



Day centres for older people: what do people say about them?

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There have been six recent UK research studies about day centres. In the studies, older people and family carers were asked about their experience of day centres and we have used their quotes here to talk about the main messages from the studies.

Going to a day centre helps maintain quality of life. Many people can find it helpful and enjoyable, and it helps to provide structure to their week.

Many people who go to day centres have long-term conditions and many are unable to go out without support. Some will also have experienced loss (e.g. bereavement, retirement, declining health) and may have very little social contact. People often start going to their day centre for social contact. It gives them something to do, to get out of the house, it adds structure to their week and improves their mental or physical health.

Any initial reluctance to use a day centre can often turn to enjoyment and enthusiasm.

I didn't want to come (laughing)...I said what down there, it's for old people and I'm not old. So, anyway, when I did come down, I enjoyed it". (Ruth)

I'm nearly 92 but I don't feel 92 and I thought what are you on about you're an old woman yourself (laughter). And after I gave myself a talking to, I sort of warmed to it, and I like coming now. (Joan)

I didn't like it to begin with, I have to say, but I got to like it very much. (Megan)

Going to a day centre can improve a person's quality of life, reducing loneliness and improving their feelings of self-worth. For many people day centres offer companionship and something different to do, in the outside world. Importantly, they also offer practical support, information about other help available and, often, a great deal of fun.

I just enjoy it there. Because I am alone. I am on my own. Sometimes I feel sad. I feel better when I go to the centre I have a little bit of talking, conversation and some socialising. (...) I enjoy it very much. To tell you the truth, before Monday I had been waiting for Monday to come. (...) I feel happy and it helps my depression. (Miguel)

Oh, the companionship, definitely everyone is just lovely. (Val)

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)

I was in a bad place as far as loneliness is concerned... but it was an experience to sit with people and socialise with people. People who were friendly and we had a laugh. (Cedar, client).



The welcoming, safe and supportive atmosphere and the opportunity to build genuine relationships are important.

Well, it is the fact that everybody says, hello and you are welcomed; when you arrive, you see familiar faces even if you don't talk to everybody. (Ruth)

I find the whole atmosphere here is very comforting, you sense it as you walk through the door. (Anne)

If they're doing well-er than you, they seem to come and help you. They don't have to. But they did come and help. (William)

Most people have good experiences. Older people's overall feelings about their day centres:

All I can say is that anyone who doesn't go there is missing out on something. (Kathleen)

It changes your life. (Wilma)

Oh, I love going. Oh yes. Yes. (Kenneth).

Yes, it's good value for money. (Miguel)

People running the service are supportive.

They care, and they understand why I am here ... (Mariana)

They come around asking "Are you alright? What's the matter?" (Thomasina).

Everything is done for you, you know. It's great to think now you can be looked after like this, you know. (SAM).

I don't know what I'd do without them. (Site 3, S03OP01 aged 73)

Day centres provide reassurance and a break for family carers.

Having a regular extended break is beneficial for carers' mental and physical health and helps them to sustain their caring role. Knowing their family member is enjoying themselves enables them to have a relaxing break.

"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)

She gets a lunch and she gets a social engagement. It gets her out of her flat and (...) that's money well spent (...) it is good value for her, because it does all those things about keeping her mentally and socially active. (Family carer Evelyn)

I can sit in my living room on my own. It's one thing I really like doing (...) It relaxes me. Otherwise I'm just highly stressed. I'm like, you know when you're highly strung, you're ready to burn (...) Just to be alone in my own house is just the best feeling. (Family carer Linda)

It gives him a break from me and it gives me a break from him. Then when he comes home I'm saying, have you had a good day? It gives you something else to talk about to each other. (SCF)

Download this document from the Day Centre Resources Hub <https://arc-sl.nihr.ac.uk/day-centre-resources-hub>.

Research quoted here: Bennett et al (2023), Hagan & Manktelow (2021), Lunt (2018); Lunt et al (2021); Noone (2023); Orellana et al (2020), Orellana et al (2021) Rokstad et al (2019). Names are not participants' real names.

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