

REIMAGINING COLLECTIVE DAY CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE: KEY FINDINGS

YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'VE GOT UNTIL IT'S GONE



Laura Bennett, Prof. Ailsa Cameron, Dr. Demi Patsios, Dr. Joanna Thorn, Dr. Paul Willis, Prof. Karen West (University of Bristol), Dr. Simon Hankins & Ruth Green (BS3 Community Development), Sonia Davies (Bristol City Council)

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Introduction

A widespread view that collective day care services are outdated and undesirable has arguably underpinned a pattern of disinvestment and de-commissioning of collective day care services for older people. Our research challenges this view. We found innovative day care services, and new models of collective day care, that are considered a vital lifeline by many older people and their carers, as well as local community and health partners. Aspirations set out by policy makers (People at the Heart of Care 2021; NHS long term plan 2019) for locally-based, joined-up, preventative services that support older people to remain independent at home, focus on wellbeing and address loneliness and social isolation, as well as support unpaid carers, all speak to the role of day care in the lives of older people and their carers. Despite this, day care services are disappearing from local health and social care landscapes and have been largely ignored in the development of local integrated care systems. Investing in reimagined collective day care has the potential to be central to local place-based partnerships, supporting wellbeing and health of older people and carers, providing opportunities for connection and joy, and serving as a central and trusted partner in local community networks and partnerships.

This report sets out key findings to inform a reimagining of collective day care for older people, based on research conducted by researchers at University of Bristol, as part of a study funded by the National Institute for Health Research, School for Social Care Research. The study included analysis of trends in day care provision and uptake of services over time using existing national datasets, as well as visits to eight collective day care case-studies across England, where we conducted interviews with older people attending services, carers, care workers, managers and local stakeholders. Visits were carried out between September 2021 and July 2022, when many settings were re-opening post COVID closures. More detail about the study, methods and updates can be found at: <https://reimaginingdayservices.blogs.bristol.ac.uk>.

What is collective day care?

Various terminology is used to describe collective day care services for older people including day centres, day clubs, day services, day opportunities, day provision and day care. For the purposes of this study, we define collective day care as community building-based services that provide care and/or health related services and/or clubs and activities specifically for older people (65+) with care and support needs, which people can attend for a whole day or part of a day, and which support wellbeing and health, and/or support people to remain living at

home and/or enable informal carers to sustain care (adapted from Orellana et al, 2018). We include a broad range of services including day centres and lunch clubs, as well as clubs and activities for older people with care and support needs.

“ We don’t call it a day centre. We’re social with care, not care with social.” Site 7 manager (S07M01)

We use the recognised term ‘day care’, however, our research supports findings from others that the term can be stigmatising (Sanders et al, 2009) and prevent people from accessing services (Bacon and Lambkin, 1997). Some of the settings that participated in our study were adopting alternative terms, such as ‘day clubs’, that focus on the activities and social aspects of their services, referring to people who attend as members of a club.

What has happened to provision and use of day care services?

The number of people accessing day care services has decreased over time

Analysis of national datasets including adult social care provider and service user data, as well as nationally representative surveys, show a steady downward trend in the provision and use of day centres over time. Between 2009 and 2014 the number of day care or day services clients 65+ declined per week. Comparable local authority figures were not available post-2014, but proxy service user data using a carers’ survey suggested that the decline in use of day centre services or activities continued and then declined substantially following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data shows that there has been a decrease in the number of people accessing day care services, however, the data is not able to tell us if this is a result of declining *availability* of services. Our interviews at day care settings across England suggest that many day care settings have closed and that there is less local authority funding available, and that this has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The project also looked at the predictors of day centre and day service use over time. Whilst the key predictors of use of day care services by adults 65+ varied between surveys, the two most influential predictors over time were:

- not married/cohabiting - on average, those not married/cohabiting are roughly four times as likely to use day centre services as those adults 65+ who are married/cohabiting

