

***An opportunity knocks?
Turning visitors into volunteers***

**fit as a
fiddle**

Final report of the Come to Tea project / December 2011





Thanks to all of the care home staff, residents, volunteers and trainers who participated in the Come to Tea project.

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Thank you to all of the many care homes, volunteers and residents who have contributed to this report. Some names have been changed.

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Contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	8
About 'fit as a fiddle'	8
Aims and objectives of 'fit as a fiddle'	8
Methods for 'fit as a fiddle'	9
Structure of this report	9
Project overview	10
Background to Come to Tea	10
What is Come to Tea?	10
Aims and intended outcomes	10
Project details and method	11
Project context	13
Project management and evaluation	15
Outcomes and successes	16
Lessons	21
Key findings: impacts on older people	24
Emotional benefits	24
Promoting an enabling, active approach	25
Key findings: impacts on partnerships and sustainability	27
Developing partnerships	27
Ongoing influence of project	27
Structured participation	27
Key findings: impacts on volunteering	28
Developing relationships with established volunteers and visitors	28
Opportunity knocks? Developing volunteers' skills	28
Key findings: impacts on equality and diversity	29
Reaching people with dementia	29
Diverse communities	29
Key findings: impacts on health literacy	30
Joint learning, shared vision	30
Promoting health literacy	30
Key findings: economic value of the project	31
Calculating the gains	31
Conclusion and recommendations	32
References	34

Executive summary

Background

The Big Lottery awarded £217,975 for the Come to Tea project to be delivered by the National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA) between 2007 and 2011. This project was part of the 'fit as a fiddle' programme managed by Age UK.

The aim of fit as a fiddle was to improve wellbeing outcomes around physical activity, nutrition and mental health for people over 50. Five national fit as a fiddle projects were set up specifically to target 'hard to reach' older people, and this included older care home residents.

Come to Tea began as a project to nurture the involvement of volunteers in small-scale tea parties or similar gatherings that engage hard-to-reach residents. The project aimed to support residents to:

- increase their physical activity
- improve their nutrition and hydration
- increase mental wellbeing.

The project hoped to achieve this through increasing community involvement and developing staff through training.

What the project achieved

Come to Tea engaged with care homes in three significant ways:

- Come to Tea training and events
- Friends and Family days
- Roadshows.

Come to Tea training and events

Each of the 21 participating care homes formed a project group made up of volunteers, the home manager and staff from care, catering and activities. Each group received two days training from NAPA. In total 163 people participated in this training. The project group then delivered six Come to Tea events, and kept detailed records in project diaries and photographs.

Friends and Family days

These one-off workshop days were run at 64 care homes and involved 434 residents and 411 friends, family members or volunteers. Each participating resident was partnered by a friend, family member, volunteer or member of staff. This one-day event included structured discussions and recreational activities.

Roadshows

Over 600 care professionals attended the Roadshows delivered in Autumn 2011 in Dorset, Crewe, London and Brighton. Over a half-day interactive workshop the NAPA team shared the project's findings and resources with a much wider audience than the other two phases of the project.

Executive summary

Evaluation

NAPA collected feedback from:

- the 21 training events
- Friends and Family days
- 135 diary accounts of Come to Tea events
- project feedback forms.

It also conducted an end of project survey and commissioned follow-up visits to eight Come to Tea care homes, two Friends and Family homes, and telephone interviews to two care homes. A sample of Roadshow participants completed a follow-up survey.

Successes

The Come to Tea project created a large number of tea parties. But participants' project diaries also highlight that the project prompted a vast range of activities, from sandwich making to 'knit and natter' sessions and curling.

Thirteen of the 21 care homes participated in the end of project survey. All care homes considered the Come to Tea project a success, with 10 of the 13 care home respondents saying 'yes – definitely'. Nearly three-quarters of the training participants rated the training as 'excellent'; the remainder said it was 'good'.

Feedback from the Friends and Family days showed that these structured days provided a valuable opportunity to nurture relationships and promote active living. Participants reported being challenged by having to consider wellbeing goals and ways to increase physical activity and independence, often by making relatively simple changes.

Of the participants that NAPA surveyed one month after the Crewe Roadshow, nearly two-thirds said they had taken positive steps to involve more residents or volunteers in their care homes.

Lessons and limitations

NAPA encountered a risk-averse culture in some care homes. Some managers were concerned about the risks of involving volunteers in this sort of engagement with residents, and feared that the health and safety of residents would be compromised in some way.

Some care home teams were reluctant or unable to commit to the time involved in the initial vision of the project. As a result, NAPA adapted the project to involve a larger number of care homes by developing the Friends and Family days.

Once committed to the project, care homes reported that the main barrier to the project's success was recruiting volunteers. Ten care homes told NAPA this was difficult; only three said it was not difficult.

Executive summary: Key findings

Older people

For residents, the key impact of Come to Tea was the opportunity to have meaningful conversations and develop relationships with volunteers. The project demonstrated that care homes can facilitate volunteers' involvement and this leads to great emotional gains for residents.

Feedback from Friends and Family days and Roadshows showed that family members and care staff had developed a much more enabling, active approach with residents.

Partnerships and sustainability

Most care homes involved in Come to Tea successfully used the project to build up the skills and commitment of their existing volunteers and attract new volunteers.

Each home reported that Come to Tea continued to influence their home after the project's six events ended.

Feedback from Friends and Family days showed that offering structured participation was a valuable way of building relationships that are more likely to last over time.

Volunteering

The Come to Tea project demonstrated that, with the right support and encouragement, people who already have an established link with a care home are more likely to be willing and long-standing volunteers than people without this connection.

The project demonstrated that care homes can offer volunteers a wide range of opportunities, and can help them to develop their communication skills and their confidence.

Equality and diversity

Come to Tea volunteers offered residents a new type of relationship that focused more on their emotional and psychological needs. This was particularly important for engaging residents with dementia and those with high needs.

The project also gave care homes the flexibility to develop the project in a way that best matched the needs of their diverse community: participants developed a wide range of events, far broader than the initial 'tea party' idea, which may not have been culturally significant in some settings.

Health literacy

Offering joint sessions for volunteers and staff – in training or structured discussion – was a powerful way to promote a shared vision of healthy living and active engagement.

The Roadshows successfully promoted health literacy across the care homes community. The leaflets produced for these events covered a wide range of healthy living topics including 'Smoothie making with older people' and 'Using stress balls'.

Economic value

Come to Tea volunteers completed an estimated 7668 volunteer hours, contributing an equivalent of £52,755.84. This group of 80 volunteers (by the end of the project) continue to be active and together contribute on average 18 hours per month at each of the homes. If the resident received this engagement from a member of staff paid at the equivalent to an activity organiser it would cost each care home an estimated £123.84 each month.

