

Learning for older people in care settings

Thoughts for local authorities



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

NIACE

The National Voice for
Lifelong Learning



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Foreword

This guide is one of four, originally commissioned by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. It is part of a range of actions undertaken by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) to improve access to learning opportunities by older people in care settings. NIACE hopes it will encourage and enthuse those working with older people in care settings to understand the value of keeping people engaged and active through learning, and to recognise that learning is an essential and central aspect of providing care.

Happier older people make care homes and care settings better places for residents, people attending, relatives and care staff alike. Sitting alongside a general programme of activities, a programme of active learning enables older people to keep in touch with the wider world as well as their local community. Learning activities foment a culture of lifelong learning which has an impact on families, friends and staff.

Local authorities have a vital role to play in helping integrate active programmes of learning into care home settings. First, in care settings delivered directly by the authority, the establishment of active learning programmes into the activity programmes of older people should act as a living example of best practice.

Second, local authorities can act as exemplars of partnership working. They can demonstrate how an authority can deliver joined up services, with adult social care services working closely with their adult learning service and libraries to promote learning activities in care settings.

Third, the authority is well placed to engage with the voluntary sector in helping to deliver learning activities to care settings.

Fourth, the local authority is best placed to ensure that where care services are commissioned, there are lively and inspiring activities programmes.

Fifth, local authorities should expect that their local adult learning service is responsive to the community needs and interests of older people in care settings, and that the service is in active partnerships in line with the community learning reform programme.

NIACE believes that active learning programmes in care settings will reap rewards for managers, staff, families and friends and, of course, for older people themselves. We at NIACE hope this guide will encourage local authorities to help instigate and inspire learning programmes for the older people whom they serve.

Carol Taylor, OBE
Deputy Chief Executive, Development & Research, NIACE



About this guide

NIACE is the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, the national voice for lifelong learning. We are an internationally respected development organisation and think-tank, working on issues central to the economic renewal of the UK, particularly in the political economy, education and learning, public policy and regeneration fields.

This guide is for local authority staff with responsibility for adult social care, health and wellbeing or managing services for older people.

The guide will:

- help you to understand the importance of learning for older people in care settings;
- give you examples of interesting practice; and
- suggest some ways of introducing learning into care settings.

This guide was originally commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2010, and has been updated to provide more recent examples of practice. It is part of a wider piece of work that aims to take action to improve learning opportunities for older people in care settings. Other materials provide guidance for care managers, activity coordinators and care staff, and learning providers. All materials are available at no charge online from the NIACE bookshop.

If you would like further information about NIACE's work on learning for older people in care settings, or to share an example of existing practice, please contact Emily.Jones@niace.org.uk

The views expressed in this report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.





Background and context

People in the UK are living longer than ever before. By 2035, population projections show that 23 per cent of the population will be aged 65 and over and the number of people aged 85 and over will account for five per cent of the population, 2.5 times higher than in 2010.¹

While life expectancy is increasing, healthy life expectancy is not increasing at the same rate. People are spending longer living with conditions that seriously affect their quality of life and current trends in lifestyle-related diseases will also increase the need for care. More than eight out of ten adults now aged 65 will have a need for some form of social care or support in their later years.² In England, only one third of men and 15 per cent of women will never need social care.³

The evidence gathered by the Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing is particularly powerful. The Foresight researchers faced the challenge of developing advice on how to help the greatest number of older people maintain their mental capital and how best to preserve older people's independence and wellbeing – for their own benefit and to minimise their need for support.

The wide-ranging body of evidence has shown that taking part in learning can make a big contribution to older people's quality of life, bringing benefits for family, friends, carers and society more widely. The Foresight reports have striking implications for care settings.

The first is the crucial underpinning principle that wellbeing is subjective and no one knows more than older people themselves about their own preferences and priorities. So wherever possible, older people should be involved in planning, implementing and reviewing initiatives and activities to support their wellbeing.

The second is that activities such as improving physical fitness, increasing social activity and taking steps to reduce the risk of cardiovascular problems can all help support cognitive vitality in later life.

The Foresight project commissioned work to identify the wellbeing equivalent of 'five fruit and vegetables a day' and their suggestions for action, based on an extensive review of the evidence, are all by-products of learning:

1. **Connect...** With the people around you.
2. **Be active...** Go for a walk or run.
3. **Take notice...** Be curious.
4. **Keep learning...** Try something new.
5. **Give...** Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger.⁴

The third Foresight finding is that computer training can help increase social connectedness among older people and, for fitter people, generate new opportunities for volunteering, creating benefits for the individual and for society.

