

The contribution and potential of day centres for older people: realities and perspectives

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Non evidence-based perceptions

“For some social care professionals and service users alike, day centres offer the ideal opportunity to provide targeted services to clients in a safe, stable environment. But others regard them as outdated and patronising, a service firmly stuck in the last century.”

Sale, A. U. 2005. Can a new day centre dawn? Community Care, 21 Jan, 30-31.



“The cliched image, I’m sure, of day centres is that you sit there, passively. People bring you things - lukewarm cups of tea and biscuits – and the atmosphere is warm and there might be some nice, undemanding music bubbling away in the background, but, essentially, you are there as a passive pot plant.”

Andrew Marr in conversation with David Slater of Entelechy’s ‘Meet Me at The Albany’ arts project, BBC, 8th April 2019 www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m0004019

Aim: To improve the understanding of day centres' purpose and role, how they are viewed and their use within a changing policy and practice context.

What it did: Explored outcomes, experiences, views and perceptions.

Multiple perspectives:

- 4 day centres
- 4 perspectives
- 69 participants



Main messages
of this research
to take away

*Day centres are
a life-enriching
gateway*

*Day centres
offer added
value*

*Day centres' group
environment plays
an important role*

*Day centres are
highly relevant
to social care and
health policy
themes*

Circumstances behind day centre attendance

Physical health decline

Stopped driving

'Stuck' at home / not getting out enough

Nowhere to go

Nothing to do

Living alone

Bereaved

Another service closed

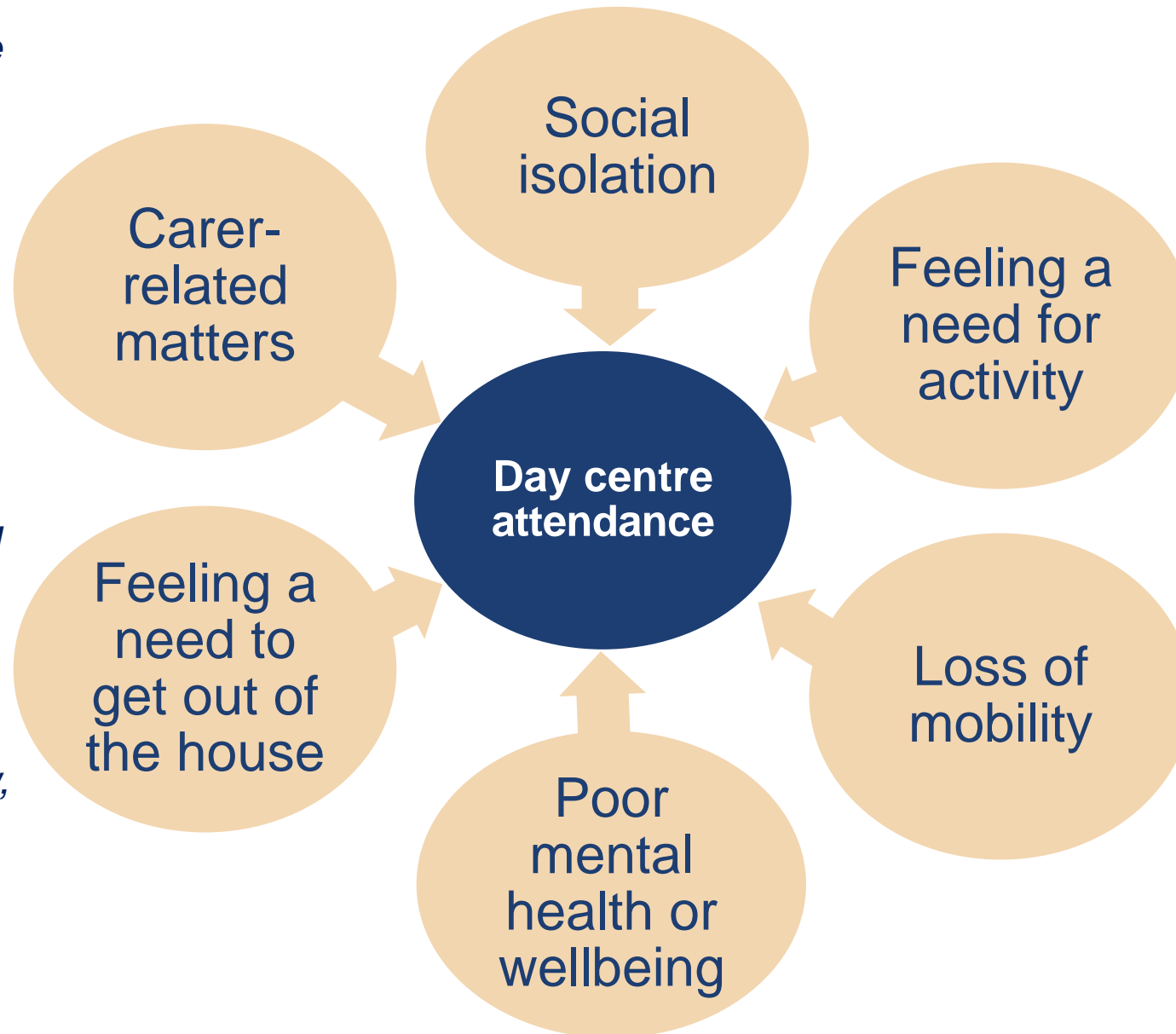
Stopped volunteering or retired

Lost social networks

Depressed, feeling low, lonely, lost confidence

Family needs a break

Isolated as spousal carer



'Stuck in place'