Executive summary: Conclusions and recommendations

Care homes should recognise and value what volunteers can offer to residents: valuable conversation, meaningful relationships and the promotion of active living, particularly for people with dementia.

Given that volunteers are most likely to be found through established relationships with or within the care home, care homes should value and nurture the relationships that they have already. Hosting structured events such as the Friends and Family days offered in this project may provide a valuable opportunity to develop relationships with friends, family, staff and the wider community. These relationships may lead to long-term volunteering commitments that result in great benefits for residents.

Volunteers should be a part of training events alongside the care team to develop relationships, a team approach and a shared vision of meaningful and active engagement with residents.

The care home team, including volunteers, should be encouraged to support residents to take appropriate risks and develop physical activity across a whole spectrum of daily living and physical activities. This includes preparing meals.

Care homes need to value the vital role that friends and family can play in helping care staff to develop personalised plans to improve quality of life and wellbeing.

Introduction

About 'fit as a fiddle'

The Big Lottery Fund's Wellbeing Programme is a £165 million programme encouraging healthy lifestyles and wellbeing. The Wellbeing Programme comprises three main outcomes aimed at improving and developing:

- levels of physical activity
- mental wellbeing and
- healthy eating habits for people and the wider community.

The Wellbeing Programme reflects the increasing emphasis put on healthier lifestyles, nutrition and preventative health services by government as obesity levels rise, alongside an increased focus on tackling mental health problems. These multiple objectives are set out in the cross-government strategies Healthy weight, healthy lives (Department of Health, 2008) and No health without mental health (HM Government/Department of Health, 2011). Funding under this programme is available for voluntary and community sector organisations and statutory and private organisations through a series of national and regional portfolios of activity.

The Big Lottery Fund awarded Age Concern England £15.1 million to deliver the 'fit as a fiddle' portfolio across the nine English regions from 2007 until 2012. From January 2010 Age Concern and Help the Aged came together as Age UK to deliver this portfolio. The main aims of fit as a fiddle coincide with the outcomes of the Big Lottery Wellbeing Fund by championing healthy eating, physical activity and mental wellbeing for older people. The portfolio aims to broaden and increase the opportunities for older people to undertake physical activities and improve their eating habits, and contribute to an overall improvement in mental health.

The fit as a fiddle portfolio comprises projects delivered by over 200 organisations; 99 of these are local Age UK/ Age Concern organisations. Each of the nine English regions receives £1.2 million to deliver a range of innovative projects in their area. The portfolio builds on Age Concern's Ageing Well Programme developed in 1993 to specifically improve older people's social and emotional wellbeing in a wider context.

Aims and objectives of fit as a fiddle

An independent inquiry into mental health and wellbeing in later life revealed five main factors that have an impact on older people's mental health and wellbeing: discrimination, participation in meaningful activity, relationships, physical health and poverty (Age Concern and Mental Health Foundation, 2006).

By increasing the focus on expectations of good health in old age and encouraging older people to maintain, sustain and improve their health, fit as a fiddle aims to address inequalities and empower older people to live fulfilling lives with the support of peers and their communities. fit as a fiddle projects promote healthy ageing, based around the needs and ideas of local people. At a regional level, projects aim to include black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, older people with specific health risks (for example, high blood pressure) and those living in deprived urban or rural areas.

Introduction

Methods for fit as a fiddle

At a national level the programme is focusing on training and support to volunteers to encourage lifestyle and health improvements via a National Cascade Training Programme.

A series of leaflets, resources and materials are also being produced as part of a national health literacy project.

Structure of this report

This report documents the Come to Tea project, one of five national fit as a fiddle projects. It has been delivered by the National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA).

The report presents an overview of Come to Tea, including a description of the project's aims and objectives, methods, context, project management, evaluation, outcomes and lessons learned.

It goes on to present findings emerging from the work, specifically the impact of the project on six key areas: older people, partnerships and sustainability, volunteering, equality and diversity, health literacy and the economic value of the project.

The report's conclusion contains recommendations for promoting the involvement of volunteers in care homes based on the experience of conducting this project.



Project overview

Background to Come to Tea

The overall aim of fit as a fiddle was to improve wellbeing outcomes around physical activity, nutrition and mental health for people over 50. Alongside fit as a fiddle projects in the nine regions, five national fit as a fiddle projects were set up to target 'hard to reach' older people. The Big Lottery recognised that older people in care homes were one of the groups of older people who may be 'hard to reach'.

The National Association for Providers of Activities for Older People (NAPA) is a care home membership charity that promotes quality of life for residents in care homes for older people. The Big Lottery awarded a grant of £217,975 for the Come to Tea project, to be delivered by NAPA between 2007 and 2011.

What does 'hard to reach' mean in a care home?

While every care home has a 'Mr and Mrs Sociable' – residents who will join whatever activity is on – there are also usually other residents who don't like to join in any of the big group activities. It may be that hearing loss makes participating in large groups difficult or dementia acts as a barrier to participation. Depression, shyness or personal disposition may mean that some residents don't engage with a home's activities programme. Whatever the individual reason, one-to-one and small group attention is much more likely to enable that resident to participate in a way that is meaningful to them.

With the Come to Tea project, NAPA particularly wanted to reach those who did not usually engage with large group activities for any of the reasons explained above.

What is Come to Tea?

When we say to a friend or neighbour, 'Will you come in for a cup of tea?', we are not offering a hot beverage alone. The invitation goes to the heart of wellbeing: we are offering an invitation to another person to join us in a social ritual of sharing, companionship and friendship.

Come to Tea began as a project to nurture the involvement of volunteers in small-scale tea parties or similar gatherings that engage hard-to-reach residents. This would also demonstrate a way of working to influence the whole home's culture away from large activities towards more personalised activity provision with greater relevant involvement for all residents.

Aims and intended outcomes

The project aimed to support residents to:

- increase their physical activity
- improve their nutrition and hydration
- increase mental wellbeing.

NAPA hoped to achieve this through increasing community involvement and developing staff through training. The project aimed to benefit older people living in care homes through promoting a 'whole home' approach and a cultural shift towards increasing community involvement (see inset box below for an explanation of a 'whole home' approach).

In this report the term 'community involvement' is used to encompass the participation in care home life of all those who live outside the home and are not paid to work there. All visitors are included in this: family members, friends, volunteers or people affiliated to an external organisation such as a church or school.

The intended outcome of Come to Tea was that it would be a national cascade training programme in care homes for older people to explore what works to encourage volunteering and to increase family and community participation. The goal was to engage with a wide range of care homes, offer training and follow up with care homes to identify learning. This follow-up and a range of evaluation interventions would inform a process of disseminating the project's findings to as broad an audience as possible.

Project overview

What is the 'whole home' approach?