Learning should be an essential aspect of providing person-centred care that supports the principles of dignity, independence, control and choice.

¹ Office for National Statistics (2011) Statistical Bulletin: Older People's Day 2011 www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_235000.pdf

² HM Government (2012) *Caring for our Future: Reforming Care and Support*

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136422/White-Paper-Caring-for-our-future-reforming-care-and-support-PDF-1580K.pdf

³ Care Quality Commission (2012) *The State of Health Care and Adult Social Care in England*

www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/documents/cqc_soc_201112_final_tag.pdf

⁴ Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing (2008) *Final Project Report – Executive Summary*, p.23.



'It is a matter for celebration that people are living longer. For many, these are extra years of good health and quality of life. For others whose care needs grow, we see much fear and uncertainty. Caring for and supporting each other should be something to celebrate. In the life and work of individuals and carers we can see dignity and independence made possible, and much that is good about our communities and society.'

Commission on Funding of Care and Support (2011) *Fairer Care Funding: The Report on the Commission on Funding of Care and Support*, p.2

'Ensuring that people are treated with dignity and respect, and that they are treated as people – with lives, families, relationships and individual needs of their own, and not defined in terms of the 'illness' they have or 'task' they represent – is one of the most important, if not the most important, feature of a high quality care service. Nowhere is this more important than in social care services, where the majority of people are older, where they generally have greater co-morbidity than in the past, and where their care requirements are becoming more complex.'

Care Quality Commission (2012) *The State of Health Care and Adult Social Care in England*, p.84

Older people and lifelong learning

Although engagement in many activities, including sports, leisure and learning, tends to decline with age, for many older people participation in learning is an essential social activity. A recent study into older people's learning found that passion for a subject, pleasure in the act of learning and the opportunity to develop as a person are all powerful incentives for older people to engage in learning.

Analysis of the evidence on the benefits of learning shows that learning helps older people to remain socially engaged and maintain their health.⁵ Research also shows that taking part in learning at an older age improves wellbeing and could offset a gradual decline in wellbeing as people continue to age.⁶

The absence of large numbers of older people from adult learning provision does not necessarily mean that they are not interested in learning.⁷ Older learners, like those of any other age, move in and out of formally organised learning activities according to personal needs and circumstances. Evidence shows that learning at home grows in importance with age and that older learners are eclectic in the tools they use – from informal contact to reading a book or following a correspondence course, using a computer, or learning online.

'Although there have always been older people in adult education, they have been a largely neglected minority. As the shape of later life changes, educators and policy-makers need to consider how far learning can help us all, as we age, to lead more rewarding and healthy lives... How far can it help us to maintain our independence, and reduce the costs of an ageing society, in health and welfare services, to the wider community?'

McNair, S. (2012) *Older People's Learning in 2012: A Survey*. Leicester: NIACE.

⁵ McNair, S. (2012) *Older People's Learning in 2012: A Survey*. Leicester: NIACE.

⁶ BIS Research Paper Number 92 – *Learning and Wellbeing Trajectories Among Older Adults in England* (October 2013).

⁷ NIACE (2013) *2013 NIACE Adult Participation in Learning Survey: Headline Findings*

http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/2/0/2013participationsurveyheadline-web_1.pdf



Older people learning in care settings

'Recreation, social and community activities and personal development are essential to quality of life for people of all ages and the benefits to the health and well-being among older people, even in advanced frailty, have been demonstrated. However, studies suggest that almost 50 per cent of care home residents' time is spent asleep, socially withdrawn or inactive, with only 3 per cent spent on constructive activity.'

Help the Aged (2006) *My Home Life: Quality of Life in Care Home*, p.43

Although many care settings offer activities for older people that are designed for enjoyment and occupation, much of this provision lacks a learning or personal development structure to it. More could be done to ensure that older adults in care settings are as likely to be engaged in learning as other adults of the same age.

Reported outcomes from older people being involved in learning activities include:

- improvements in motor skills or increased mobility;
- maintenance – and, for some, improvement – of attention, communication and memory skills;
- acquisition of new skills and interests;
- lower levels of depression;
- reduced dependence on medication;
- increased levels of resilience and ability to cope;
- positive changes in behaviour;
- increased sociability with the other older people being cared for;
- greater levels of engagement, by providing opinions, speaking up and communicating with others;
- improved levels of motivation to participate in day-to-day activities; and
- greater enjoyment of life – something to look forward to and to talk to others about.