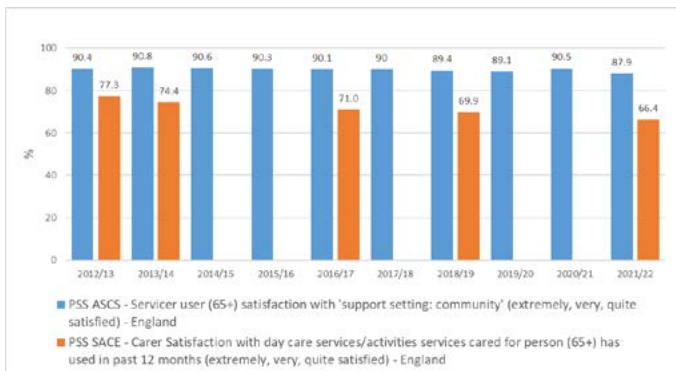
- aged 85+ - on average, those 85+ years of age are roughly four times as likely to use day centre services as those aged 65-74

“If there was no day care, how would the carers manage, other than putting them [person cared for] into some sort of long-term facility or respite. And there are no respite places at the moment.”
 Site 1 manager (S01M01)

Carers’ satisfaction with day care services has decreased

Analysis of nationally representative survey data on the extent to which carers were satisfied with the services that the person they cared for had used in the past 12 months also showed a steady decline post-2014 (see Figure 1 below). In 2014, three quarters of carers were satisfied with the services the person they care for has used compared to two thirds of carers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The largest relative declines in carers’ satisfaction were found in the South East, South West and East Midlands. While there is no directly comparable information at the national level regarding satisfaction with day care services or activities by older service users themselves, we can compare satisfaction with community based support overall. The figure below shows that overall satisfaction with community based support (which may or may not include use of day centres/activities) has decreased marginally over time, but still remains at relatively high levels.

Figure 1: Service user satisfaction with ‘community based support’ versus Carer satisfaction with ‘day centre or day activities’ - Service user/care for person aged 65+ in England



What role does collective day care have in the lives of older people and carers?

Older people value supportive opportunities for connection and joy

When we spoke to older people, carers and people working in day care services we learnt that day care settings provide an accessible and supportive opportunity for older people who attend to participate and be with people, providing opportunities for connection, movement, learning, fun, laughter and joy, sometimes in the context of a complete lack of other opportunities or support. Older people we spoke to at day care settings described overwhelmingly positive experiences and impacts of attending day care, ranging from a reprieve from loneliness or isolation, making new friends and connecting with peers who share common experiences or interests, to providing purpose and structure, learning new skills and improvements to confidence and self-esteem, as well as mental and physical wellbeing and health.

“I’m not doing it for any other reason except that I want to stay as fit as I possibly can and as well as I can for as long as I can. I’ve met loads of lovely people along the way.”
 Site 5 member (S05OP05 aged 79)

Day care provides distinct and highly valued support for carers

Our research supports warnings from others (Care and Support Alliance, 2023) that carers are facing extremely difficult circumstances, the all-encompassing nature of their caring role leading to negative impacts on their physical and mental wellbeing including stress and exhaustion, isolation and frustration at lack of support. Carers told us they value the distinct support offered by day care, describing it as better than other options and positively impacting their wellbeing, in particular their mental health. Some carers described the importance of the provision of transport as part of the service, extending their break and maximising how they could use the time. Key elements include that collective day care:

- provides a regular all-day break, in which carers can use the time flexibly ranging from catching up on sleep to meeting friends or attending hospital appointments

- settings are a trusted source of practical and emotional support as a result of relationships built up over time, including for their loved one and themselves
- provides an enjoyable and social experience for their loved one, meaning they can enjoy their break without guilt and benefits of which last into subsequent days

Many carers want to sustain their caring role but need appropriate support to do so, many described fear that lack of available support and no longer being able to cope would force them to consider alternatives such as long-term residential care.