NAPA encourages everyone involved in the lives of care home residents to see it as their responsibility to engage residents in meaningful activity, and not just the role of an activities organiser – so it is an approach that promotes the involvement of the 'whole home'.

What is an 'activity' in the context of a care home?

NAPA supports the view that activity is everything that a resident does from opening their eyes in the morning to going to sleep at night, and does not just relate to specific organised activities.

Project details and method

Projects develop and change over time, hopefully while staying true to overarching aims and objectives. Come to Tea began with certain intended outcomes, but early on it proved difficult to recruit care homes to be involved in the project (go to 'Lessons' on p. 21 for more detailed discussion of these issues). As a result, the intended outcomes changed over time to broaden engagement with care homes and to ensure that as many people as possible could participate in the project.

At the conclusion of the project Come to Tea had engaged with care homes in three significant ways: Come to Tea training and events, Friends and Family days, and Roadshows.

Come to Tea training and events

Twenty one care homes participated in this part of the project, with each one forming a project group that included volunteers and staff from care, catering, activities and the home manager. Each group of staff and volunteers together received two days training together from the NAPA team. In total, 163 people participated in this training: 74 volunteers and 82 care home staff and managers (7 not known; all figures are taken from training attendance sheets). The project group in the homes then delivered Come to Tea events and provided detailed feedback to the project on their first six events through project diaries and photographs.

The Come to Tea two day-training course was created by bringing together expert trainers in activity provision, physiotherapists, a fitness instructor and an evaluator. Together they designed a two-day training course that was piloted in four homes before being rolled out to the further 17 care homes. This training resource has now been made available in order for others to replicate the Come to Tea training.

The two-day training course covered:

- how to encourage residents to move more, engage actively in the tea party, socialise, and to eat and drink well
- how the care home works
- being a good volunteer
- what is 'activity' in a care home
- understanding how to motivate residents
- communication
- non-contact mobilising, moving and handling
- basic facts about nutrition and hydration.

The training gave volunteers and staff the opportunity to get to know each other. It also gave staff across departments to see together how care and catering affected activities and vice versa.

One of the factors considered during the training was that, for the purposes of the project, 'a tea party' didn't actually need to be a tea party! It could be a beer in the pub, fish and chips on the seafront or an ice cream in the garden. In fact, the value of small group activities is that they can be whatever is meaningful and culturally significant for the resident(s) involved.

Project overview

Friends and Family days

As suggested above, NAPA discovered early on in the project that a significant number of care homes were reluctant to commit to the Come to Tea training and events because of the time and commitment involved. As a result, NAPA decided to offer Friends and Family days as a 'first step' for those care teams that wanted to begin to engage with family, friends and visitors in a new and deeper way. They were also available for those who would have liked to have participated in Come to Tea but for some reason were not able to.

NAPA ran these one-off workshop days at 64 care homes. In total the days involved 434 residents and 411 friends, family members or volunteers supporting them. Each participating resident was partnered by a friend, family member, volunteer or member of staff.

These Friends and Family days asked for one day's involvement and required no paperwork or record keeping after the event. Many homes signed up enthusiastically, and NAPA had a waiting list of twice as many homes keen to run a Friends and Family day as there was funding for places.

This one-day participation event included both structured discussions and recreational activities. The focal point of the morning was a social tea party with an emphasis on residents doing as much as they can for themselves – from passing the plates round the table to pouring milk to preparing a scone with cream and jam. Care teams were encouraged to think carefully about where the event took place and to make it feel special for everyone, for example by using bone china cups and cake stands.

In the morning a NAPA trainer acted as host for the event and worked with the group through discussions and a quiz focused on the three wellbeing outcomes. While residents took a lunch break, the NAPA trainer gave a short training session to the visitors about how to make the most of their visiting time to help improve the residents' wellbeing in ways that are meaningful to them. In the afternoon the paired resident and family member engaged together in an activity.

Roadshows

The third component of the project was the four Roadshows delivered in Autumn 2011 in Dorset, Crewe, London and Brighton. NAPA used these half-day interactive workshops to communicate some of the key messages set out in this report. This gave them the opportunity to share the learning from the project with a much wider audience than the other two phases of the project achieved. NAPA produced and distributed a series of nine leaflets based on learning from the project at these events. The leaflets contain simple, practical ideas to help care teams feel inspired to try new ways of engaging with residents. The leaflets are:

- Come dance with me
- Come to tea
- Workout food
- Everyday jobs
- Welcoming toddlers into care settings
- Carry on conversation!
- Using stress balls in care homes
- Come dance with me
- The pleasure of pets
- Smoothie making with older people.

Project overview

Project context

Come to Tea was an attempt to demonstrate a practical approach to responding to some key policy drivers and good practice guidance in relation to older people living in care homes, in particular the importance of:

- personalising activities
- valuing volunteers and visitors in a care home
- involving residents in meal preparation
- meaningful activity.

Personalising activities

The Care Quality Commission's (CQC) guidance on the Essential standards of quality and safety (2010) gives a range of prompts for care providers to help them comply with the standards. The prompts for Outcome 4, which looks at the care and welfare of people who use services, states that a care facility that complies with the standards "maintains their welfare and promotes their wellbeing by taking account of all their needs, including:

- physical
- mental
- social
- personal relationships
- emotional
- daytime activity."

Just filling residents' time with things that are not meaningful for them does not maintain their welfare or promote their wellbeing. Personalising activities in the way promoted by the Come to Tea project does.

Sue Edwards, the activities coordinator at Winifred Dell Care Centre, explains the importance of family involvement in meeting individual residents' needs, particularly those with dementia:

"When families ... start engaging with the person with dementia by tuning into their passions and interests, which they would most likely know (for example, playing an old favourite tune), the relationship is transformed. This helps both their families and the resident, as the condition has isolated them all, and then they can see how their loved one can change for the better. It really works and really makes a difference."

Another outcome of the Standards is also relevant to this project. Outcome 1 relates to "respecting and involving people who use services states", and on this the guidance says: "Providers who comply with the regulations will: encourage and enable people who use services to be an active part of their community in appropriate settings."

The Friends and Family days invited residents to set personal goals and involved families and friends in this process too. This is a useful and meaning way of demonstrating active user participation.

Valuing volunteers and visitors in a care home

Many residents in care homes are experiencing serious emotional upheavals in their lives, if not sudden traumas (although these also occur). It can be difficult for staff to slow down, to sit down and to spend the time with residents that is necessary to address their deeper emotional needs. Visitors – whether they are family, friends or volunteers – play a vital role here by offering that time with residents. But for that quality time to happen, it helps if the care home can provide a focus, such as a tea party.

Project overview

Involving residents in meal preparation

The Commission for Social Care Inspection stated in their 2006 report about mealtimes in care homes, Highlight of the day?, that:

“The connection between appetite and meeting people’s emotional, cultural and social needs has been largely absent from public discussions. Merely putting nutritious food on the table does not mean that older people will then eat it” (p4).