'Learning in a group means the excitement spins off. Residents are happier and more alert, sleep better at night, need less medication, and feel less isolated and more at home.'

Care home manager

'I like meeting with people, when I came to the day centre I felt like a new person... I come here two days a week, the day centre is part of like a family, I relax and I'm comfortable here... [I come] to communicate with other people, you don't want to stay at home on your own, you want to come and have a chat, and laugh, and do any activities going, I does painting, and art, I normally does art and craft, it makes you felt you're somebody, when you're doing something.'

Gertrude, 74, who lives in the house she owns and receives transport to a black elders' community centre in London⁸

⁸ Taken from Katz et al. (2011) *A Better Life: What older people with high support needs value*. JRF, p.23.



Other benefits of older people learning

In addition to the range of benefits experienced by the older people themselves, there are other benefits.

For family and friends:

- Less worry about the quality of life for friends and relatives in care
- More to talk about, leading to improved communication between spouses, partners and relatives
- Higher expectations of what the older person is still able to do

'The relationship between residents, relatives and staff has all changed. There's a more informal, friendly, supportive environment.'

Care home manager

For care staff/givers:

- Better understanding of the needs of the older adult(s)
- More and better communication with the older adult(s)
- Growth in skills and confidence in the caring role
- Greater job satisfaction

'Residents communicate more openly and they are prepared to try new things.'

Care staff

'Residents are a lot happier in themselves when they have done activities; it gives them an aim in their daily routine.'

Care staff

For care providers:

- A better atmosphere in the care setting
- Improved wellbeing among the older people for whose care they are responsible
- Evident changes in health and behaviour in individual older people
- Less reliance on medication – and so reduced expenditure
- Better morale among the workforce and reduced staff turnover
- Refreshment of professional practice gained as a result of partnership working and inter-agency co-operation

'The provision of learning activities in our homes is absolutely critical to the holistic care of our residents.'

Bupa Care Services



What can you do?

Local authorities can play a key role in making sure that appropriate learning opportunities exist at local level as part of their broader strategies for responding to their ageing populations, including older adults in care settings as well as those living independently. They also have responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of their communities and there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that increased levels of wellbeing and independence are common outcomes of lifelong learning.

Although this is a challenging agenda, progress is possible if councils take a pivotal role in ensuring that decisions about the design, development and delivery of services take place at a local level. Councils can align and commission services to deliver better value for public funding and can promote more integrated working across different parts of the council, between councils and with their local partners in voluntary and health sectors.

Some of the actions senior local authority officers and service managers can take are given below.

Make the most of your strategic influence

- Consider including a commitment to ensuring a good quality of life and continuing health and wellbeing for older adults within the council's Sustainable Community Strategy.
- Consider including references to the value of ongoing access to learning in the local Older People's Strategy.
- Monitor the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection reports on the residential care providers in the area for the quality ratings awarded for daily life and social activities, and consider what might be done strategically and collectively to help improve these. A service improvement partnership could be set up with residential care providers to move this agenda forward.
- Enlist the support of the voluntary and community sector, and their experience in recruiting and deploying volunteers, in shaping the early specifications for services to be commissioned.
- Encourage cultural organisations (e.g. theatres, orchestras, art galleries) operating in your council area to come up with creative ideas for working with older people.

Ensure commissioning procedures secure better services and improve outcomes

- Make the nature and extent of access to stimulating learning and activities for older people one of the research questions in the needs assessment procedures for services for older people.
- Identify resources across the council that could be pooled or aligned to fund an increase in the range and quality of learning and the actions needed to make the learning more effective.
- Consider including an expectation of regular access to stimulating learning activities for service users within the service specifications for commissioning care services for older people.
- Support the procurement team to understand the importance of informal learning within the quality of services the council is seeking to secure.
- Include regular access to stimulating learning activities for residents, and the quality of the offer, among the criteria for the council's regular monitoring and review of council-commissioned care providers.
- Set aside small sums of money to be made available as grants to smaller voluntary and community sector organisations and others able to provide stimulating learning activities in local care settings. Look for variety in addition to the ongoing core offer.



