Nanyang Technological University (IRB Reference Number: IRB-2018-07-011). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before commencing any study procedures. The researcher briefed participants on the purpose and activities involved in the study and were ensured anonymity and confidentiality when presenting data. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any point of the study.

### ***Research Design***

The study utilised a qualitative research design to examine the effects of the art-based life review programme because qualitative data are often rich in descriptive attributes and are able to offer meaningful insights into participant's individual experience (Driscoll et al. 2007). The insights gained were aimed at contributing to the understanding of how relocation of older adults with dementia can be supported in nursing homes through art-based life review. Figure 1 shows the two main phases of the study: art-based life review sessions and qualitative interview.

Figure 1: Sequence of Events for the Current Study.



### ***Qualitative Data Collection***

Field observations were done by the researcher during each art-based life review session to assess participants' quality of engagement with the art materials and the other participants (i.e., other residents, staff, volunteers, the facilitator). After the 6 art-based life review sessions, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with the participants. The interview focused on understanding participants' experiences and opinions on the art-based life review, the life review artbook, and the effect of the programme on individual wellbeing and relocation. All interviews and the participants' weekly sharing of life review narratives were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and subjected to qualitative analysis.

### ***Qualitative Data Analysis.***

All qualitative data collected were analysed and interpreted using constant comparative analysis (Howitt and Cramer 2010). The data were initially skimmed to obtain general themes through open coding followed by a more focused analysis, using axial coding to explore the relations between various themes to derive the major themes and subthemes. Several research meetings were held to articulate the eventual themes that provide insightful explanations to answer the research questions.

### **Findings**

Individual's physical, emotional, and social experiences with art-based life review project were explored. Participants were also asked to share how art-based life review had supported their relocation experience into the nursing home environment. After constant comparative analysis, three major themes were revealed and the key attributes contributing to the major themes were also identified.

Table 3. Matrix of Participants by Evidence (N=12).

Participants	Empowering Environment	Identity Reconstruction	Personal Biography
	Enabling Space	Self-Enhancement	Preservation Memories
Peter	✓	✓	✓

Participants	Empowering Environment	Identity Reconstruction	Personal Biography
	Enabling Space	Self-Enhancement	Preservation Memories
Mary	✓	✓	
Gina	✓	✓	✓
Amy	✓		✓
Tracy	✓	✓	✓
Lucy		✓	✓
Jennifer	✓	✓	✓
Elaine		✓	
Helen	✓		✓
Rose	✓	✓	✓
Jim		✓	
Calvin		✓	✓

### Theme 1: Empowering Environment

Each session involved engaging the participants to create content for their life review artbook through art-making and storytelling. To encourage active participation amongst participants, an open environment was established to build participants' confidence to exercise autonomy by experimenting with new materials. Additionally, life review sharing requires residents to share relatively personal issues that they faced throughout their lives. Therefore, it is pertinent to assure a social space that is safe and comfortable for participants to share about themselves.

#### *Key Attribute: Enabling Space*

There were two main characteristics of creating an enabling space: encouragement and non-judgment. Most participants in this study were new to art-making. Many had no formal training or had limited engagement in the arts. Therefore, many showed initial reluctance in participating, as mentioned by Jennifer, 'I was quite hesitant. I told [staff's name], '*Aiyah* [translate: a common expression of dismay used among Chinese speakers], wasting my time lah'. Participants also expressed nervousness over participating in art activities because of expectations: 'I was a bit worried, you know? I don't know what the teacher's [referring to the facilitator] expectation is' (Gina). In the participants' opinion towards art-making, the facilitator needed to establish an environment that stimulated engagement and motivated self-expression.

Encouragement was provided by giving residents the autonomy to explore new materials and improving their confidence. Continuous support was provided by volunteers and the facilitator to ensure timely help was provided when older adults need: 'I like that there's volunteers, the volunteers would come and help me' (Mary). As observed, volunteers played a vital role in breaking barriers for older adults who were hesitant to engage in art



activities. The encouragements that the participants received from volunteers appeared to boost their participation and confidence. Through the session, participants also acquired an appreciation for the expressive and developmental qualities of art: ‘Art is a release of emotional outlet... And then we also learn to express ourselves, you know? After doing, right, you see, even Peter knows how to express, Mary knows how to express. Ya, I also expressed also la’ (Gina). Figure 2 shows an acrylic painting by Jennifer. It represents the sea of emotions she felt during her stay in the nursing home. She appreciated the art-based life review session and saw it as an avenue to express herself and create.