However proud our care homes are of the homely environment they offer, preparing food is almost always shut away from view with very little resident involvement in the sights, smells, touch, taste and processes of engaging with food. And while a lot of homes have accepted the person-centred care messages of letting the resident do as much as they can for themselves in the area of personal care, many haven’t yet thought to extend that to food preparation and domestic tasks.

The Come to Tea training specifically addressed the importance of incorporating food and drink into activities and suggested ways for volunteers to do this. It also helped develop the communication and team-working between catering and activities staff.

Meaningful activity

The Department of Health’s 2005 Health Survey for England looked at the health of older people. It revealed that older people living in a care home are doubly inactive compared with people living in their own homes:

“The majority of residents in care homes are classed as inactive with significantly more women (86%) than men (78%). Inactivity levels are highest in nursing homes, with 90% of residents not having done a continuous walk of 15 minutes or more in the past month.”

The same survey also found that 50 per cent of care home residents never go outside.

The high level of sedentary behaviour, typically always indoors, compounds the health problems and deterioration of care home residents. Put simply, sitting around too much is making residents more frail and increases their dependency.

The Come to Tea project helped both volunteers and staff to develop a shared vision of ‘do-as-much-as-you-can’ participation. This makes it more likely that a wide range of activities will be optimised to be more physically active.

Project overview

Project management and evaluation

The project had the full-time equivalent of one member of staff and nine freelance trainers.

The project was evaluated by collecting feedback from the 21 training events, 135 diary accounts of Come to Tea events, further project feedback forms and care home surveys.

NAPA also commissioned follow-up visits to eight Come to Tea care homes and phone interviews to two of these a year after their visit to gain an in-depth insight into the impact of the project over time. These visits and interviews, conducted by consultants Zoe Duke of Vitalyz training and Annie Stevenson from Integration in Care, provided a much richer and more detailed picture of the impact of the project.

The participants on the Friends and Family days completed feedback forms and two projects received follow-up evaluation visits.

A sample of 154 roadshow participants were asked to complete a follow-up survey a month after their attendance.

The research company Ecorys and the social care department of Keele University conducted an external evaluation of all parts of the fit as a fiddle project. NAPA collected demographic data on 1785 individuals involved in the project to contribute to the wider project portfolio evaluation and sent out surveys on behalf of the external evaluation. Due to the generalist nature of that evaluation NAPA had difficulty engaging care home residents in these surveys as they had been designed to be used with the general population of people aged 50+.



Project overview: Outcomes and successes

Come to Tea training

Almost all the care homes (11 out of the 13 that responded) reported in the end of project survey that the training had been very important to help staff understand how to work with the volunteers. For most care homes (10 of 13), it was the element of staff development that the care team felt was significant to the success of the project – more so than training the volunteers how to understand how to engage residents.

Two-thirds of participants (69 of 107) rated the training as 'excellent', with the remainder saying it was 'good'. In the follow-up visits, the consultant observed a ripple effect within the homes where other staff who had not attended the initial training had been motivated by the project to change their practice and do more to promote the fit as a fiddle philosophy (see project's End of year report 2010).

Come to Tea events

As well as a large number of tea parties and tea dances, Come to Tea followed the creativity of staff and volunteers and the interests of residents to prompt a wide range of different activities. This is a small sample of the activities included in the project diaries:

fruit tasting – sandwich making – picnics in the park – indoor picnics – birthday parties – gardening – painting pictures – laying the table – knit and natter – curling – shopping trips – gentle exercise session – seaside trips – going outside to feed the birds – IT sharing sessions – smoothie making – live music sessions – singalong music sessions

The care homes were enormously committed to the project. Only 1 out of the 21 care homes that had Come to Tea training failed to complete the 6 events that the project asked for feedback on. This home was unable to retain its volunteers and completed only 4 out of 6 events. A common feature was that volunteers' commitment to completing project paperwork lagged behind their enthusiasm for delivering activities with residents!

Of the 21 care homes to take part 20 provided the feedback on all 6 events that the project asked for.

NAPA conducted a survey of the care homes at the conclusion of the project to increase its understanding of their experiences with the project and volunteers. Thirteen of the 21 homes responded to the survey conducted in December 2011. The responses from this survey were overwhelmingly positive. All said they considered the Come to Tea project a success, with 10 of the 13 care homes respondents saying 'yes – definitely' and the remaining homes say 'yes – in part'.

Project overview: Outcomes and successes

Friends and Family days

At the half-way point during the Family and Friends days, participants were able to reflect on what had happened during the morning, which in many instances surprised the relatives:

“Dad did much more than I thought. He even poured my tea!” (quote taken from training feedback).

Another said,

“My wife enjoyed writing in the workbook albeit very slowly and painstakingly. I hadn’t considered doing such a simple thing as giving her a pen and paper which is something we all take for granted in our daily lives” (quote taken from training feedback).

The day involved participants discussing wellbeing outcomes. Both the resident and their partner were encouraged to set goals for themselves. These wellbeing goals were frequently highly relevant to the visitors as well as the residents. While goal setting is not an attainable activity for all care home residents, there were many for whom it was an empowering experience. In many ways care home residents are encouraged to hand over their self-care responsibilities to others, but setting objectives for your own wellbeing can help reclaim some lost empowerment.

The Roadshows

Of the 30 participants NAPA surveyed one month after the Crewe Roadshow, nearly two-thirds said they had already taken positive steps to involve more residents or volunteers in their care homes as a result of the Roadshow. Respondents gave a range of examples, including the following:

- involving residents more with day-to-day activities
- hosting a ‘smoothie day’
- encouraging family and residents to attend activities meeting
- starting a knitting group and hosting a quiz night
- offering more food-related activities for residents to participate in, such as food preparation and so on.



Project overview: Outcomes and successes

Come to Tea at Manley Court

Come to Tea had a major impact on this nursing home in south London. Serendipitously, the project began right around the same time that a local theatre group, Enterlechy, approached Manley Court with an interest in forming links with the home.

The project has been the catalyst for an extraordinary culture of tea dancing and performance in this home. Initially the care team had some reservations about this idea of linking up with a theatre group, but the Come to Tea training really helped address these concerns and made it much easier for everyone to work together.

A number of small tea dances were organised after the Come to Tea training last year, and took place at the Albany Theatre. Then the group came to the care home and a huge tea-dance took place in the summer. A gazebo with a jazz band and a professional compère led the entertainment and dancing. Tea and cakes prepared in part by the residents were served. Some residents dressed up, including at least one in drag who practised his comedic skills!

The musicians ensured that the music was taken to residents who couldn't get out to join in and were visited in their rooms by the brass band. There were even head and shoulder massages going on to make sure everyone felt relaxed.