Influence other procedures and specifications

- When deciding the specifications for the building of new residential extra care facilities, consider including dedicated space for learning in the design specification. Include quiet spaces for people to meet in small groups to learn together and maybe even a learning or activities resource centre which residents can access individually and independently, as well as using it for organised classes and groups.
- The format of care plans should be designed so that an individual's skills and interest in learning is recorded as part of his/her assessment and participation in learning thereafter is recorded and monitored. Provide a prompt on the forms to ensure that care providers have this discussion.





Make alliances with others with expertise to offer

- Continue to support an older people's forum and be guided by their view of their wants, needs and interests.
- Consider meeting with the council's Head of Adult Learning and Head of Cultural Services to discuss ideas for how a learning offer might be incorporated into the ongoing care offer of council-owned or commissioned residential and day care settings. Talk about what this offer might consist of and how it might be organised and funded as a collaboration between your two services.
- Speak with other council divisions about what they can offer to the provision of stimulating learning and development activities in care settings. For example:
 - What might the libraries service offer to establish book groups in care settings or to stimulate reading in other ways?
 - How might the museums service develop and build on work to package up and take out clusters of artefacts to stimulate group discussion and reminiscence work?

These services may not be able to respond immediately, but may be keen to build developments into their ongoing service development plans.

- Speak to the local further education colleges. Are there projects where there might be mutual benefit in bringing together younger people with skills or experience with older adults with skills and experience to share?

Support others

- Build up a local network of activity coordinators by organising open access training events, briefings, workshops and ideas exchanges. Use websites and social media to keep the network energised. Ensure the post holder has a small budget to underpin these activities.
- Work with the local association of care providers to help them raise the grade of their members' care settings at CQC inspection. Encourage them to see that the quality of the learning activities they offer could become more of a factor in how their homes are graded by inspectors. It will certainly be a factor in how they are perceived by the carers and relatives of an older adult looking for a care placement for their relative.



Build capacity within through staff training and development

- In the training and development programmes for care staff sessions, include – or ask to have included – sessions on optimising the learning potential of everyday activities. Enlist staff from the council's adult learning service to design and run these sessions with you.

'By empowering older people to continue to learn we empower the people who support them to learn too. Learning at all ages is an essential part of our well-being – whether it's formal learning and qualifications through the Qualifications and Credit Framework or informal learning through community education. Enabling people to learn and continue to learn throughout their lives is fundamental and contributes to supporting new ways of working and improved quality of support across all care settings.'

Skills for Care

Share good practice as you go

- Organise cross-sectoral seminars and events, bringing together staff from health, social care and education to share examples of their practice in order to sow the seeds for a more integrated service offer.

Research, reflect and review

- Help us further strengthen the case for the value of learning in enhancing the quality of life of older people in care settings. Think about how you might capture data which provides evidence of its effectiveness, and help us build the evidence base as you go.

'We have set up a service improvement partnership for residential care homes providers, resulting from a recent review identifying a lack of activities as an area for development locally. We are also looking at community activities and increasing volunteering as part of our prevention strategy. We are intending on reviewing day support services this year and learning activities will form an important aspect of this review, with intentions to set up a similar service improvement plan and partnership. Our challenges include engaging reluctant providers, supporting providers to recognise the importance of learning and activities and enabling them to have the right skills, resources and support to deliver on providing person-centred services.'

Trafford Council (January 2010)



Potential benefits for the local authority

- Investment in better and more stimulating activities, and the services needed to ensure people can benefit from them, will help your council demonstrate its commitment to securing a better experience of care for older people.
- It will contribute to your council's progress with the outcomes for adult social care,⁹ particularly in relation to enhancing quality of life and reducing social isolation, promoting independence and ensuring that people have a positive experience of care.
- It will help to improve your council's external inspection ratings, and those of your care providers, whose quality ratings become a contributory factor in your own.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the benefit of such activities will generate data to inform the thinking on how your care services should be redesigned for future needs.

'Learning in care settings means working with people who are often perceived as being beyond education. For them it can be so affirming that they are seen as still having much to offer society. For those who care for them in any way it can change their mindsets and attitudes about those they care for.'

Jim Soulsby, Association for Education and Ageing

'Learning in care settings is one of the most effective quality of life sustaining 'vaccinations' against socio-health deterioration in care settings. It is a means for people to remain in the mainstream of everyday life and its challenges.'