Figure 2: Jennifer, *Cacti*, 2019. Acrylic on Canvas. © *Chao Min Tan* 2019.



Enabling space was also created through non-judgment. Participants in each art-based life review sessions were encouraged to keep an open-mind, exercise caution, and respond respectfully while listening to others as the topics shared were often sensitive and personal. This was only achievable because of the sense of security they felt within the space. For example, Mary shared her deterioration of health as one of the most difficult moments of her life. The multiple operations she had undergone not only took a great toll on herself, but her family was also greatly affected. To be able to share this difficult moment of her past brought relief to her: ‘When they ask me about my condition, then I just say about my operations... After I said it, I felt more relieved’ (Mary). Participants provided emotional and social support for one another by acknowledging their painful pasts, sharing sentiments through similar

experiences and/or providing advice on overcoming these difficulties. Many participants felt the importance of a non-judgemental environment and the opportunity to share about their personal stories were cathartic for them.

All my friends were there... I could open up, you know? The more you get to talk, your mind is open, your mind is free from all old things because you got somebody to talk to... got somebody to tell your stories to. (Jennifer)

To conclude the current theme, an empowering environment was established during the art-based life review sessions where individuals enjoyed complete inclusivity and comfort. Assistance provided by the facilitator and volunteers also allowed participants to garner the confidence they needed to pursue self-expression through the arts. In this space, participants also established a sense of security within the group. Through their sharing of experiences, strength and hope, participants were able to help one another reconcile with the difficult memories and build resilience through the process. Eventually, this aided in the relocation process as participants had opportunities to talk about their feelings and life experiences that are necessary as they adjust into the foreign environment (Brownie et al. 2014).

## **Theme 2: Identity Reconstruction**

One important goal of dementia care is to provide person-centred care (Helgesen 2013). To achieve that, it is important to recognise and respect the care recipient's individuality. Persons with dementia are often at the risk of being depersonalised, and having their personhood undermined (Kitwood 1989). Identity reconstruction was a means to bring the resident's attention towards focusing on their unique life experiences that distinguished them from others. Beyond that, the art-based life review sessions also facilitated personal growth through the development of values by revisiting and learning from their past life experiences.

### ***Key Attribute: Self-Enhancement***

Self-enhancement focuses on encouraging individuals to take a positive view of self (Sedikides and Gregg 2008). Within the healthcare environment, residents often view themselves as dependent individuals: 'My eyesight not very clear, I dare not move around, later I fall down. And sometimes, I don't know where I go, so I normally just stay where I am...' (Calvin). During the art-based life review, participants were encouraged to reconnect

with their past identities. In the case of Jim, he reminisced the enjoyment he found through his job: ‘I used to work at the Port of Singapore Authority. Wait for the ship then I go up to see the officer. My workplace was good. I enjoyed my job’. Participants saw this process as meaningful, as it helped them to focus their attention on themselves as persons who had lived a meaningful life and enjoyed accomplishments throughout their lifetime:

To revive the opportunity to think over it and opportunity to revive what has been lost. I am so glad... I don't know what to say... When I thought was ‘It's done already’... It is revived... You brought alive into what I [have] forgotten. (Peter)

Additionally, the art-based life review also emphasised personal growth, enabling participants to develop or strengthen values that are in line with their psychosocial developmental stage. Through revisiting life experiences, participants compared themselves to their younger self and reflected on how their values have changed throughout their lifespan. In Tracy's case, she developed an ability to accept and forgive:

We are old, whatever have passed, I don't put in my mind. In my younger days, everything I put in my mind, and I want to get back to those that did wrong and make them realise that they were wrong. Now I don't... Say it out, and let it go. Don't keep it in my mind. (Tracy)

Other than learning from past experiences, the nature of art-based life review sessions also contributed to values development: ‘There is, discipline must be there. Discipline, such that when you are composed to do something [referring to artworks], you must put on your concentration’ (Gina). Figure 3 displayed Gina's creative responses when asked to represent her childhood during the second session using air-dry clay. In the art-making process, she was fully focused and engaged the volunteer actively to express her ideas while requesting for her assistance. Gina also paid meticulous attention on detailing each clay pieces and expressed firmly on the importance of self-discipline in order to achieve the desired outcome for her artwork.

