

# Inside Out Theatre - Village Improv for Alzheimers - Final Report

## Executive Summary

The Village Improv for Alzheimers (VIA) Community-based Initiatives in Dementia Care (CIDC) project was developed to train health care professionals to run VIA programs at their facilities (both long term care and day programs) and in doing so increase the availability of this program across the province. With the support of the CIDC initiative, Inside Out Theatre was able to develop and offer a 2-day training workshop, instructional handbook, online tutorials, and train 26 health care professionals working in southern and central Alberta.

VIA is an innovative approach to Person-Centered Dementia care that fosters self-expression, agency, recreation and social engagement through arts and creativity-based care. Using improvised theatre and storytelling, VIA's program creates meaningful activities that have been specifically developed for individuals living with dementia and designed to preserve dignity and autonomy, validate perception and reality, and focus on failure-free experiences that highlight participants' strengths and aptitudes, not disease or preserving memory. The principles at the center of both the VIA program and improvised theatre are that there are no wrong answers, and all ideas are celebrated and built upon.

While the first two stages of the project were successful (developing the training program/materials and holding the workshops), the effects of COVID-19 outbreaks in care centers meant that many of the workshop participants were unable to hold group activities, while some were transferred to different departments, relocated, or otherwise stopped communicating with the project team. This had an overall negative impact on the third stage of site visits, in-person follow-ups and data collection. The project team addressed this challenge by adapting the follow-up meetings to be virtual where possible, offering refresher sessions/consultation and ultimately by reallocating resources into offering follow-up services and workshops in the future.

## Objectives/Implementation

Primary objective: to benefit more individuals living with dementia by creating opportunities to provide the VIA program throughout Alberta and increasing overall availability of the program.

Approach: familiarize and train healthcare professionals operating programs for persons living with dementia (PLWD) about the VIA program with the goal being that they would then facilitate their own VIA programs at care facilities. The first portion of this was to develop a two-day training program designed to make the activities within the VIA program, and the practice of improvised theatre, understandable and teachable for individuals of various professional backgrounds. The activities and structure of the VIA program had already been developed and run by Inside Out Theatre instructors in Calgary prior to the start of the CIDC initiative.

Participants were selected based on interest and response to an open call for registrants, and match to admission criteria. The criteria were based on the training's relevancy to the individual's field of practice, their having direct contact with PLWD and their stated willingness/ability to conduct a 10-week program at their facility following the workshop, followed by feedback collection.

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Both workshops were held in theatre studios, one in Calgary and one in Edmonton. Those working in communities outside of these two cities were also encouraged to apply and participate as well, and reimbursed for travel/accommodation costs. The basic structure of each workshop was to spend the first morning exploring the joy of play and the tenets of improvisation, creating a feeling of acceptance towards spontaneous creativity. The afternoon and second day were focused on the specific activities in the VIA program and applying those concepts to the needs of PLWD. In total, the team trained 26 health care professionals, primarily in the field of therapeutic recreation. Workshop participants largely stated that the workshop was successful in training them and they felt confident in leading their own VIA sessions.

In the follow-up stage, the objective was to have these trained health care staff implement the VIA program at their facilities with the oversight and support of trainers from Inside Out Theatre. As a function of their training and certification, the participants agreed to run at least one 10-week program and to collect pre- and post-session feedback from participants, as well as other evaluation and data collection materials provided (staff feedback form, participant observation form, caregiver feedback where applicable). Trainers from Inside Out Theatre would travel to provide in-person support to these facilities to both ensure the program is being delivered accurately, and to gather the feedback collected by staff.

Unfortunately, both workshops were shortly followed by surges in COVID-19 cases and lockdowns or closures in many long term care and adult day programs. Many workshop participants initially communicated that they had suspended programs and were reallocated to other departments. The team was unable to get ongoing updates from some participants. However, those that remained in contact and were eventually able to run the program, in full or in part, did collect feedback. Planned site visits were delayed multiple times due to outbreaks, and COVID-19 exposures for the staff of planned visitation sites or within our project team staff. During the first stage of the pandemic, the team pivoted to offer a supplementary training for virtual delivery of the VIA program. Where possible, the team followed-up through virtual sessions and helped to facilitate these virtual sessions. To ensure the most was made of resources from the CIDC, funds that could not be used for in-person site visits and follow ups were reallocated to providing an additional workshop, conducted early in 2023.

