



Stand by me

The contribution of public libraries to the well-being of older people

A report by Shared Intelligence for
Arts Council England
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1 Background to these case studies

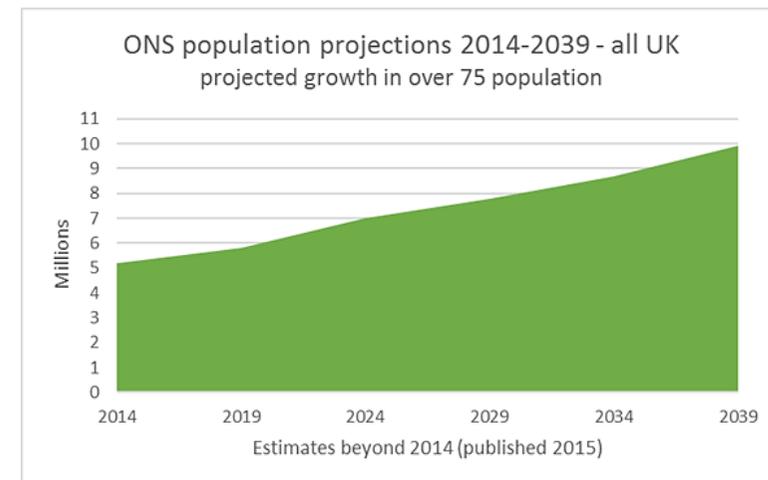
1.1 Following our series of case studies published in 2016 about public libraries and their use of WiFi to create social impact¹ we were commissioned by Arts Council England to produce case studies looking at two further areas of public library impact. One of these was the contribution public libraries make to the wellbeing of older people. As before, we looked at five library services chosen because they were delivering services for older people which were either innovative or unusual, or because they provided a good example of something which was happening on a wider scale. Our five case study areas are:

- **Halton** library service's reminiscence box service
- **Hertfordshire** library service's Slipper Swaps programme
- Touch a New World, a digital independence service by **Kent** libraries
- The Libraries Loneliness Project in **Norfolk**
- **Wakefield's** first fully dementia friendly library at their Sandal branch

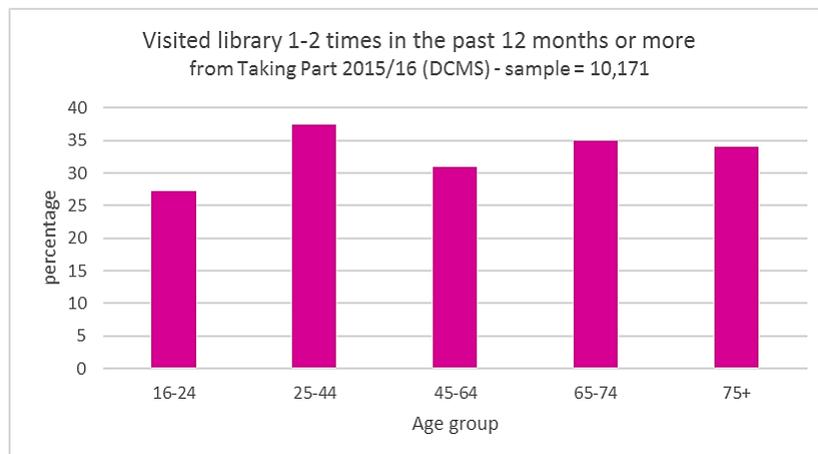
¹ See [Making the Most of WiFi](#), Arts Council England (2016)

Why focus on libraries and older people?

1.2 The effects of our aging population are among the biggest social challenges we will face over the coming decades, as a society, economically, and within our own families. According to the latest ONS figures the UK 75+ population (for England this is 4.5m people) is forecast to have doubled by 2039 compared to 2014. There will be positive effects as many of us live longer and in better health, and play a bigger role in our communities in old age. But there are also enormous challenges the biggest of which is how to meet and fund the care needs of the growing number who will succumb to frailty and chronic illness in old age.



1.3 Given the scale and reach of public libraries it was an obvious theme to focus on in terms of the role libraries are playing in meeting these challenges. Over one in three people aged 75+ use public libraries, and one quarter use their library service once a month or more². We know that in many individual local authority areas the figure is much higher. There have also been other national studies which have indicated higher proportions of regular users overall³. Libraries are also inherently local, part of the social and cultural infrastructure in every local authority area alongside schools, GPs, theatres, museums, parks, galleries and sports centres. On average each library branch in England serves a catchment area of around 18,000 people; a 10 minute-walk in many towns, or a few minutes by car or bus in rural areas.