Figure 3: Gina, *Childhood Breakfast Set*, 2019. Air-dry Clay © Chao Min Tan 2019.



Identity reconstruction was achieved through self-enhancement. In the process, participants were encouraged to refocus on themselves in the positive light through reconnecting with their past identities and achievements in life. As individuals are guided by values which differ over time depending on the concurrent life stages, it is pertinent for the art-based life review to provide an avenue for participants to realise and strengthen positive values which can help them to cope with ageing and develop a more positive attitude towards their lives (Gouveia et al. 2015). Ultimately, the main aim of identity reconstruction was to strengthen the personhood and provide avenues for continuous improvement of self as a powerful means to help residents cope with relocation into a nursing home (Melrose 2013; Ryff 1989).

### **Theme 3: Personal Biography**

Understanding that the progressive course of dementia may affect participants' ability to recall memories, the creation of the life review artbook was an attempt to document their memories. The process of creating personal biography allowed the individuals to reflect, preserve, and share memories. The artworks and life stories created during the art-based life review sessions with support from the facilitator were used as contents for their life review artbook.

#### ***Key Attribute: Preservation of Memories.***

Upon receiving the life review artbook, participants expressed excitement. Rose, for example, mentioned, 'It [the book] is very nice... I feel very delight[ed]. Yeah, very happy. Because

whatever we have said is inside the book, so anytime we can refer back, look at it, share it with somebody.’ For the participants, the book was similar to a diary, which contained important memories and reflections. For example, Figure 3 presents Lucy’s relationship tree(s) which included a scene of her *kampung* (translate: village). On the right, she wrote her sisters’ names in Chinese. During her sharing, she mentioned that she lost contact with her sisters. Hence, this artwork will remind her of the joyous memories they used to share in the past.

Figure 4. Lucy, *Sampans (translate: wooden boat) and Trees*, 2019. Collage. © Chao Min Tan 2019.



Participants not only viewed the book as a preservation of their memories, in which they could look back to remind themselves, but most of them also mentioned that they would like to share the book with their loved ones. They expressed that they wanted their loved ones to understand their life stories and what they went through: ‘Give [the book] to my child! Let them have a look at the me last time and whatever happened to me’ (Amy).

Lastly, the life review artbook also helped to create a sense of pride and accomplishment for the participants. Peter, for example, felt that it was a fulfilment of a wish he had planned on doing but did not have the ability to do alone: ‘That [life review artbook] is what I planned on doing when I went around the world. But instead... I can’t do the work that we have done it so well.’ When asked about how he felt after receiving the life review

artbook, he mentioned: ‘Now that I see what come out of it [the sharing], I can hardly say the word... [The book] is so beautiful.’

To conclude the current theme, preservation of these stories was an imperative process for the residents as creating a biography and keeping it on display in the residents’ room allowed enhancement of self-identity, which is important as they relocate into the new environment (Melrose 2004). The life review artbook was also a way for them to find constructive engagement with their loved ones through sharing their life stories and allowing their loved ones to develop a deeper understanding of them. Moreover, the sense of accomplishment they felt completing the life review artbook also improved their confidence and increased their sense of autonomy within their new environment.

## Discussion

This study examined how art-based life review supports the relocation process of older adults with dementia in nursing homes. Through constant comparative analysis, three major themes were identified (i.e., *empowering environment*, *identity reconstruction*, and *personal biography*) and were accompanied by their respective key attributes (i.e., *enabling space*, *self-enhancement*, and *preservation of memories*). Each theme and its accompanying attributes were further organized into a proposed practice framework (Figure 5):

Figure 5: Proposed Practice Framework of Art-based Life Review.

