

Reducing ambulance call outs for a diabetic day centre service user

The situation

A service user with diabetes became unresponsive several times (slumped, eyes rolled back), the ambulance needed to be called and took her to hospital. This disrupted activities and had staffing ratio implications. One staff member needed to accompany the service user, another phone the ambulance, and another prepare paperwork. Meanwhile, staff needed to move other service users (with high needs) away from the area.

Background

Staff at this day centre actively monitored what this service user ate and drank with her diabetic needs in mind. Although none of the day centre staff are medically trained, they know their service users well, with time, knowing 'what is normal' for each one. When something is 'not right' with a service user, staff do not always know the reasons for this. A service user with advanced dementia arriving at a day centre is unable to explain what they have done that week or the day/night before. Not all family/carers are able to inform the day centre to let them know that a service user may not be too well on that day, or the service user has only seen their home care worker that morning.

Action taken

The service focused on discovering the cause of these episodes to understand whether they might be avoidable. Staff worked closely with the service user's family and identified the cause as hypoglycaemia. Together, they devised a plan to avoid hypoglycaemia episodes which included ensuring the service user ate regular small snacks.

Impact

- Better understanding the service user's medical needs led to fewer episodes of hypoglycaemia, fewer unresponsive episodes, and, consequently, a reduction in ambulance call-outs.
- NHS expenditure was avoided: ambulance call-outs (unit cost £213) and accident and emergency attendances (unit cost £117)ⁱ.
- Service user: experienced fewer hypoglycaemic incidents, falls, hospital visits, and uninterrupted day service.
 - Hypoglycaemic episodes in people with dementia can worsen cognitive impairment or cause delirium (abnormal metabolism - e.g. low salt or blood sugar levels – that can have a lasting impact)

ⁱ National Cost Collection: National Schedule of NHS costs - Year 2019-20, NHS trust and NHS foundation trusts

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- Hospital admissions can be very disorientating for people with dementia, and can also contribute to delirium.

(see <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/daily-living/delirium>)

- Family carer: uninterrupted respite periods, worry, avoidable hospital visits, and disruption to plans.
- Service and other service users: reduced disruption to the service, operating with planned staff (service user ratios).

Supporting the local authority to consult with carers during an update of the local Carer Strategy

The London Borough of Merton needed to consult with unpaid carers living in the borough about its Carer Strategy. Merton and Morden Guild, a voluntary sector activity day centre that was in contact with many carers, supported the council to hold a consultation event on its premises. The event was open to carers linked with the organisation and other family carers living in the borough who were not were not.

Use of day centre building by local health and social care professionals

A large local authority (LA) operated Dementia Day Centre in south London was being underused because of its mandatory closure to clients during the earlier part of the Covid pandemic. The LA closed its offices and introduced hybrid, or flexible, working. During this period, various LA employed social care staff started to use the day centre building. Opening up the use of the building has introduced health and social care professionals and borough residents to the existence of the day centre.

Some staff started to collect their PPE supplies from the building (and continue to do so) which heightened awareness of the day centre among these professionals.

The enablement service was relocated from the hospital to the day centre. Later, the 'discharge to assess' social workersⁱⁱ were also relocated there as they needed to be connected with the enablement team. These teams are based in the main office and main dining hall. The day centre's training room is used by LA occupational therapists (OTs), who are part of the enablement team, to run moving and handling training sessions.

The Falls Clinic, run by the falls OTs, now takes place at the day centre. This started during the pandemic when falls OTs delivered all their virtual training sessions from the day centre. Since the building has re-opened, the team has started to bring older people in to do their exercise programmes in the sports hall.

Social workers on the LA's single-point-of-access gateway use the day centre as a base to interview people from the local area and other parts of Lewisham. This is both for safety and accessibility reasons. There are both good public transport links and car parking.

A continuing, but acknowledged, challenge extended use of the centre is the building's poor wi-fi connection. Managers hope that the building's broadening usage would lead to approval of an improved internet connection which would, in turn, enable creativity around use of technology with day centre clients.

ⁱⁱ See Department of Health's hospital discharge service guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hospital-discharge-service-guidance> (also <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hospital-discharge-and-community-support-guidance/hospital-discharge-and-community-support-guidance>)

Partnership with NHS adult mental health service to transform a storage room into a reminiscence room for day centre clients

Background

- Central Hill Day Service is for older adults living with moderate to severe dementia. It is an in-house service run by Lambeth Council.
- We wanted a place where people could sit among furniture and household items and ornaments from past times. We wanted to give people visible links to their younger years to evoke memories and conversation and to give reassurance through familiarity.
- It is a quiet room dressed up like a family living/dining room. The walls have been wallpapered to complete the illusion. The quietness of the room appears to aid anxiety, taking the usual day centre noises away, and is somewhere staff can concentrate on the individual if they are having an episode of anxiety or upset.
- Senior management agreed to offer enough funding to pay South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation (SLAM) for labour and to buy materials such as wallpaper, decorating items and hardware, for the job of transforming the storage space into a living space. All the collectables came out of Central Hill's budget. These were bought at local second-hand shops and on eBay.