Consultant Occupational Therapist



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⁹ Department of Health (2012) *The Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework 2013/14*
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/141627/The-Adult-Social-Care-Outcomes-Framework-2013-14.pdf



Inspirations

Drawn from existing practice, as well as from the literature, we believe that the following key principles reflect best practice in the provision of learning opportunities for older people in care settings:

- Irrespective of disabilities and differences in ability, older people in care settings should have the opportunity to engage in stimulating mental activity, acquire new skills and share existing ones. It is integral to a good quality of life and promotes health and wellbeing.
- Older people should be fully involved in the maintenance of their existing skills and interests, and in developing new ones of their choice. They should be involved in the creation of care packages and support plans. Action to achieve learning goals should be recorded and targets agreed and set.
- Older people should always be able to choose whether or not to participate in learning.
- Older people should be at the centre of, and involved from the outset in, the planning of teaching and learning which is to be provided for them.
- People learn best when there is something relevant to be learned and when it is something they really want to learn.
- Learning should be delivered using real-life contexts and adult learning materials.
- Learning achievements, however small, should be recognised, valued and made visible.
- Learning should build on a person's existing strengths.
- Learning should help to increase a person's quality of life. It can contribute to improved choices and decision making, and to greater autonomy and independence.
- Learning should make a positive difference to people's lives.
- Learning should always be interesting and enjoyable.

The following seven case studies provide a range of examples of work that is currently taking place to support learning for older people in care settings.

This collection of examples is not exhaustive – no doubt there are many other examples of learning taking place in care settings up and down the country. Neither are we holding up these case studies as being best practice to be replicated exactly elsewhere – however, we have sought to draw out where we think aspects of the work are particularly interesting or where work is underpinned by key principles.

We do hope that these case studies will provide you with some inspiration as to what can be done, and we would consider our efforts a success if we have stimulated you to think about how you can take this work forward.

We are continuing to look for inspirational examples of work to support the provision of learning for older people in care settings, especially in relation to activities or settings that differ from those presented in the case studies below. We would like to hear from older people in care settings, their relatives and friends, managers, staff or volunteers and other organisations who can tell us more about existing opportunities.

Please send examples of practice to Emily.Jones@niace.org.uk

or to:

Emily Jones
Research Manager
NIACE
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester
LE1 7GE



Open Age

Open Age is a user-led charity operating in Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Barnet, Brent and Hammersmith and Fulham, enabling older people over the age of 50 to sustain their physical and mental fitness, maintain active lifestyles and develop new and stimulating interests. Every week Open Age provides over 220 physical, social, creative and mentally stimulating activities across more than 50 sites. Activities cover four broad areas – learning, leisure, health and employment – and are run from community centres, sheltered housing, church halls, libraries and Open Age hubs. As well as offering provision in residential accommodation, residents are supported into activities by dedicated link-up workers.

The link-up project has been running since 2008 in North Kensington and more recently across the whole of the borough. Funded by the NHS and the local council, the project works with those who are most isolated, or at risk of isolation in the community to support them into activities and signpost them to other services in the borough. In order to support isolated older people, including those receiving care in the home, to engage with opportunities, Open Age link-up workers offer:

- a friendly person to chat to about the opportunities to take part in activities with Open Age, and help in identifying suitable activities;
- one-to-one, confidence-building support and encouragement;
- accompaniment to initial sessions until the individual is comfortable attending on their own;
- contact suited to the needs of the individual, including home visits, phone calls and meetings in the community; and
- advice regarding transport options and schemes for people unable to walk long distances, or for whom public transport is inadequate.

As with any age range, older adults have a wide range of interests and aspirations, and the project aims to provide people with a choice of activities in local venues. The link-up project has been particularly successful in providing support and opportunity to those who have lost confidence, perhaps due to ill-health, bereavement or poor mobility, to attend social, learning, leisure and health activities. Through providing one-to-one support and advice, giving the individual time and encouragement, the project has helped people to make friends, build their confidence and explore their interests.

‘You [the link-up coordinator] have been really helpful, you have helped me out so much, I can’t see how much more you could do for me.’ (Open Age learner)

‘I’m very happy that someone is thinking about me, it is a blessing. Open Age is doing me good, I need to go out and do exercise and I find it does me good.’ (Open Age learner)

For those older people who are unable leave their home, activities are offered in facilitated groups over the phone. This includes a book group in partnership with the Home Library service.