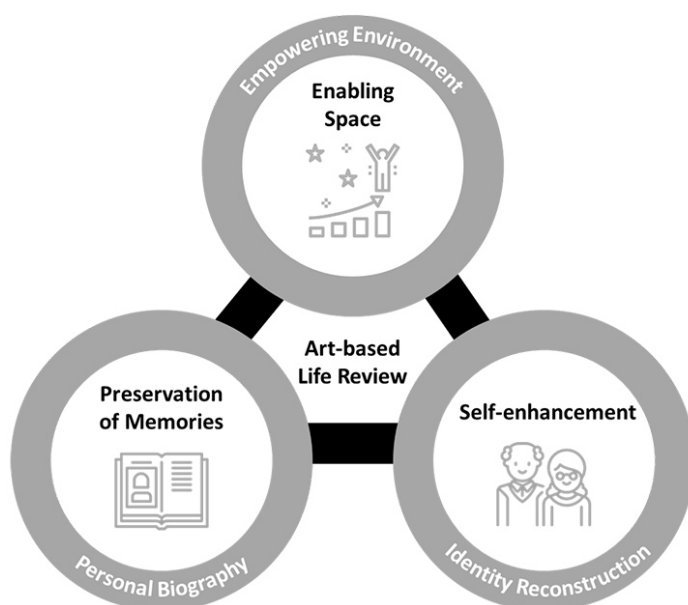


Figure 5 illustrates the comprehensiveness of the art-based life review in supporting the relocation process through enhancement of an individual's psychosocial and emotional wellbeing. The three major themes surrounding the art-based life review were present throughout the programme. They represented important achievements that residents obtained from the project which led to the eventual improvement in psychosocial and emotional wellbeing as they relocated into the nursing home environment. Hence, the proposed practice framework provides conceptual understanding to support the potential of art-based life review in supporting the relocation process of seniors with dementia through enhancement of wellbeing. Moreover, the key attributes surrounding each theme serve as guiding principles to explain the underlying processes on how wellbeing is achieved through the art-based life review sessions.

Essentially, this is the first study to innovatively conduct life review through creative expressions and validate its potential qualitatively as a possible programme that nursing homes can implement for recently relocated older adults with dementia. Therefore, the proposed practice framework serves as a useful guide to facilitate future art-based life review practices by establishing objectives and informing practitioners on how to achieve each objective through creating a conducive physical, social, and emotional environment.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

This study was an exploratory study with relatively small sample size. However, while the limited sample could not be sufficiently generalised to represent the population of older adults in nursing homes, findings from the current study suggest that the programme has the potential to support their relocation. Future studies could assess art-based life review with larger sample size, and evaluations should also be done on the practice framework presented in this study to evaluate its suitability to be applied to other care contexts. Secondly, the project could benefit from engaging the participants to discuss more extensively about their artworks to gain further insights on their relocation experience.

Lastly, the proposed programme of art-based life review was targeted at older adults with mild to moderate dementia only. Individuals in more advanced stages of dementia would require more catered programmes to support their relocation, such as encouraging self-care behaviours and providing cognitive stimulation (Mirotznik and Kamp 2000; Hirsch et al. 1993). Therefore, the scope of programme would be different and that is not addressed in the current study.

## Conclusion

Relocating into a nursing home can be an emotionally stressing process for older adults with dementia. To worsen the situation, the negative psychosocial and emotional effect of relocation are often overlooked. As a result, it can further deteriorate the health and wellbeing of these older adults. The current study developed art-based life review and examined its potential to support the relocation process of older adults into nursing homes, targeting on improving individual's psychosocial and emotional wellbeing. Findings from the study supported the potential of art-based life review and demonstrated the ability of creative practices in enhancing the life review process. A proposed practice framework was developed to offer guidance for interested practitioners who like to consider and use art-based life review to support relocating process for older adults with dementia in nursing homes. To conclude, the insights gathered from the current study not only add to the current pool of literature but further motivates research on relocation as continuous efforts to develop catered programmes for individuals relocating into nursing homes.

## Acknowledgement

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