(Lehning et al. 2017:159)

"... an old person at home (...) may be quite as isolated, both socially and physically, as her counterpart in a long-stay institution. Indeed one of the great difficulties for both carer and cared for is the dulling monotony of a routine which is harsh, unremitting and never changing and which allows no opportunity to meet new people or to see new places."

(Higgins 1989:13)

... for socially isolated people who are unable to go out without support

Companionship

Enjoyment (fun!)

Activities / something (different) to do

The outside world

Practical support

Information

Other services



Life-
enriching
gateway

... and also life-enriching for family carers, staff and volunteers.

... for socially isolated people who are unable to go out without support.

Companionship

I get conversation instead of talking to myself.... And I'm mixing with human beings.

(Nellie – day centre attender)

You look forward to seeing friends again, you know.

(Elizabeth – day centre attender)

... for socially isolated people who are unable to go out without support.

Companionship

Enjoyment (fun!)

*I can have a mini joke or — [laughs]
you can sit down and hear something
very funny.*

(Thomasina – day centre attender)

Life-
enriching
gateway

... for socially isolated people who are unable to go out without support.

Companionship

Enjoyment (fun!)

**Activities / something
(different) to do**

I just sit here from when I get up to the time I go to bed.

(Ruby - day centre attender)

It's enriched my life (...) Well I suppose it gives me an interest, doesn't it? It's a big interest. And it gives me something other to talk about and to think about.

(Jenny – day centre attender)

Life-
enriching
gateway

... for socially isolated people who are unable to go out without support.

Companionship

Enjoyment (fun!)

Activities / something
(different) to do)

The outside world

Life-
enriching
gateway

*It's like being a prisoner in my house now
... That's how it feels now and again,
because you don't see nobody there now.*

(Olive – day centre attender)

*Saying hello to an acquaintance in
passing is 'not the same as actually
going to a function with the people.*

(Bob – day centre attender)

... for socially isolated people who are unable to go out without support.

Companionship

Enjoyment (fun!)

Activities / something
(different) to do

The outside world

Practical support

Information

Other services



More later

Life-
enriching
gateway

... for family carers

Emotionally

- * **Feeling reassured, supported and encouraged in caring role**
- * Feeling in control of daily life
- * Respite (*relief, less stress, relaxing*)
- Space/time to be themselves and for their own lives
- Improved relationship with relative
- Feeling safe

Practically

- * Free time to do as they pleased or for meaningful activities
- Time for practicalities (e.g. housework)
- Time to look after themselves
- Information
- Contact with people they like

More about staff and volunteers later!

*Oh, I **love** going. Oh yes. Yes.*
(Kenneth – day centre attender)

I look forward to it all the time.
(Linda - carer)

I am proud of what I do.
(Staff 8)

*I love it, I really do like working here. It's just done so much for **me** you see”.*
(Volunteer 5)

*I am here to help, but there's a thin line as to where I'm a user or a helper. (...) It's a lifeline for **me**. (...) I think I'd miss it if I didn't have this. It's the best voluntary work I've done and I've tried different voluntary sectors. (...) I would use it as a place to come to not be at home isolated.*
(Volunteer 4)

How do people feel about day centres?

Health and wellbeing monitoring

Practical support, information and access to other services

Benefits for staff and volunteers

- ✓ **Beyond** purposes of commissioning or funding
- ✓ **Beyond** assumptions of what is covered by an aim of improving quality of life or supporting people to remain at home
- ✓ **Beyond** what attenders may have expected or hoped for.

“Added value”

Health and wellbeing monitoring

They come around. "Are you alright? What's the matter?"
(Thomasina – day centre attender)

Sometimes when you are with somebody a lot and you think something is not quite right, but maybe I am just thinking it. Then when you get confirmation from other people, you think, okay, so maybe a trip to the doctor is in order.
(Kate - carer)

If I was working anywhere else like you wouldn't be so involved with the person. You wouldn't get to know them. (...) you kind of get to know when they are upset, when they are quiet. You know what I mean? If there is something bothering them.
(Staff 3)

Added
value

Health and wellbeing monitoring

Practical support and access to other services

I could get them [batteries] free from the hospital but I'd have to take a taxi to the hospital to get them. So I used to buy them from Boots. But [manager] said "oh no, don't buy them. We'll give them to you." ... That's another thing that's been a great help. (...) I can clean part of it but I can't take the things apart and clean it properly.