² Based on data from the national [Taking Part Survey 2016](#) (DCMS)

³ Findings from [Shining a Light – Data Booklet](#), Carnegie UK Trust (2017)

⁴ The [Campaign to end loneliness](#) have brought together extensive data to identify loneliness-related needs, including the [Loneliness Map](#) by AgeUK

1.4 What we have seen through our case studies are four ways in which libraries are helping meet these challenges directly.

1.5 The first is **helping people in old age live in their own homes for longer**. Many people (whether they pay for their own care or qualify through means testing) would prefer to stay living in their own home for as long as they can rather than move into residential care. Many local and national public agencies encourage this because ultimately it is cheaper for the public purse and is also what many individuals and their families want. But support for people living in their own homes is often hard to secure or over-stretched meaning that the support library services can provide is valued both by the public and by other agencies.

1.6 The second is **organising high-quality enrichment and socialising activities**. Libraries have always been hubs for group activities but for older people these can be more than a convenient leisure option, they may in fact provide the only opportunity some people have to socialise. These kinds of activities, from group reading, crafts, and social games to learning digital skills, or exploring reminiscence collections, help alleviate loneliness which in many communities is one of the biggest risk factors for older people⁴. We have also seen the potential for library services to offer high quality activities and services which can be delivered in residential care homes, a sector which is set to grow significantly in the coming two decades.⁵

1.7 The third is where library teams are **delivering the statutory duty for local authorities to shape adult social care provider markets**. Some

⁵ According to [a report by the Government's Technology Strategy Board](#), by 2040 the demand for residential care will be nearly double what it was in 2011, and turnover in the care home sector will have tripled

are doing this by enabling social care providers to target the right people, while some have launched services which in their own right are playing a role as part of a “diverse, sustainable, high-quality market”.

- 1.8 The fourth is where library services are **actively expanding the reach of their services for older people** either by encouraging more people to visit a library or by taking library services out of the library to other settings.

2 Overall learning and themes

Helping people in old age live in their own homes for longer

- 2.1 The case studies from Kent and Hertfordshire highlight two very different ways libraries can support people to live in their own homes for longer. Hertfordshire's 'Slipper Swaps' are essentially a way for a combination of local agencies to target people who could benefit from preventative services – aimed in particular at preventing emergency hospital admissions. For many people living in their own homes who are mentally fit, but physically frail, an emergency admission (most often originating from a trip or fall at home) spells the end of their independence. Besides the human cost these kinds of avoidable emergencies put significant strain on the NHS and social care agencies. Using data from The Kings Fund, Hertfordshire estimate each one of the 5,000 trip and fall incidents they see each year costs the NHS and local authorities £16,000, in other words £80m in total. Yet simple interventions delivered through the library service like the non-slip slippers, after which the project is named, can reduce the risk of these accidents – as can the advice and help that partner organisations (such as AgeUK, HertsHelp, and Fire and Rescue) also provide at slipper swap events.
- 2.2 Kent's Touch a New World digital independence service takes a very different approach but is also part of a jigsaw of interventions in Kent which enable people to live independently longer. Originally conceived as an alternative model for the Home Library Service

(books delivered to housebound borrowers), the real value of the service has been in reducing loneliness and supporting independent living. The service matches volunteers to elderly housebound residents and the volunteers give lessons in using tablet computers for web-browsing, email, and other basic functions. Alongside enabling housebound users to access library resources such as e-books, what has been even more impactful has been the freedom users have regained to do things which are integral to their sense of independence and connection – for example sending birthday greetings and gifts to their grandchildren and staying in charge of their grocery shopping. We also saw how the implementation of Touch a New World has also been integrated with Kent's community warden service which provides a visible uniformed presence in rural villages for the benefit of elderly residents in particular.

Organising high-quality enrichment and socialising activities

- 2.3 Norfolk library service were inspired to act by a county council wide campaign to tackle loneliness. Their response has been to double the number of weekly social activity sessions from 57 to 113 across the county's library network. A common set of standards have been agreed within the service to ensure that wherever someone turns up for a session it will be warm, welcoming, and well-planned, and run by proactive staff. The sessions vary according to the interest of different communities – from arts and crafts, to social games, to

local history. To monitor the impact of the programme, staff routinely gather ‘impact stories’ from every session using a standard data sheet which asks them for evidence of the difference made to individual library users and to the council’s strategic objectives.