Four residents have been invited to be part of the Enterlechy group and are being encouraged to inspire and mentor others as they are natural leaders and inspirers. One of them is Frank, a professional singer, who is pictured singing at the Albany Theatre to the public. He is now very physically disabled but has an extraordinary voice. He says that performing arts touches people in a way that nothing else does.



Manley Court resident, Frank, performing at the Albany Theatre
Photo credit: Enterlechy Arts, Roswitha Cheshire

Project overview: Outcomes and successes

Friends and Family at Winifred Dell Care Centre

Winifred Dell Care Centre in Brentwood, Essex, held its initial Friends and Family day in July 2011. Since then, the home has held three Friends and Family days and they're planning many more.

The team at Winifred Dell say the project has taught them the following key things:

- the need to demonstrably value friends and families so they feel they are taken seriously and have an important role in the day-to-day life of the home
- the importance of having a plan/strategy for engaging with friends and families
- the need to incorporate the learning from Friends and Family days into staff training
- the need for activities organisers to have boundless imagination to keep stoking the imagination of others
- the importance of a positive attitude and a love of people
- doing things together brings residents and their families and friends closer, forges new friendships and keeps skills alive.

The activities organiser, Sue Edwards, says that initially it had been hard to engage staff in thinking differently about the way they relate to friends and family. But, as Sue explains, with the backing of the manager, the Friends and Family training is now mandatory for all staff:

“It is always a struggle to get the carers [staff] in on the Friends and Family days I have run. Our manager decided they are so important to the home and residents that she would incorporate the training NAPA provided into staff training days. So they have to do it. This has enabled the home to inspire and involve the staff and use their comments and ideas. For example, the chef has really engaged with this. She has now created ‘baking days’ for the residents and their friends and families. So they’ve been busy making shortbread, Christmas cakes and mince pies (56 were made at the last session!). This has been a great success, it has really brought people together and been great fun.”



Project overview: Outcomes and successes

A volunteer's view

In 2011 the National Council for Volunteering Organisations (NCVO) published Pathways through participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship? (Brodie et al) This report argues that four elements are needed for participation in volunteering: motivation, trigger/s, resources and opportunity.

One of the Come to Tea participants, Nina, volunteers in a care home in the north-west. Here, the consultant who conducted an in-depth interview with Nina illustrates how Nina's experience demonstrates the importance of these elements.

Nina identified a large number of personal motivations for volunteering in the care home: she was an only child, and has seen numerous aunts in care homes in a large city in the north, where she observed poor quality care. She understands what good quality care looks like. She is religious, is thankful for the life she has, and wants to give something back to society.

For Nina there were two elements of the trigger, one from her church and one from the care home. Through the church she was asked to take communion to a resident in a local home where she lives. She was reluctant then, being a shy person and wary of what the home might be like from past experience. This home was in fact "extraordinarily welcoming" and she agreed to become involved in the NAPA training, which was just right to build her confidence having taken the initial step.

Nina is retired, healthy, and single: this means she has time resources. She spoke about herself in self-deprecating ways, emphasising her shyness, yet she has the skills and experience of a whole career with the NHS as a

radiographer and she has a deep empathy and regard for older people, especially the ones who are isolated through disability. She has the intelligence and insight to see that, due to her circumstances, she may need care herself one day and she is passionate to see the quality of care improve. This means she brings enormous reserves of empathy and kindness that are enormously valuable.

For Nina the care home where she volunteers has "an unbelievably encouraging atmosphere which benefits everyone in the home", and volunteering here offered her a terrific opportunity. She responded exceptionally well to their encouragement and feels valued. Her fears about care homes have been overturned by the way the home has treated her and her skills with relating to bedbound residents on a one-to-one basis have been welcomed.

From the training, Nina found that the practical suggestions – such as practising helping people get out of a chair, and learning that if someone is confused it is best to go along with their confusion and not correct them – were very useful and have helped to make her more comfortable and confident in her role.

Project overview: Lessons

A risk-averse culture in some care homes

The most significant challenge initially was the risk-averse nature of some care homes. The two-day training was designed to ensure that volunteers were properly prepared for their role so that residents benefited from the involvement without being exposed to any additional risks. Yet this was insufficient reassurance for a number of care managers who perceived volunteers as 'loose cannons' and declined to be involved.

“Health and safety and risk assessment came out as one of the main barriers to homes progressing with the project. I found that some care home managers would not take on volunteers to support activities due to the ‘risks’ this posed to residents and the bureaucracy around recruiting them and carrying out CRB checks and so on. Again, some staff were reluctant to allow volunteers to take control of activities without their supervision, because of the ‘risks’ [unspecified] this posed to residents. There is a culture of fear and ‘covering yourself’ in case things go wrong and harm comes to a resident, and this fear seems to overtake the benefits that may come from allowing volunteers to become more involved with activities and allowing residents the freedom and flexibility to choose what they do with their time.”

The project coordinator Amy Hinks reflects on the problems she encountered in the early phase of the project.

Interestingly the homes that did move forward with the project were the ones that did not perceive risk management or 'health and safety' to be an issue. Of the homes that did succeed in the programme only two reported in the final project survey that health and safety/risk concerns were a serious difficulty that they had to overcome; the remaining 11 who responded said this was not a difficult barrier to overcome.

NAPA recorded an interview with Chef Manager Lisa Keel from Linwood Care Home where she talks about managing risk in involving residents in activities around food. This was shown at the Roadshows as a way of prompting discussion on this topic. The video can be viewed online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0GIHSiyHzk.

Administrative barriers

Similarly, some care home managers were apprehensive and misinformed about CRB checks. It is worth setting the record straight here:

1. CRB checks are free from the CRB bureau for volunteers. However processing companies usually charge a small administration fee.
2. Volunteers need a CRB check in order to work unsupervised with residents. This means they can support a member of staff in an activity with residents such as a tea party before their CRB check has come through, but not visit residents alone in their rooms.

Of the Come to Tea homes that responded to the final survey, most (11 of 13) felt CRB checks were not difficult to deal with, and just two considered them quite difficult, but no participating homes thought CRB checks were a serious barrier.

Project overview: Lessons

Staff time

All but two of the homes who participated in Come to Tea had a member of staff specifically employed with 'activities' as part of their remit. While no data exists on the exact proportion of care homes that employ an activities organiser, NAPA estimates that about half of care homes do – making this sample much higher than NAPA would have expected. Having someone in this role is very important to provide a contact and coordinator for all forms of community involvement.

The project required a large commitment from the staff group, involving staff from management, care, activities and catering. It was important for the success of the project to be able to create the conditions for change across the whole care home, however, for some homes large commitment of staff time for training was a barrier to being involved. In the current economic climate some homes had organisation bans on releasing staff for training, and others did not have the budget to back-fill staff positions.

