

Discover Your Story Tours – Docent Advice

Here are the tips and advice we shared with each other at our meetings on January 9 and 15.

Let the docents and participants know that the tour may be more than an hour. Getting in, getting started, and moving around all take longer than with most other tours.

Even if you get a slow start, plan to conclude the tour in an hour.

Since we will always have two docents on each of these tours, it is a good idea to establish a comfort level with your docent partner stepping in and participating as needed.

Be flexible.

Have a plan, but not an agenda.

Be aware of and sensitive to big and often sudden mood swings.

Be sensitive to the sensitivity of group members.

Ask concrete questions. (e.g. “what do you see?” will often be more appropriate/doable than “what’s going on?”) Ask direct questions.

When people arrive, always ask if they would like to use the restroom before you begin.

If someone needs to go to the restroom at any time the second docent should wait with the individual and his/her care partner to ensure they reconnect with the group. It is not the docent’s job to accompany the individual into the restroom; you should not be alone with an individual in the restroom. A staff person, family, or friend should accompany the individual if necessary.

Props are so important. Bring props with textures and scents. Engage the senses. Music would be great too.

Slow down. Listen. Let people finish their thoughts. It is okay if you don’t get to everything on your plan.

These experiences are uplifting, joyful.

These experiences are about the people—the people with memory loss, their spouses, their children, their care providers. They are not about the art or art history.

The value for the participants lies in being present at that moment. Don’t worry about how much they might or might not remember.

Don't call participants dear or sweetie. You are all equals in this process. These tours are non-hierarchical. Focus on relationship building.

You do not have to impart great knowledge. These tours are a vehicle for interdependent discovery.

When you greet your group, say hello by name. Let them know how glad you are that they are here. (Note: we discussed shaking hands or placing hands on theirs. As docents, however, we must not initiate touch.)

Ask participants to let you know if they are having trouble hearing you.

If your group splits, be sure that a staff person is with each group.

Be sure to distribute evaluations with return envelopes.