## Impact

Virtually all workshop participants found the workshop to be effective in demonstrating the VIA activities and their role as a facilitator of the program. The majority of those who completed feedback indicated that they were confident in delivering the VIA program at their facilities. The vast majority of PLWD who participated in VIA programs led by trained facilitators found the programs to be enjoyable and meaningful. Staff who observed these sessions noted high levels of engagement and positive mood/behaviours. Data collection was greatly limited by COVID-19 in participants' facilities and subsequent delays from running in-person programs.

- 26 INDIVIDUALS COMPLETED THE WORKSHOP - 13 COMPLETED POST SESSION FEEDBACK

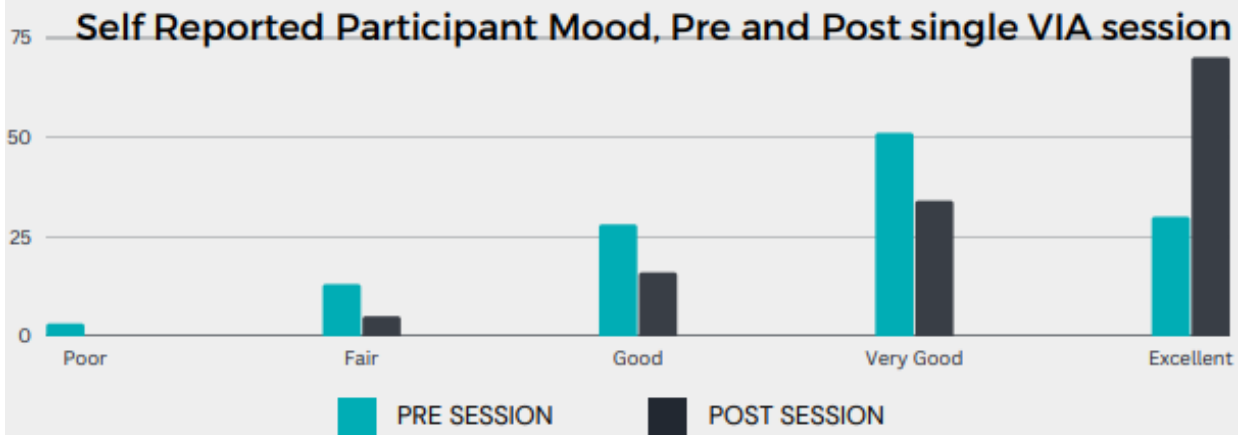


Note: 'no' was the third option, but no participants selected this.

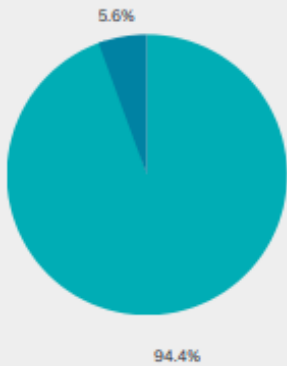
## VIA PROGRAMS

### PRE/POST SESSION EVALUATION

- 125 TOTAL PRE/POST SESSION QUESTIONAIRES WERE COMPLETED BY PLWD (INCLUDES SINGLE-SESSION AND REPEAT-SESSION PARTICIPANTS)



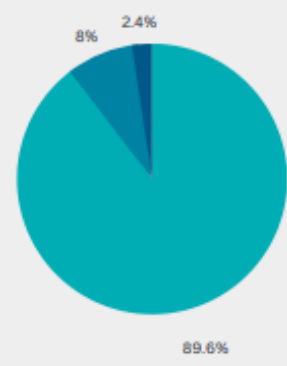
# EVALUATION QUESTIONS



Did you enjoy the session?



Did you enjoy your interaction with others?



Did you feel you could share your ideas?



YES



KINDA



NO