Difficulty recruiting volunteers

A number of homes were initially keen to participate, but found it hard to recruit volunteers. In some cases volunteers were keen to be involved, but reticent about the amount of time involved in completing the project or about completing the paperwork in the form of diary entries required for project feedback. Early on, it became clear that volunteers/visitors to the care homes would welcome another sort of engagement with lighter commitment, and as such NAPA developed the Friends and Family stream of the project.

When NAPA began the Come to Tea project it drew on the considerable expertise of volunteering organisations such as Volunteer England to draw together a list of recommended sources to find volunteers. NAPA suggested that care homes consider approaching the following sources:

- relatives
- local church or community group
- schools/colleges/universities
- websites
- local press/advertising
- local volunteer centres.

Recruitment was the biggest barrier that the participating care homes reported. Ten care homes told NAPA this was difficult; only three said it was not difficult.

At the conclusion of the project, NAPA asked care homes to report on where they had recruited their volunteers from (End of project survey). Out of a total of 80 volunteers who were involved at the end of the project:

- 25 were relatives of residents living in the home
- 11 were relatives of residents who had now died
- 19 came from church or faith groups
- 14 came from schools or colleges
- 9 were current or retired members of care home staff who participated as project volunteers.

Local volunteering bureau, volunteer organisations and job centres provided no volunteers to any of the care homes surveyed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that homes who placed advertisements with volunteer centres found it a disheartening process and not to be recommended. It seems that trying to find a new volunteer, one not already linked with the care home in some way, is not as productive as developing and deepening the relationships with the community around you.

Project overview: Lessons

Project capacity

While the Friends and Family days were very over-subscribed and very popular, the disadvantage of these days was that, due to the constraints of the project targets and budget, NAPA could only support homes able to gather and host a large group of 10 residents and partners. In this size of group the project was not able to meet the needs of smaller homes effectively, or homes in which residents experienced more advanced stages of dementia where much smaller groups and tailored communication would have been required.

There is no reason why the model of structured Friends and Family days cannot be used with small groups, and with residents with advanced dementia, it was simply a project requirement to deliver the days to a large number of people. There is evidence to suggest that smaller groups would have an even larger impact on the individuals involved.

Reflecting on one Friends and Family day with a group that was only half the targeted size, trainer Julia Burton Jones commented:

“I felt the main benefits of the day were for the daughter and three wives who came. All are daily visitors who struggle with the emotional impact of their role and appreciated the chance to spend the day together. I was able to give one-to-one time to them, too, since it was such a small group.” (from the trainer’s post-project reflective account of training)



Key findings: impacts on older people

For residents, the key impact of Come to Tea was the opportunity to have meaningful conversations and develop relationships with volunteers. The project demonstrated that care homes can facilitate volunteers' involvement and this leads to great emotional gains for residents.

Feedback from Friends and Family days and Roadshows showed that family members and care staff had developed a much more enabling, active approach with residents.

Emotional benefits

One resident described the impact of the Come to Tea volunteers as follows: "They talk and listen to us as if we matter, care staff don't always have time for us" (quote taken from project diaries). This revealing comment shows the heart-wrenching link between someone taking time to talk and listen, and the emotional benefit for the resident of feeling she mattered.

The system of follow-up visits tracked the progress of participants and captured monitoring and evaluation data. The consultant identified that, for the residents, the most overwhelmingly significant benefit of the project was the opportunity for residents to have meaningful conversations with volunteers. Care homes cannot always provide the staff time for sitting and talking, but they can work in such a way that encourages and welcomes volunteers and visitors and creates the great emotional gains for residents.



Key findings: impacts on older people

Promoting an enabling, active approach

Lisa Keel is the Chef Manager at Linwood Care Home, one of the Come to Tea homes, and she explains below how her work in catering can enrich everyday activities with older people:

“We can enrich each activity for people... whether it is flower arranging or dominos, dominos with a slice of great cake – much better than just dominos! ... Everyone has a relationship with food, and I just feel it is a real crime if we don’t let people continue that relationship once they come into a [care home] environment. Making a cup of tea is so important to a person’s self-esteem. And that’s just the very basic. To take it further than that let’s people get involved, [let them] have a party, pick a meal for yourself: it’s choice, it’s independence, it’s encouraging people to eat and to drink and to get the very most out of life.”

The full interview with Lisa Keel is available to view at www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0GIHSiyHzk.

One activity organiser who attended a Roadshow later reported on the home’s progress in encouraging physical activity among residents:

“We are having active afternoon teas, providing residents with tray of all they need and seating at tables in social groups so they have moved from lounges. The aim at present to do this once a week whilst all care staff get used to the idea. As well as the physical activity involved in an active tea party, every activity that requires a resident to move to a specific place for a specific activity encourages them to walk more steps and this has great health benefits. ”
(Roadshow participant survey)

One of the factors that limits how much residents move for themselves is the lack of staff time. A resident who could walk to the dining room or the bench in the garden – given enough time, a little breather half way, and someone to walk with – may well be taken in the wheelchair (or not at all) because it is quicker for the staff. Volunteers can provide that extra time. The Come to Tea training showed volunteers how to accompany residents to walk safely and explained the immense value of that walk to the nicely laid tea table or bench in the garden.

The Come to Tea project diaries captured good evidence that volunteers too were getting involved in helping residents be more active and that they developed strong relationships with residents. One resident spoke of the strong emotional bond that had developed with the volunteers:

“They are my friends. I see them every time they come in and I wrote to them when they were in Australia and they wrote back. I love seeing them and I go outside and sit with them when they are gardening.”

Key findings: impacts on older people

Kerry Barrowman, one of the project trainers, explains how she used the training to show participants that tea parties could be used to promote a physical activity for older people:

“During the Come to Tea training I would ask a volunteer from the group to mime making themselves a cup of tea and ask the rest of the group to count the steps. Generally people would lose count of the individual movements at about 35–40. When we thought about them these movements had included lifting, core trunk stability, flexion and extension of the upper limbs, hand-eye-coordination, fine and gross motor skills. Imagine now, if you will, the number of movements required when you are handed a cup of tea from the tea trolley. Two probably?”

Kerry goes on to explain:

“Maybe a resident cannot do every one of those 35+ steps of making a cup of tea for themselves, but they probably can do some of them. Encouraging volunteers to support residents to pour their own tea from pots and milk from small jugs, to slice, butter, jam and cream their own scones makes teatime into a do-as-much-as-you-can workout for the hands and the mind.”

NAPA's Friends and Family day at Belmont Castle – a residential home for 37 people – taught the activities organiser here, Therese, much about letting residents do more for themselves, for example, encouraging residents to pour their own tea and coffee. She notices how hard it is for the care team to let go: many staff have a huge fear of accidents happening to residents, which results in the residents' quality of life being affected. The Friends and Family day helped Therese and the manager Juanita crystallise the need to reinforce a culture of suggesting, stimulating and enabling, not controlling – with huge implications for the residents here.