(Francine – day centre attender)

When it's working well, it's brilliant, because it means that hopefully, nobody will slip through. There will always be somebody to signpost to.'

(Manager 1)

Added value

Health and wellbeing monitoring

Practical support and access to other services

Benefits for staff and volunteers.

*It's not only that we are **working** with them where you build a kind of **relationship** with them as well.*

(Staff 9)

I love it when we've got music or anything like that, her whole face lights up. That gives me a lot of pleasure (...) she comes in sometimes and she doesn't know if she really wants to be there. Then she listens to some music or the exercises (...) Her face, it lights up. You think, oh, that's worth coming for, really.

(Volunteer 6)

I've never come into work fed up, saying I don't want to do it. You know what I mean? It's looking forward to coming to work and enjoying it.

(Staff 3)

Added value

Role of environment

- Group environment
- Continuity
- Trusted and supportive
- Relationships enabled
- Opportunities for reciprocity.



Policy relevance: professional perceptions



Relevant to social care policy and local targets *(but not all of them!)*

Relevance reflected in practice
– *in signposting, referring and commissioning*

- ❖ Promote wellbeing
- ❖ Prevent, reduce or delay deterioration
- ❖ Information provision
- ❖ Personalisation
- ❖ Positive experiences of care
- ❖ Partnership working
- ❖ Supporting carers
- ❖ Supporting people to retain independence and remain at home

Future potential: professional perceptions

More partnership working with health and social care?

- *Convenient locations for outreach*
- *More health and social care appointments at day centres?*
- *Limited relationships with NHS - how to make links?*
- *Support social care better by making direct referrals and undertaking certain assessments*



Commissioning day centres seems to be out of fashion (...) I believe that, for some older people in our communities, there will always be a need for a building-based service that can care for and support the most vulnerable in society' (Manager 2).

...a hard sell to health (...) it's difficult to get health to buy into that to the degree where they are willing to fund it. (Commissioner 3).

Common criticisms of day centres

Perpetuate social isolation in a different setting '*out of normal community life*'

(Tester 1989: 168)

Partial institutions


(Townsend 1981; Higgins 1989)

Create/reinforce dependency and provide care to passive recipients

(Townsend 1981)

Undermine self-identity

(Goffman 1961)



People growing up after World War II are said to recognise welfare as a reassuring 'safety-net'

(Lymbery & Postle K. (2015))

What older people with high support needs want and value

(Katz et al 2011)

Do you look at day centres through rose-tinted or dark lenses?

Have you spent time at any day centres?

Can you think about them from the perspective of an older person who needs support to leave their home?

Are they good hourly value for money or an easy expenditure to identify and cut?



Day centres post-Covid?

Temporary closure...

'...had a severe impact on most PLWD' and carers' lives.'

'...remote service support does not substitute face-to-face support.'

'There is evidence that social support reduces the risk of care home admissions and unplanned hospital admissions.'

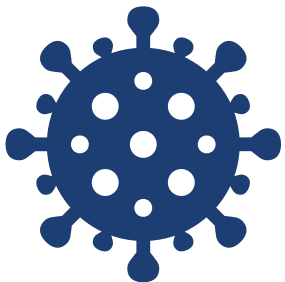
Giebel et al.'s UK studies of carers and people living with dementia

Time to consider day centres' contribution?

Resource-heavy services?



Services that do or could offer benefits to individuals, their staff & volunteers, the social care sector, the wider community, LAs, the NHS, and the education sector.



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Thank you
for listening

All study publications

<https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/the-future-of-day-centres-for-older-people-in-search-of-the-evidence>

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Orellana, K., Manthorpe, J., & Tinker, A. (2023) [What happens in English generalist day centres for older people? Findings from case study research](#), London: NIHR Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce, The Policy Institute, King's College London.

Want to know about my experiences of using ASCOT (the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit) in day centres for older people?

Watch my talk 'Using ASCOT-INT4 to investigate the impact of older people's day centres' at Webinar One of the ASCOT 10th Anniversary webinar series, October 2022.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUDgp1q16Tw> (from minute 21).

Orellana, K, Manthorpe, J & Tinker, A. [Making my day. Volunteering or working at a day centre for older people: findings of exploratory research in English day centres](#), Journal of Long-Term Care

Orellana, K, Manthorpe, J & Tinker, A. [Choice, control and person-centredness in day centres for older people](#), Journal of Social Work

Orellana, K., Manthorpe, J. & Tinker, A. [Day centres for older people - attender characteristics, access routes and outcomes of regular attendance: findings of exploratory mixed methods case study research](#). *BMC Geriatrics* 20, 158 (2020).

[Review of the literature about day centres for older people – their benefits, purposes and how they are perceived](#) (Jan 2020) and the [blog](#) introducing it.

[Research evidence briefing for commissioners](#) (Feb 2018).

[Implications for social workers](#) are discussed in this Community Care article (4-1-18).