- 2.4 Wakefield’s dementia-friendly library was originally designed of course for people with dementia. But in reality, almost everyone with dementia will visit the library with a carer – sometimes a professional worker, but usually a family member. For those carers the chance to socialise with other carers can be a weekly lifeline in what is often an isolated existence, especially for those caring for a loved one who can no longer communicate.
- 2.5 In Halton, library service staff are running reminiscence sessions in care homes using a combination of reminiscence boxes drawn from their heritage collections and specialist book stock designed for people with memory loss. They began the service when they realised that care home residents, especially those with dementia, needed more than simply access to their collections via the mobile library service. What many care home residents (and care home managers) really needed were high quality organised activities based around the library service’s collections. Given the experience Halton libraries already have with reminiscence materials this seemed to obvious place to start.

Delivering the statutory duty for local authorities to shape adult social care provider markets

- 2.6 Under the Care Act 2014 all local authorities now have a duty to shape the local market in adult social care. They are required to

“understand their local market of care providers and stimulate a diverse range of care and support services to ensure that people and their carers have choice over how their needs are met and that they are able to achieve the things that are important to them.”

- 2.7 Our case studies show that library services, as part of a local authority can help the council build its market intelligence by building relationships with local care providers. But they also show how library services can themselves become part of the provider market. The activities held in Wakefield’s Sandal library are a unique form of provision as they are held in a fully dementia friendly environment. Kent libraries with Touch a New World have created a highly scalable volunteer-led digital independence service which supports independent living especially for the lonely and vulnerable. Halton are also providing a new and unique professionally-led reminiscence service for dementia sufferers which instead of taking place in a library, is delivered peripatetically in care homes.

Actively expanding the reach of their services for older people

- 2.8 The most obvious approach libraries can take to increasing their positive impact on older people is to reach more unique users and to target those in most need – either by attracting them into a library or by taking library services out to other settings. Wakefield’s fully dementia friendly library at their Sandal branch generated a 73% surge in visits in the year after it opened, many of those were new users and many were attracted specifically by the dementia friendly environment. Since then the higher level of visits has been sustained. Hertfordshire’s slipper swap events appeal to exactly the older

demographic they want to reach in order for their partner agencies to be able to promote their preventative and advisory services to that demographic. For partner agencies it is the wide reach and high awareness of libraries which attracts them to the partnership. But the library service also benefits from new users attracted by the slipper swaps who are not frequent library users.

- 2.9 Similarly Norfolk's huge efforts to double the number of weekly sessions – with the specific aim of reducing loneliness – has brought in new users attracted by the offer of organised social interaction in a safe, trusted environment. Halton on the other hand shows what can be done by taking services out to other settings. Whereas the other library services, for the most part, rely on the right target audience to come to them Halton's reminiscence box service is taken directly to people with dementia and for whom the service was designed for.

Approaches and ways of working

- 2.10 Besides these themes in *what* our case study library services are doing to contribute to the well-being of older people themes also emerged when we looked at *how* they were going about it.

Starting small and scaling up

- 2.11 Library managers may sometimes feel that a new service or activity has to be available everywhere from day one. The pressure may stem from concerns about fairness and equal access to the new services, or from expectations from partners that all library branches will start providing 'x' from a certain date.

- 2.12 In reality 'big bang' launches are expensive and high risk and leave little room to try different variations or learn from mistakes. It is notable that four out of our five case studies created new services by starting small and are now planning to scale up. Kent's Touch a New World began as a service for housebound users serving a few dozen individuals but there are now plans to scale up to serve many more. Halton's reminiscence box sessions were initially trialled at six residential care settings but again, staff are now scaling-up to reach more people in more care homes. Wakefield's dementia friendly library has only been implemented at one branch, but now elements of the design (such as signage, and dementia-friendly colour schemes) are being adopted in other Wakefield branches. Hertfordshire began their Slipper Swaps to try to reduce the number of hospital admissions caused by trips and falls, but are now looking to use the same partnership relationships to start new sessions focused on preventing older people becoming victims of fraud or rogue trading.

- 2.13 The one exception to the 'start small' approach is Norfolk's loneliness project which doubled the number of social activity sessions from 57 to 113 per week. But in reality this was not a huge single project managed by a single person or team. Instead Norfolk distributed responsibility to staff in each of their 47 branches asking them to decide what was needed locally. As a result each branch has put on one or two extra sessions, and focused on activities they know there is a local need for based on their knowledge of the community. To maintain a strategic direction, and enable senior managers to know whether it was working, each branch was set a framework to operate within. This meant the new sessions had to

address loneliness, respond to local needs, and once launched, each branch was required to gather impact data (in the form of impact stories) to report back.