Key findings: impacts on partnerships and sustainability

Most care homes involved in Come to Tea successfully used the project to build up the skills and commitment of their existing volunteers and attract new volunteers.

Each home reported that Come to Tea continued to influence their home after the project's six events ended.

Feedback from Friends and Family days showed that offering structured participation was a valuable way of building relationships that are more likely to last over time.

Developing partnerships

Most care homes involved in Come to Tea successfully used the project to develop relationships with their existing volunteers and attract new volunteers. NAPA also encouraged participating homes to use the Friends and Family days to actively extend their relationships with the community. Many of these homes were taking their first active steps into building these relationships. As well as the 'frequent flyers' (the visitors that you see regularly), homes were encouraged to also target some relatives whom they saw much less often or that were completely unknown to staff. All activities that build the relationships between the care home and the residents' families and visitors is beneficial to the life of the home, and the stronger these relationships the more support the home can expect from visitors.

Ongoing influence of project

Every one of the homes said that the Come to Tea project continued to influence their home after the official conclusion of the Come to Tea events. Four homes said the project continued to have a little influence, but the majority – 9 of the 13 homes that responded to the end of project survey – said that the project continued to have a lot of influence in the home after the official conclusion of the project.

Come to Tea had a significant impact on the way in which Wren Hall, an independent family run care home in Nottinghamshire is run. Previously Wren Hall had an activities organiser who worked 37.5 hours a week, but in the end of project survey the home reported that it had ***“altered how our care staff work and they incorporate a variety of activities into our residents' daily lives as the norm. We have increased care staff hours slightly to do this.”***

Recruiting volunteers on to the project was difficult for this home initially, but 2 years after they begun Come to Tea they continue to benefit from 72 hours a month of volunteer time, and report that the project continues to have a lot of impact on their work.

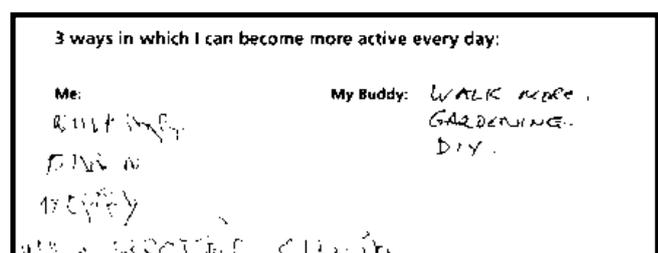
Structured participation

Friends and Family days offered just one day of structured participation, but with this came many benefits: strengthening of relationships, not just between residents and family members/friends, but also building the social networks between other residents and staff that make visiting a more positive experience for everyone, and more likely to last over time.

The team at Winifred Dell Care Centre are clear that introducing some structure for the way friends and families are involved – prompted by the Friends and Family days at the home – has made a big difference. Sue Edwards, the activities organiser there, explains:

“We understand that if someone is willing to spend their time with us, they must have a programme run for them and the activities organiser should steer them and give them some structure. So we have our own overall plan for [the engagement of] families and friends. The Friends and Family days are now part of this. It's no good leaving it vague. They need a plan so they can see what their involvement can achieve. For example, reading stories and sourcing books. This would depend on the mutual interests of the resident and friend, and could involve anything that would work, for example, audio newspapers.”

[XXX add caption for below]



Key findings: impacts on volunteering

The Come to Tea project demonstrated that, with the right support and encouragement, people who already have an established link with a care home are more likely to be willing and longstanding volunteers than people without this connection.

The project demonstrated that care homes can offer volunteers a wide range of opportunities, and can help them to develop their communication skills and their confidence.

Developing relationships with established volunteers and visitors

Two homes had no volunteers before they began the project and this training was their first step. Most already had some and used the project to build up the skills and commitment of their existing volunteers and reach out for new volunteers at the same time. On average the Come to Tea homes increased their volunteers by two.

During the Come to Tea project, two types of relationships have been successfully converted into volunteering. People who already have an established link to the care home (relatives of current and former residents and retired and current staff) make up over half of the volunteers: 45 of 80 at the end of the project. A smaller number – 33 of the 80 – were drawn from groups such as churches or schools/colleges that can be used as a focus for volunteer recruitment. These figures support the assumption that one-off structured events like Friends and Family days can help build the relationships that create the volunteers of the future.

Because the Come to Tea training began with two days of training it gave activity organisers something specific to talk to potential volunteers about. The project could act as a prompt. At the same time, the NAPA training made the volunteers more aware of people who need visiting.

Opportunity knocks? Developing volunteers' skills

Care homes can provide the opportunity to be involved because they can link people together. They also have the potential space for meetings to take place. Care homes can offer an almost infinite variety of volunteering opportunities. The range of activities that have come out of the Come to Tea project include a full spectrum from large flamboyant events with music, dance and laughter to gentle private moments such as a conversation about feelings of loss and loneliness. This variety offers scope to include an enormous range of volunteers' talents, personalities and interests.

The Friends and Family stream of the programme is an example of a way that care homes can encourage visitors to build their skills to communicate with their relatives and their confidence within the care home. The days also helped start to build up social networks between visitors to support themselves and each other.

A member of staff at a Come to Tea home described the contribution of the volunteers as follows: "They are of immense value to the home. If [our activities organiser] is off, they still come along and they are great at getting people out of doors into the fresh air even just for a walk around the grounds" (end of project survey).

While having the potential to provide opportunities for enormous participation, care home environments often discourage opportunities for visitors, family members and volunteers to be involved. Many homes do not have any one specific person whose explicit responsibility is to encourage visitors and volunteers, and take no active steps to involve visitors. Not all activity organisers have identified the potential in their role to welcome and enable others to contribute to running and assisting with activities, and not all managers support their staff to have any planning or office time to coordinate other contributions.

In one of the Friends and Family days, of the volunteers from the local church expressed an interest in continuing to be involved and offered to come and run craft related activities in which she had particular skills. The activity coordinator told the trainer, "I run all those groups here. We don't need any volunteers for this." (taken from the trainer's post-training reflective account.) When the trainer pointed out that the volunteer clearly had a great rapport with residents and could be a real asset to the home especially if and when the activity coordinator was off duty or on leave, the activity coordinator remained adamant that she preferred to keep control of what was going on herself. The trainer commented in her reflective account: "'control' probably being a key word in this context."

Key findings: impacts on equality and diversity

Come to Tea volunteers offered residents a new type of relationship that focused more on their emotional and psychological needs. This was particularly important for engaging residents with dementia and those with high needs.

