

## A day in the life of people with dementia

by **Daniel Lombard and Klara Lorenz**

Last month we ventured out of the office to learn more about the world of day care for people with dementia in a fascinating visit to two centres in a London borough.

Along with us, our colleagues Adelina Comas-Herrera, Raphael Wittenberg, Derek King, Bo Hu and Amritpal Rehill from PSSRU at LSE took part in the trip. We are all working on the **MODEM project**, which is modelling the costs and outcomes of dementia.

PSSRU is committed to engaging with stakeholders across the social care sector, including service users and carers. This is important for us to ensure that our research addresses aspects that are key to people requiring care and support and the wider social policy context. The trip to the nearby borough of Richmond was an ideal opportunity for us to see first-hand the realities of life for people with dementia and the way they are supported. It was very efficiently organised by PSSRU's **Research Involvement Manager, Margaret Dangoor**, who has a lot of experience in dementia care and is well-connected within the care community.

### Visiting the Homelink Day Respite Centre

The **Homelink Day Respite Centre in Whitton**, run by a charity with links to a local church, is a state-of-the-art unit for people with varying support needs, particularly chronic illnesses. A purpose-built venue costing £1.3 million, it managed to raise the funds to open the new centre in January 2015 thanks to a £760,000 grant from the Department of Health and other funding from local bodies.

When we arrived around 12 guests were in the main living room, a place for socialising and relaxing, while staff prepared refreshments in the kitchen. The centre follows the principles of dementia-friendly design, with an emphasis on sensory stimulation: the purple and teal walls of the dining area are designed to stimulate appetite, while the kitchen and dining area are open plan so that the cooking smells are recognisable to the guests.

Guests can take advantage of therapy and hair salon facilities on the first floor, while there is also a space for carers, with the centre hosting regular support groups for carers of the centre's guests.

Homelink is an interesting example of how nurse-led day care can help avoid acute health care costs. It provides regular healthcare monitoring for the guests, in order to detect problems as early as possible. There are two nurses and three healthcare assistants on duty every day, supported by volunteers. Qualified staff provide regular tests for the clients covering blood pressure, urinary tract infection and blood sugar levels.

*We have a very close relationship with the local GPs, district nurses and other health professionals and regularly liaise with them about the guests' well-being*

Sue Hodder, chief operations officer at Homelink

### Visiting the Woodville Centre

The second unit we visited was the **Woodville Centre**. Based in a renovated primary school building in Ham, it's a key provider of day care in the local area, open 365 days a year. It provides a wide range of activities for people with care and support needs, from a pool table and indoor



cricket to word games and dancing. The centre also holds regular supper club nights where couples can have dinner in a relaxed environment and take part in other activities.

During a tour of the building we explored a reminiscence room, decorated with vintage items such as an 'wireless'-style radio, comfortable sofas and chairs as well as telephones, cake tins and books, to encourage people with cognitive impairments to re-live cherished memories.

Perhaps the most eye-catching feature of the Woodville Centre is that not all the residents are human. Two rather boisterous budgies keep watch in one of the rooms; they are kept in a cage – wisely, it turns out, given that the other guest is a bright-eyed tomcat, who is very popular with the clients – but are still highly noticeable due to the constant chirruping.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the visit was the chance for MODEM researchers to meet and talk to guests and staff. This took place during the lunch we had with people who spend their days at the centre.

*Margaret [Dangoor] and I sat with a carer and a person with dementia who almost didn't speak but who communicated with the carer mostly through smiling. It was wonderful to watch the warmth of the interaction between her and the staff member*

Adelina Comas-Herrera, Assistant Professorial Research Fellow at PSSRU

We also heard about how activities were often designed with the interests of individual guests in mind.

*A staff member mentioned to me that one of the residents had worked as an engineer in the army, and after this had gone on to work on Concord planes. One of the trips the staff member had arranged was to go with him to an aviation museum, which proved to be a tremendous hit*

Amritpal Rehill, Research Officer at PSSRU



In the afternoon people from various organisations involved in dementia care talked to us about the local support available. Shuan Pereira, dementia services manager at the Alzheimer's Society in Richmond, discussed services provided by her charity in the local area, such as case management for people with dementia and their carers. Simon Hooper, founder of Health Connected.com, explained the development of **RemindMeCare**, a free app for people with

cognitive impairment, designed to be used on tablets as a “reminiscence tool”. (This is currently being piloted at Homelink.) We also heard about respite care and other services for carers provided by Shared Lives, represented by Cathy Gregg, and Crossroads Care Richmond & Kingston upon Thames, represented by Janet Fevrier. Finally we heard from Gwen Ramsay who runs the “Talk and Draw” and “Imagine” workshops at the Orleans House Gallery in Twickenham.

The day was rounded off at the Woodville Centre with an enjoyable tea party for invited guests, including people with dementia attending the centre, their carers, three borough councillors, and professionals including Dr Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health at the London Borough of Richmond, and Aileen Jackson, the Commissioning Manager responsible for commissioning dementia services.

There was a short introduction to the MODEM study by project manager Adelina Comas-Herrera and colleagues on the team, followed by a question and answer session.

It was great to meet people with dementia, their family members and the staff. Staff in both centres we visited created a very warm and caring atmosphere and concepts presented to us showed that people with dementia and their carers are being taken into consideration as the individual people they are, and what great effort is being made to address their wishes and needs.

### About the authors

**Daniel Lombard** is Research Officer within the Personal Social Services Research Unit, and a member of the MODEM research team.

**Klara Lorenz** is a PhD student within the Personal Social Services Research Unit, and a member of the MODEM research team.

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