For more information contact hleech@openage.org.uk



First Taste

First Taste is a registered charity which has been providing arts education to frail older people in care and nursing homes and day centres in Derbyshire for 15 years. First Taste is currently delivering two programmes: PACT (Practical Action for Carer Training), funded by the Headley Trust, and Health & Education Activities Training (HEAT), funded by Derbyshire County Council. These training programmes evolved from reviews of past projects which recognised that care staff, managers and ultimately the older people would benefit from extra holistic and stimulative care training added to the health and care training of care staff. The programme's activities look to motivate staff who, in turn, pass on the motivation and skills achieved to older people in their care, thereby enhancing the quality of life in care settings.

The HEAT programme covers a range of activities, including chair-based exercises, hand massage, digital photography, cooking, arts and crafts, poetry, music, using the Wii, metal work and gardening. As well as delivering these activities, staff attend training on thinking differently about dementia, making mealtimes pleasurable, structuring and evidencing activity sessions, intergenerational learning and dealing with the constraints of using volunteers. All training sessions are led by professional tutors with relevant subject expertise. Care staff students are provided with individual folders to record their own work and achievements. In deciding on the range of training, First Taste is guided by both the national scene and suggestions from 'ideas forums' held with staff involved.

An independent evaluation of the HEAT programme has identified a range of benefits for care staff, managers, residents and their families. Residents experience benefits such as improved health and wellbeing, developing new and existing hobbies and interests, and better relationships with staff and other residents. Benefits for staff include gaining skills that they can put into practice in their everyday work, increased confidence, an improved perspective of care and higher levels of job satisfaction.

'It makes you want to live.' (Older learner)

'First Taste is an advocate for activity coordinators. They are saying the role is important. They have made a difference in making our role recognisable.' (Activities coordinator)

'Staff attitude towards offering activities has changed. This is now seen as an important part of their job role.' (Care home manager)

First Taste is now working with staff at Derbyshire County Council to explore whether the stimulative care training can be accredited and become a mandatory part of the care qualifications for all care staff.

For more information contact firsttaste@btinternet.com or visit www.firsttastecharity.co.uk



Learning for the Fourth Age

Learning for the Fourth Age (L4A) is a not-for-profit organisation providing one-to-one learning opportunities for older people receiving care. L4A offers older people personal learning mentors who spend time with them each week sharing ideas, information, materials and audio visual resources. The activities are designed to suit each individual's needs and interests, and the one-to-one sessions are backed up with materials to enjoy in between sessions.

To date activities have included history, music, theology, arts and crafts, film making, computer skills, languages and intergenerational skills sharing with older people passing on their skills to younger learning mentors, and vice versa. L4A has also piloted some innovative technology projects, including using tablet computers with older people in care settings, video calling between different care settings to enable older people to meet digitally, and creating life story films using spectacles with built in video cameras. L4A is currently piloting this work in domiciliary settings to support people receiving care in their own homes.

In order to provide an affordable and sustainable offer, L4A services are delivered through a network of volunteers. Ongoing support and training is available to volunteers – they are covered by insurance and L4A covers all expenses, DBS/CRB checks and references. Established in 2008, L4A aims at being a self-sustaining organisation.

By working with learners on a one-to-one basis, L4A is able to work around all the different support needs of older people. Another benefit of the personalised service is that learners are able to explore interests they may have felt too shy to express in a group setting. They are able to learn at their own pace and are able to focus on particular areas of a topic. Learners are given ownership of their individual learning and their self-perception changes from that of 'cared for' to a much more empowered 'learner'.

'I like it that I am in charge of the interests that we follow.' (L4A learner)

'I used to think that my days of learning were over 30 years ago!' (L4A learner)

To complement its wider provision, L4A fits around the existing time frame and routine in the care settings which buy the services. It also works to support family, friends and members of staff in continuing the interests that individuals have been following with L4A.