The project also gave care homes the flexibility to develop the project in a way that best matched the needs of their diverse community: participants developed a wide range of events, far broader than the initial 'tea party' idea, which may not have been culturally significant in some settings.

Reaching people with dementia

As indicated earlier, one of the key impacts of the project for older people was the potential to develop new relationships and have meaningful conversation with the volunteers. This type of engagement – one that is not so constrained by time or work pressures, and that places high value on emotional connection – is especially important for reaching out to people with dementia and those with high needs.

As one of the consultants who conducted follow-up visits to the Come to Tea care homes reported:

“The project helps to fulfil residents’ emotional and psychological needs which are so often overlooked by care staff ... the introduction of volunteers has created a new type of relationship for the residents and they are hungry for this type of interaction. This is especially important when working with a client group with high level needs and those with dementia.”
(see End of year report 2010)

Diverse communities

From the outset the Come to Tea project made clear that it was not essential to hold a 'tea party' as such for the purposes of the project: it could be anything that was meaningful or relevant to the residents. This flexibility meant that the project group for each care home could develop events in such a way that best matched the needs of their diverse community.

In fact, participants developed a wide range of events, far broader than the initial 'tea party' idea, which may not have been culturally significant in some settings. It also allowed for diversity within care homes where, across a range of events, the needs of individuals could be better met.

Key findings: impacts on health literacy

Offering joint sessions for volunteers and staff – in training or structured discussion – was a powerful way to promote a shared vision of healthy living and active engagement.

The Roadshows successfully promoted health literacy across the care homes community. The leaflets produced for these events covered a wide range of healthy living topics including ‘Smoothie making with older people’ and ‘Using stress balls’.

Joint learning, shared vision

Several relatives shared how the learning from the joint sessions with staff had helped them learn more about promoting a shared vision of healthy living and active engagement. One relative who attended a Friends and Family day at Wheatlands care home told NAPA in training feedback that “it was very useful for many reasons: to get to know other residents; to discuss with staff ways of working with my mother; to ‘experience’ the exercise sessions; to find out what she [my mother] would like to do.”

Another Friends and Family participant wrote to NAPA after the event, saying:

“On my most recent visit I realised I was helping Mum, when I should have been encouraging her to help herself – so I changed tack and will try to stay on the latter path for as long as possible. It was worth coming [to the Friends and Family day] if only for that last point – in that small things can help people retain a small amount of independence for longer, that’s got to be good.”

In this situation, the daughter changed her approach and took on-board a much more enabling approach as a result of a Friends and Family day. This will help her mother, who is experiencing a degree of dementia, to continue to be as physically active and independent as she can for as long as she can.

The trainer at Buxton Lodge’s Friends and Family day reported later that “the goals of fit as a fiddle struck home with one wife, in particular, who had been neglecting her diet since her husband’s recent admission” (taken from trainer’s post project reflective account of training).

Promoting health literacy

The Roadshows went on to share the learning from the Come to Tea project, including a range of resources that promote healthy literacy. The training materials for Come to Tea are now available for other care homes to utilise. The video on managing risk while promoting involvement in meal preparation is viewable on Youtube. The project’s nine leaflets present a range of ways of engaging in health promoting activity in care homes. They are written in an accessible, engaging style, supported by positive images, and promote ideas such as ‘Using stress balls in care homes’, ‘Workout food’ and ‘Smoothie making with older people’.

Key findings: economic value of the project

Come to Tea volunteers completed an estimated 7668 volunteer hours, contributing an equivalent of £52,755.84. This group of 80 volunteers (by the end of the project) continue to be active and together contribute on average 18 hours per month at each of the homes. If the resident received this engagement from a member of staff paid at the equivalent to an activity organiser it would cost each care home an estimated £123.84 each month.

Calculating the gains

The Volunteer Investment and Value (VIVA) audit tool designed by the Institute for Volunteer Research can be used to create a financial indicator of the value created by the volunteering activity of Come to Tea.

On average volunteers continue to contribute 18 hours per month of time at each of the Come to Tea homes (End of project survey). If the resident received this engagement from a member of staff paid at the equivalent to an activity organiser it would cost each care home £123.84 each month (no average figures are published nationally, but NAPA estimates a usual rate at time of writing would be £6.88/hr).

Throughout the life of the project, from training to project conclusion in December 2011, an estimated 7668 volunteer hours were completed by Come to Tea volunteers contributing an equivalent of £52,755.84. This group of 80 volunteers continue to be active, but there is no way of evaluating the longevity of their commitment.

One could also make an equivalent assessment of the value of visitors in general. If viewed in this way the time spent by a member of staff on the phone to build community links with churches, schools and local groups starts to look like a valuable investment.

The costs associated with making relatives welcome – such as extra cups of tea and cake, or extra lunches – are in fact very cost-effective ways of investing in one-to-one attention for residents.

Homes rated the factors around the value of training more highly than the specific elements of having a named project to use in recruitment or events such as tea parties to focus on.

Conclusion and recommendations

Recruiting volunteers was the main barrier encountered by this project. But the project also demonstrates that volunteers can both be found and developed. In general volunteers aren't recruited out of isolation, but out of relationships.

The experience of this project shows that it takes time and a bit of focus to build up relationships with the community around care homes, but that once those links are developed they can continue to enrich the life of the home for years to come. Through the training element of both Come to Tea and Friends and Family care home managers and staff gained confidence in the abilities and skills of the volunteers.

Family members and visitors are not a static group beyond the influence of a care home. Their contribution can be encouraged and grown. Providing some structured events for this, such as the Friends and Family days, provides a focus to invite visitors in and strengthen family bonds and communities around the care home.

Volunteers have been shown to be a great asset to homes. Training the volunteers alongside staff enabled a shared vision of engaging residents with physical activity, eating and drinking well and feeling good. Staff valued volunteers for their energy and the extra 'life' they brought to homes, and residents valued them for the individual attention they received.

Conclusion and recommendations

Based on its experience of the Come to Tea project, NAPA makes the following recommendations:

Care homes should recognise and value what volunteers can offer to residents: valuable conversation, meaningful relationships and the promotion of active living, particularly for people with dementia.

Given that volunteers are most likely to be found through established relationships with or within the care home, care homes should value and nurture the relationships that they have already. Hosting structured events such as the Friends and Family days offered in this project may provide a valuable opportunity to develop relationships with friends, family, staff and the wider community. These relationships may lead to long-term volunteering commitments that result in great benefits for residents.

Volunteers should be a part of training events alongside the care team to develop relationships, a team approach and a shared vision of meaningful and active engagement with residents.

The care home team, including volunteers, should be encouraged to support residents to take appropriate risks and develop physical activity across a whole spectrum of daily living and physical activities. This includes preparing meals.

Care homes need to value the vital role that friends and family can play in helping care staff to develop personalised plans to improve quality of life and wellbeing.

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