“... I have a day where I don’t have to think about him, so my mental health is better [...] I don’t want him to go into a home. I want to care for him. He’s mine.”
Site 4 carer (S04C03)

Priorities for reimagining day care

Diverse and purposeful activities are important

Older people welcome choice and variety, built on personalised and tailored opportunities that reflect and appeal to the diverse interests and experiences of all older people. In many cases, this was described as thinking beyond traditional, artificial or ‘childish’ activities often associated with day care, to offer opportunities that provide a sense of purpose, including:

- working towards completion of a project or task such as maintaining a garden, caring for animals, helping to prepare a meal or contributing to projects for local charities
- continuing existing, or pursuing new, interests and ambitions such as woodwork, music or dance
- learning and sharing skills and knowledge such as how to use IT to keep in touch with family, learning a language, literature or culture
- having fun and building meaningful friendships such as discovering shared interests or history.

Opportunity to have a role and contribute were described as important in building confidence and self-esteem.

“I don’t do bingo, never did bingo. I think it’s a horrible thing.” Site 8 member (S08OP06 aged 81)

Small-scale, bespoke groups offer an important alternative

Small and informal groups provide an important, alternative model of provision that is more preferred by some older people. Benefits of smaller groups include providing a more supportive environment, opportunity to spend more time to get to know each other and to provide more personalised and tailored activities and support, greater flexibility to build and adapt groups around specific and different interests and preferences of members, as well as ability to focus on more relational aspects of care such as enabling more in-depth conversations and connections. Part of this may be a more informal, homely or authentic environment such as hosting groups in a home, workshop, garden or farm. Alternative and innovative models that provide support in small groups in alternative settings require support, investment and flexibility from commissioners.

“I think what [site 4] does is, it really creates a sense of, “I’ve gone round to someone’s house, rather than going to an institution.” I think that’s a big bit of it. [...] the host gets to know the people, because they are so much smaller groups.” Site 4 stakeholder (S04SH02)

Working with community partners can enhance variety and quality

Embedding in local community networks and establishing partnerships with local community organisations such as gyms and sports clubs, theatres, libraries, universities and art galleries can enable development of a more diverse programme of opportunities, offering greater choice and variety for members, and enabling older people to pursue diverse interests and ambitions, as well as connect with others who have shared interests. Collaborations between day care settings and community partners can provide more quality opportunities for members, as well as offering support to community organisations, to improve their own offer and support access through signposting. Working with community partners can also help to sustain organisations, for example working together and sharing resources to develop programmes or interventions and to secure funding.

“I mean to have such a broad spectrum of people, there is no way that you can say one size fits all, right. You’re going to have different needs, different abilities, different genders, different social economic status, ethnicities, the lot. So, you know, we believe in choice, and what we do obviously is through the power of groups. And essentially what happens is a self-made community is built from doing these groups.” Site 5 care worker (S05CW04)

Partnerships with health can enhance the preventative role of day care

Collective day care settings are well-placed to support policy ambitions for preventative and community-based care including: supporting wellbeing and health of members and their carers; delivering education and interventions; identifying and responding to changing needs. In practice this may include:

involvement in local strategic networks, for example related to loneliness and social isolation

- links with GP’s, public health and social prescribers to develop and deliver education and preventative programmes, for example programmes to support management of conditions such as diabetes or long COVID or focused on mobility and strength
- part of inter-professional care management, for example day care settings specialising in dementia working with local dementia clinics to hold joint clinics or review patients
- providing long term support as part of NHS pathways, for example long-term falls prevention or rehabilitation programmes post NHS-discharge

“... the evidence states that you need to have nearly a year, essentially, of tailored exercises that are facilitated. Obviously, as an NHS service, we can’t offer that option, so we’ve got [site 5 falls prevention programme]...” Site 5 stakeholder (S05SH01)

What is the role of day care in local health and care landscapes?

Distinct potential role of day care in local place-based partnerships

As Integrated Care Systems are established across England, there is potential for collective day care services to play a central role in local place-based partnerships. Day care settings are distinctly placed to support the aims set out by NHS England’s Long Term Plan (2019), underpinned by their trusted position within community networks, including with health partners, as well as their in-depth knowledge of local communities, older people who attend and their carers.

The role of day care settings during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the distinct contribution day care can offer as part of local integrated health and social care, including their ability to support the mental and physical wellbeing and health of members and carers, to identify needs and respond rapidly and innovatively, informed by on-the-ground knowledge of their members and community partners, as well as their trusted nature in local social care and health systems.