Volunteers in their 70s supporting people in their 80s and 90s

- 2.14 The involvement of volunteers in Kent's Touch a New World home-based digital independence service provides an important reminder that among those people now in their 70s there are many who in their working lives were at the forefront of using digital technology. One Kent volunteer, now in her 70s explained how she had first encountered desktop computers more than 30 years ago in the 1980s when she taught herself how to use accountancy software running on MS-DOS. She had been a book-keeper and jumped at the chance computers gave her to do away with tedious written ledgers. But computers at that time were far less intuitive than now, and learning to use everyday software from accountancy to word-processing required her to develop a level of technical understanding beyond what many people require to use today's highly intuitive, touch controlled apps.
- 2.15 Recruiting volunteers just a few years younger than those being offered support – especially when it relates to technology – can be positive in a number of ways. It means those providing help have more in common with those they are helping. It also helps change perceptions of those past retirement age – demonstrating they can contribute technical skills as well as social and organisational skills.
- Working with partners**
- 2.16 It was inevitable that the case studies would highlight the role of partners alongside what library services have done themselves.

What is interesting however, is the wide range of partners our case study services are working with and in what ways.

- 2.17 It is unsurprising Wakefield worked with the Alzheimer's Society, but it is interesting to learn how the partnership began; serendipitously as a result of the library managers moving into a new shared office. Having established the relationship they were also able to involve the Alzheimer's Society before the plans for the refurbishment of Sandal Library were finalised, rather than after the builders had left which meant the adaptations could be factored in more effectively and cheaply.
- 2.18 Halton's partnership with care homes is also interesting. It is more common to hear examples of library service staff working with adult social care colleagues within their local authority, than managers of individual care homes. But it was through these detailed discussions with care home managers and activity co-ordinators that Halton staff were able to identify how they put library resources to best use for people in care homes with dementia.
- 2.19 Kent's partnership with the village warden's service was also interesting in that it challenges some assumptions about what partners are interested in. The wardens are a local uniformed presence and each village is assigned a warden who builds up detailed knowledge of the community. Many people think of the wardens as being concerned with community safety and low-level crime. But in reality, the partnership between Kent libraries and the wardens is much more geared towards preventing loneliness, and helping stitch together the patchwork of social care support for vulnerable older adults living in their own homes.

Creating specialist outreach roles and focusing on staff not just inanimate resources

- 2.20 One aspect the Halton and Kent examples have in common is that Halton's reminiscence box service and Touch a New World in Kent both began as attempts to find new ways to support people who cannot travel to a library themselves. In Halton, this was prompted by the closure of the mobile service and a desire to target resources on the most vulnerable, and in Kent it was driven by a desire to increase the impact their services have on housebound readers.
- 2.21 In both cases this had led the library services to move away from simply delivering physical materials (books, magazines, audiobooks, reminiscence materials), towards using physical materials as the basis of human interaction; at-home digital skills lessons in Kent, and reminiscence activities in Halton.
- 2.22 In some respects, Wakefield's dementia-friendly library has also been developed with a similar mindset. Wakefield know that the real social value (or return on investment) from Sandal library cannot be extracted simply by opening the doors each morning. Rather, the real value is extracted by holding the Active Minds sessions in the library – it is these which draw people in, provide a reason for people with dementia to visit, and provide the much-needed respite for carers.

Senior leadership (officer and political)

- 2.23 Three of our case studies (Kent, Norfolk, and Hertfordshire) begin with excerpts or quotes from strategic plans and documents which were highlighted to us by each of the three library services concerned. What these show is that in each case the library service has been very deliberate in aligning their activities for older people with wider strategic priorities. Norfolk is the clearest cut in this regard – the chief executive of Norfolk County Council set a county-wide challenge to do more to tackle loneliness, and the library service responded. But in Kent, Touch a New World is also designed to directly address the council's strategic priority to ensure "*older and vulnerable residents are safe and supported with choices to live independently*". In Hertfordshire, the Slipper Swaps directly contribute to the need, identified in the county's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, for more preventative interventions to reduce harm and reduce demand.
- 2.24 The message here is that these library services have drilled down a long way below the broad theme of 'services for older people' and have designed services which address the specifics of their authority's strategic goals (supporting independent living and tackling loneliness).