Aims

The day centre's target service users had recently changed from older people to older people with moderate to severe dementia. The storage room was being used inefficiently and had potential to be a further, peaceful room that service users could enjoy as part of their day to provide them with a better day centre experience or to unwind and relax.

What was done

The day centre worked with [South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation](#) on a project to transform a storage room at the day centre into a reminiscence room. As part of their recovery, users of SLAM adult mental health services were employed, (i.e. paid) through SLAM, to work at Central Hill to put up wallpaper, a picture rail, treat damp above windows, paint above the windows and picture rails and fix ceiling kites to the walls to create a false ceiling.

We had to clear the storage area by placing needed items around the centre and having unwanted items taken away. There was also a huge amount of archiving to do before we got the space empty.

As the room was being prepared to be decorated, the day centre manager asked her facilities officer (with a fleet van) to take her round all the local second-hand shops. They chose wallpaper and bought all the items needed to put it up. A false fireplace was fitted with fairy

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lights for effect. The manager was constantly thinking of how the pieces she bought fit together to create a living room of enough interesting detail for people. There was an unused piano in the room which became part of the living room. It was tuned and is ready for any piano players to 'have a tinkle'. People enjoy the live piano playing.

The work took place between November 2019 to December 2019 varying in days each week and people working on the day.

Resources needed

- **Staffing:** SLAM workers from Re-Cover, a man with a van, manager (project planner).
- **Training:** People came from SLAM with their own work experience and knowledge. They were stretched as the project was unusual and presented a few posers such as how to wallpaper a brick wall and create the *illusion* of a room.
- **Space:** When two centres became one, two sets of furniture and office items were stored at Central Hill. The only place to put it all, was an unused room at the rear of the building. A lot of work went into clearing the space in a timely manner for the creation of the reminiscence room.
- **Decoration costs** (involving mental health service users): Labour £1,000 (SLAM costs). Decoration materials £200. (Total £1,200).
- **Manager:** I was able to use my time within working hours and I did do some purchases outside of my working hours online from sites, such as eBay. I saw this room as part of the development of our service and we had full support from line managers to get the result we did.
- **Transport.** Our Facilities Officer, who is supervised by me, and who has a fleet van drove us both around several second-hand shops. This was not too time consuming as we found quite a few shops in our local area.
- **Payment card.** I am the only Lambeth card holder in our service to purchase such items. Other staff would have had to paying out and claim back expenses.
- **Staff availability.** As a face-to-face service, I and the Facilities Officer were the only ones who were not offering direct support which freed us up to do the above.
- **Vision.** Overall, it was my vision and ability to mentally tie all the elements in and the support of the Facilities Officer which brought the room together. The team saw all the things we bought as just random items piled up in a chaotic looking room until the room was dressed. It wasn't until they saw the results that they finally understood the vision.
- **Out of hours time:** Both the Facilities officer and I worked late to dress the room for the reveal to the staff and more importantly the clients who use our service the next day.

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- **Reminiscence room furniture and paraphernalia costs:** £350, the biggest purchase was a working 1940s radio (see video – link below).
- **Funding:** Lambeth Council paid for this. A Purchase Order was created to pay SLAM for their labour. Workers were paid in accordance with their financial limitations such as benefits through SLAM.

Impact / outcomes

- We have not yet formally gathered feedback as the room is still very new. However, every family member, social worker etc who visits the room instantly starts identifying and pointing at things they remember from their childhood which sparks conversation.
- Clients attending Central Hill and their families benefit when the space is used for reviews and meetings. It is a pleasant place for a meeting. We offer potential new referrals and their family/carer to join us for lunch in this room.
- It was a cheap space to construct. Labour and gathering items took time.
- Satisfaction for those working on the transformation as demonstrated by an email from the SLAM contact:

Dear Andy,
Please find attached the invoice for decorating your reminiscent room. Thank you for giving the team an inspiring project we all enjoyed it, and the chaps look forward to coming to have a look. A very happy Christmas to you all at the centre BW Jane, SLAM

- **Future plans:** We are seriously considering using this space for people on the estate in which the day centre is located. We want to start either a breakfast club or a luncheon club for older adults on the estate who may have become isolated and need some social interaction and can have hot fresh food when they visit.

The process

The process was straightforward once the idea took form. Only clearing the space was laborious. Working in harmony with SLAM workers was important. Communicating clearly what exactly what was being asked of them and making sure they understood meant they could be left to get on with the work with minimum oversight.

Tips for others considering something similar:

- Make the space functional as well as interesting not just a room to visit to look at, like a museum. Furniture and items are to be *used*. Having a functional, useful room is more likely to result in service users feeling like they are a valuable part of the group, not just 'service users' or 'patients'.