For more information contact enquiries@l4a.org.uk



Nightingale Hammerson

Nightingale Hammerson is a charity formed by the merger of two care homes, Hammerson House and Nightingale House. Through this merger the organisations have pooled resources, expertise and best practice and work collectively to provide quality care to elderly Jewish people in both north and south London. The activities departments at both sites work together to provide a varied and broad range of learning opportunities, including music and singing, drama, ceramics, silk painting, tai chi, cooking, gardening and trips out to places of interest. In addition:

- Hammerson House has invested in computers with touchscreen technology, making it easier for residents to email, search the internet, play games and receive photographs and video clips from their family and friends. Staff and volunteers receive online training and deliver one-to-one sessions throughout the week.
- Some activities are led by residents in the home or involve residents taking turns to present something; for example, 'In Conversation' sessions, where a resident will talk informally about a hobby, life story or other topic to a group of residents. One recent conversation was led by a resident who was an antiques dealer. With support, she displayed a number of her antiques and gave a fascinating account of her career.
- The homes work closely with external partners; for example, Hammerson House hosts visits from staff at the Wallace Collection who bring images and handling objects for residents, and Nightingale House is working with the Dulwich Picture Gallery and the Royal Academy.
- A new reminiscence initiative has been set up to give residents an opportunity to practise speaking Yiddish.

All sessions are open to every resident. Activity registers are maintained to monitor the activities that residents are attending and this information contributes to Social Care Plans. Hammerson Nightingale keeps relatives informed by displaying their weekly activity programme on their website and giving feedback on participation; some relatives prompt residents to attend and will also ask staff to ensure they attend particular sessions.

The learning activities provide residents with mental and physical stimulation as well as social interaction and a purpose for the day. They develop interests and hobbies, learn new skills and feel a great sense of achievement from a job well done. The activities also give residents something new to talk about with staff and their visitors. Staff at the homes report that residents' health has improved as a result of participating in the learning activities. For example, being busy during the day has helped residents to sleep better and exercise classes have reduced the number of falls.

For more information contact activities@nightingalehammerson.org



iPad engAGE

iPad engAGE is a digital project for individuals living with dementia. It aims to inspire creativity through iPads using various digital apps in order to improve engagement and digital confidence. The project is currently being piloted for one year, funded by the Grants for the Arts Scheme on behalf of Arts Council England. It is being facilitated in four types of care setting, including day centres, a residential care home and a hospital, to explore the possibilities of iPad apps and the difference they can make at various stages of dementia in different settings.

iPad activity is tailored to the learner and their interests, which means they are highly engaged. Learners gain a sense of achievement and renewed confidence in their ability to learn and explore new technologies. The tactile and intuitive interface of the iPad provides instant stimulation and an accessible gateway to new forms of communication, for example discussing an individual's painting days while creating on the iPad or viewing photographs of a place on the internet. This enables learners to share information and work collaboratively on the arts through an imaginative approach with the opportunity to reminisce.

A key aim of the learning sessions is to tap into an individual's senses and stimulate memories through the arts, such as music and visual arts. The more art forms that are facilitated on the iPad, the more the successful the session will be. iPad apps which are regularly used and have been very successful include Foldify, Pottery HD, Chihuly, Cross Stitch Maker, Garden Plan Pro, Halftone and Melodala. However, apps that work for the individual differ from person to person and a session will usually incorporate many to enable choice under one theme.

As well as planned learning sessions, the iPad can be used as a tool for family members and staff to engage with the older person in meaningful activity, for example as a stimulus for storytelling and sharing experiences. Carers have said that they have gained a lot from iPad engAGE as it gives individuals the identity of a learner, which overrides the label of someone living with dementia.

'This is just utterly fantastic and magical.' (iPad engAGE learner)

'I can show off to all of my family.' (iPad engAGE learner)

'They have been talking about iPad engAGE all week.' (Care staff)

As well as delivering the project in the care settings, Claire Ford, founder of iPad engAGE, is developing the work in a number of ways. For example, she is piloting small intergenerational learning projects, facilitating iPad activity for younger and older people. The ultimate goal is to develop iPad engAGE for various settings to improve health and wellbeing through digital inclusion.

For further information contact claireford88@hotmail.com



Silver Lining

Silver Lining is an enjoyable, accessible and confidence-building music project supporting the health and wellbeing of volunteers over the age of 50, care home residents and their carers. The project is run by The Sage Gateshead, an internationally recognised music venue based in the North East of England, which also delivers a number of community music and education projects regionally, nationally and internationally.

Silver Lining engages volunteers, residents and carers through singing and ukulele playing. Volunteers and carers learn new skills from professional musicians, enabling them to deliver music sessions in care settings, specifically age-appropriate songs known to residents, connecting them to memories.