“[Site 4] are in an ideal position really as well to recognize even things like deterioration in a patient or service user. When the system is working really well it’s great to get that feedback to stat[utory] service health care providers, so that we can then intervene sooner [...] keeping people living at home where they want to be” Site 4 stakeholder (S04SH03)

Day care is considered a vital part of social care landscape

Our findings challenge the view that collective day care is outdated and undesirable. We found innovative, person-centred services that are considered a vital lifeline by many older people who attend, their carers and local stakeholders. Services being community-based with good links to public transport and/or where accessible transport is provided, was particularly valued. Closure of services during COVID-19 further highlighted their vital role in the lives of older people and their carers, and raises concerns about the impact of de-commissioning these services. Our findings suggest that availability of collective day care services in local social care provision provides an important option for many

older people and carers. Whilst collective day care doesn't meet the needs of all older people, we found a range of types and models of day care for people to choose from, illustrating their potential to meet a range of preferences and needs. Within settings we found person-centred services, where members are offered choice and control in how they would like to spend their time, where staff get to know individuals and develop bespoke opportunities based on their preferences and interests. Day care services are well placed to identify and respond to needs, as well as deliver education and interventions. Most importantly, day care settings provide distinct, supportive, person-centred opportunities for connection and joy, supporting quality of life, mental and physical wellbeing of older people and carers.

“I don't know what I'd do without them” Site 3 member (S03OP01 aged 73)

How does attending day care impact older people and carers?

Many older people we spoke to described attending collective day care as providing opportunities to get out and be with people, to make friends and providing a break from experiences of social isolation or loneliness, enabling older people to feel included.

“So, I've not been really depressed, just at certain times when I'm depressed. I mean coming here is great for me because I can talk to people. So, at the weekends, [...] I was just on my own all the time. And I don't find that easy.” Site 7 member (S07OP02 aged 75)

Older people described attending collective day care, and particularly participating in purposeful activities, as improving their mental health, improving their confidence and self-esteem, as well as their physical health, for example through opportunities for movement and nutrition.

“I'm coming out now, meeting people, and it's wonderful to be able to come [to Site 5]. It's like joining the world again, you know?” Site 5 member (S05OP02 aged 74)

When we spoke to family carers of people who attend day care, they told us that the regular extended break provided by day care was beneficial to their mental health and helped them to sustain their caring role. Carers described the importance of knowing that their loved one is enjoying themselves, enabling carers to have a break without feeling guilt. Many carers described the ongoing relationship they have with day care settings, and their role as a source of support and advice, as well as providing opportunities to meet other carers. Carers also described benefits for the caring relationship lasting into subsequent days after attendance at day care settings, such as improved mood and having more to talk about.

“That amount of time [husband] is at [Site 4] is my little core of being normal [...] I know he's safe and he's enjoying himself” Site 4 Carer (S04C02)

Conclusions

As we carried out our research with collective day care settings, many were re-opening following COVID-19 closures. This particular context distinctly illustrated the vital role these services play in the lives of many older people and carers, as well as their potential role in local social care and health landscapes. Older people and carers described the negative impacts of closures and relief at services re-opening. Local stakeholders and managers described the ways in which services had responded innovatively and worked together to identify and respond to changing needs and circumstances throughout the pandemic illustrating how collective day care settings were able to play a key role as experts in their members and their families, and trusted partners in community networks. Lessons from this period highlight the vital role of these services in the lives of older people and carers, as well as their potential role in local social care landscapes.

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Appendix: Case study sites

SITE	DESCRIPTION
1	Day centre for older people living with dementia. Good connections with local health services and local organisations.
2	Adapted farm for men living with Parkinsons and dementia. Purposeful activities and outdoor setting.
3	Lunch club and activities for older people. Part of a community network to reduce isolation and loneliness for older people.
4	Small-scale, home-based day care for older people with dementia.
5	Large-scale club providing activities and health & education programmes for older people.
6	Community café providing lunch clubs and activities for older people.
7	Faith-based day centre for older people, with expertise in supporting people with visual impairment.
8	Peripatetic day clubs for older people.