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- Purchase items from across the decades not just from one era (i.e. not all from the 1950s). People with dementia are at various stages of their regressive memory and will identify with different years. Also, their ages may range from 60 to over 100 meaning these years are likely to cover several decades,
- Carry the theme through the whole room/s.
- Go to local second-hand shops rather than vintage fairs where things are too costly to buy. Look on eBay for items being sold privately; we got some lovely items this way.
- This type of initiative is a great way to put partnership working in to practice, and helps people to learn about other groups of people. Try to link with services, such as SLAM, to do work for you. It is mutually beneficial. I bumped into one of the workers recently (2023) and he said he *'loved the work. It was challenging and he still thinks about it - how they overcame the challenges and the final result'*.

Reflections:

- It might have been a good idea to have the people who would use the service choose wallpaper and furniture as their views may not be the same as a manager's and facilities officer's. However, this would have been very difficult logistically.
- Service users and family members might have items or furniture they would like to contribute to the room. These could be personally relevant to individuals (but not precious) or to an era. Involving service users and family members would be a good opportunity to attempt to co-produce something that they will all use.
- Buying furniture and other items and thinking how to make a room attractive and relevant for service users is time consuming and labour intensive. Not all services will have the time/workforce to be able to do this.

Relevance to policy and/or social care or NHS initiatives:

- Improved quality of life and wellbeing for people who need care and support and carers
- Reduced social isolation and loneliness (future plans)

Sustainability

- **Future funding plans/ideas:** As mentioned we want to open this space to older people on the estate who may feel lonely, isolated. As well as being a lovely space to visit they can possibly create friendships. They can have a hot meal and we can look out for any safeguarding issues we observe/hear and alert our front door service.
- **All the items are removable** so when we eventually move, money has not been wasted.
- At some point, consideration will need to be given to how the room and resources in it will need to be **changed to cater for future members** as generational needs change.

Photos of the storage room and reminiscence room (before and after)



The storage room (before)



The reminiscence room (after)



Video of the reminiscence room (VLC media file - double click to open):



20191207_194130.m
p4

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Day centres for safety and safeguarding: the role of day centres as consistent factor in people's lives

Safety

Common reasons for referral to the day centre might include concerns that the person is not safe at home or cannot be left alone when living with a family member who works – either at or away from home – and is, therefore, unavailable. For some people with greater support needs, attending a day centre, while the family member is at work, is often considered to be more acceptable than a move to a care home. For many carers, the day centre support is an invaluable source of replacement care, often enabling them to care at home for longer.

Safeguarding

Day centres are a regular service run by a group of staff who can get to know their clients very well, their families and their home circumstances. A good rapport is important for relatives of clients to feel safe to speak out and this is possible due to continuity within the service. Family members often speak with day centre members about concerns or difficulties, and staff may signpost to sources of support.

Staff may, for example, notice bruising or that a carer sounds distressed and has commented that they lock their family member in the bedroom. Day centre staff would then discuss this with the carer and liaise with the LA safeguarding team if appropriate. A visit by a social worker could be triggered or matters discussed with the person's GP.

Safety-net for family carers

Some day centre managers argue that day centre staff play the role of "substitute social workers". It is not uncommon for family members who are feeling the pressure of caring to phone their relative's day centre for moral support, on occasions for a long time (half an hour).

Joan's story (written using the Most Significant Change approach)

Background to my story

I am an older person who attends Merton and Morden Guild (a day centre providing activities and other services), in the London Borough of Merton, about three times a week, taking part in social activities and exercise classes. I also help out a lot now since a colleague died, from simple things like making tea to helping organise activities such as our apparently famous outings to the pub!

What it was like before?

I did feel depressed and there seemed to be no purpose to my everyday life.

What it is like now

I am a lot more active and like keeping myself busy, I am happier now than before joining the Guild.

What changes have happened?

It has helped me quite a lot. It makes me get up and get out and exercise whereas, before, I wasn't. You know, just like if you're not going anywhere, you don't bother getting up and you don't bother washing or dressing, but because you know you're going out, you have to make an effort.

I have formed a small friendship group which does things outside of Merton and Morden Guild activities, such as trips to markets.

Which of these changes is most significant to me?

Getting out, making new friends.

Why was this change significant for you?

I have more social life and something to look forward to.

What happened to make these changes come about?

My sister told me about The Guild as her husband had been collected by them for NHS Falls Prevention Classes in the past. It took me a couple of months before I eventually got here. It was one of the best things I did was to walk through that door. It's just atmosphere down there. The welcome made a big difference to me. It was very smiley. "We're going to do this. Would you like tea or coffee?" It just sort of makes you feel at home, so to speak. And there's always somebody there to help. Is absolutely brilliant. Everybody's so happy. Well, everything really good about the Guild. Everybody's so helpful that run the Guild. They're so kind.