As a result of participating in the music activities, care home residents experience an increase in self-confidence and a greater sense of community as they become more involved in other activities in the home. In addition, residents with dementia are less likely to become agitated, they are better able to communicate and some experience improved physical health as a number of activities involve movement and exercise.

'The clients and carers make us very welcome... They now request songs and repeats, repeatedly tell us how we bring back happy memories and share experiences from their past. One memorable moment was when carers told us that they did not know one gentleman could communicate until he started singing.' (Silver Lining volunteer)

While the primary aim of the project is to increase the mental and physical health and wellbeing of residents who have dementia, there are also many benefits for carers and volunteers. As well as gaining skills in music and performance, volunteers report an increase in physical and mental stamina and an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem, and say that they benefit from the opportunity to make new friends. Taking part in the sessions enable care staff to develop work-related skills such as positive communication and the use of reminiscence in learning activities. Like the volunteers, staff have a greater confidence in their ability to learn.

'I felt energised by the session of singing and playing and interacting with the residents who participated. This enabled me to more active for the rest of the day, sleep better and have more energy the next day.' (Silver Lining volunteer)

Silver Lining received funding from the Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF), managed by NIACE, in 2011/12. As the project involves volunteers and care staff – and aims to build sustainable relationships between them – the project activity has been able to continue beyond this short-term funding. The project has also been awarded further funding by The Baring Foundation.

For further information, contact silver@thesagegateshead.org



Alive!

Alive! is a registered charity which works with 230 residential care homes in the South of England. The charity runs a range of interactive learning sessions including:

- Variety Hour, a session made up of short segments of physical and mental activities, such as singing, giant balloon play, playing percussion in a band and quizzes. Other segments might include a discussion about 'On this Day in History' and reminiscence using items in memory boxes, both of which are facilitated with the use of books and online resources.
- Guided Reminiscence, a session which uses an iPad and projector to evoke personal and collective memories. Learners identify something of interest, such as a song, film trailer, television programme or place, and the facilitator uses the internet to find it. This can lead to further requests for information and the group learns about the subject together.
- One-to-one iPad sessions, delivered with care home residents who do not tend to leave their rooms. These sessions explore the learner's life story, their hobbies and interests and introduce them to apps which they might enjoy.
- Participative art and dance sessions, which provide learners with an opportunity to learn new ways of expressing themselves through art and movement.

Staff at care homes report that the learning activities have improved relationships between residents as they discover shared experiences or interests through the sessions which they continue to explore afterwards. In addition, relatives learn more about their family member and are able to relate to them better when they visit. Some managers report that residents who regularly take part in learning sessions are happier, eat and sleep better, and sometimes require less medication.

'Our residents love Alive!'s approach and enjoy every minute of the sessions. The presenters put a smile on everyone's face, taking time to talk to each individual resident, learning their names and making them feel special. Thank you for bringing a programme that is wholly inclusive.' (Activities Coordinator)

'We saw great strides last week. The residents slept better and were still talking about it for days afterwards.' (Care home manager)

'You came at just the right time... I've never sat so still in all my life. Painting makes me feel so relaxed... It takes you out of yourself. All your worries go. I really have enjoyed this afternoon. Thank you, dear, you've taken my cares away.' (Learner)

Care homes tend to make a contribution to the cost of each session and the rest is fundraised with donations from grant giving trusts and the private sector.

As well as running learning sessions in care homes, Alive! runs regular training days on a variety of subjects including reminiscence theory and practice and how to use technology to facilitate activities.

For further information, contact info@aliveactivities.org or read the Alive! blog: www.aliveactivities.org/blog.asp



Next steps

We hope that the research evidence, examples of practice and ideas in this guide will provide you with some inspiration as to what can and should be done to improve the learning opportunities for older people in care settings.

NIACE will continue its work on improving the quality and breadth of learning for older people in care settings, but it will not be possible to work through the challenges alone. Only by working together, with key policy-makers and sector organisations, learning providers and voluntary organisations, as well as with managers and staff working on the ground and learners, can we move forwards. We would consider our efforts a success if we have stimulated you to think how you can play your part in taking this work forward.

In addition to this report, we have published resources for care managers, activity coordinators and care staff and learning providers. These are available at no charge from the NIACE bookshop.

If you would like further information about NIACE's work on learning for older people in care settings, or to share an example of existing practice, please contact Emily.Jones@niace.org.uk.



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(England and Wales)
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE

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