3 Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- 3.1 The five library services that allowed us in to produce these case studies have shown five very different ways libraries are contributing to the well-being of older people up and down the country.
- 3.2 They challenge assumptions about libraries and about how the needs of older people are best met.
- Some are about the library as a physical location, but Halton and Kent show the difference library staff and volunteers can make going out to care homes and to homes of people trying to continue living independently.
 - Some examples are of course about making a difference through books and reading, but most are more about the value of sharing information, and the support of human contact.
 - The Kent example challenges us to see people now in their 70s as the original digital pioneers who have huge amounts to offer those now in their 80s and 90s in terms of building digital independence.
 - The Norfolk example reminds us that a large scale library service initiative (doubling the number of activities for older people) can be achieved by putting frontline staff in the lead, rather than a big command-and-control project.

- 3.3 One of the most important things these case studies show is that public libraries, which exist in every community in every part of the country, are a population-scale platform for meeting the population-scale challenges of aging. There are very few other public services which achieve regular personal contact with over one-third of the 75+ population. Those which do, notably GPs, are urgently seeking ways older people can be targeted by preventative interventions which reduce the likelihood of them needing more serious help from social care agencies and the NHS.

Recommendations

- 3.4 Public libraries are already contributing to the well-being of older people. But we know that the degree of deliberate, proactive, outcome-focused action varies greatly among public library services. All library services provide an open door and welcome to those who pass by, but many do necessarily target older people with services and activities designed to meet specific needs such as dementia, the needs of carers, trips and falls prevention, loneliness or the needs of care home residents.
- 3.5 We therefore end this summary report with two sets of recommendations designed to stimulate and inform action.
- 3.6 First we hope that anyone who has been inspired by these examples will pick up the phone, or type out an email to make contact with the library services featured to find out more or to pay a visit.

- 3.7 Secondly we hope that staff and managers in other library services will consider the following recommendations which we believe are the underpinning actions and approaches which have enabled those in our case studies services to achieve what they have.
- 3.8 **Start from the headline data on the older population** – Target services on the needs of older people starting from local evidence of need. Service targeting should be informed by data on the current and projected age profile of the local community; patterns in the 65+, 75+, and 85+ populations, geographic spread, and extent of clustering in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. Data on loneliness such as the maps produced by AgeUK should also be used for assessing need, as should population health data on age-related health conditions such as dementia, and emergency hospital admissions for trips and falls.
- 3.9 **Plan services jointly with colleagues in Adult Social Care, local NHS, and local NGOs** – Meeting the needs of an aging population is already the biggest challenge facing public services in many parts of the country and within every local authority boundary there will be partnerships and working groups assessing these needs, and co-ordinating action. Library services are able to direct staff energy and financial resources at the most important issues, when they begin with discussions with working groups and partnerships focused on adult social care.
- 3.10 **Tackle local strategic priorities head-on** – The library service offer for older people should contribute to the specific needs and goals highlighted in local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Older People’s Strategies. The case studies show how much more can be achieved when library services contribute directly to the priorities for older people which are specific to their local community – going further than simply having a generic older people’s offer.
- 3.11 **Support the statutory duty for social care market shaping** – Library services should support actions being taken by their local authorities to meet the Market Shaping duty under the 2014 Care Act. Library services can help colleagues in Adult Social Care both to gather intelligence, and through their older people’s offer, to contribute directly to creating a diverse and sustainable provide market.
- 3.12 **Recruit older volunteers with digital skills** – Library services have many approaches to working with volunteers but Kent’s approach to working with older volunteers who have high-level digital skills seems an innovative new direction others should consider. Older volunteers, specifically those who in the late 1970s and early 1980s were among the first digital pioneers can be valuable assets in any older people’s offer. They have the confidence and inquisitiveness about digital technology to support older people; by being just one or two years younger they can also be easier for service users to relate to and trust.
- 3.13 **Work with individual care home managers** – Although the care home market may well go through major changes in the coming decades (growth, segmentation, entirely new models), that does not alter the fact that today’s care home managers require a reliable supply of quality assured enrichment activities for their residents. This makes care home managers important partners, and potentially purchasers of services they perceive as filling gaps around reading,

access to culture and knowledge, and reminiscence based on heritage collections.

- 3.14 **Condition-specific support should also provide support and respite for carers** - When providing condition specific services (especially for dementia), the Wakefield example shows how valuable it is when the offer is designed to support carers as much as those with the conditions being targeted. Not only are carers often the decision-makers about what activities to take part in, they also carry a huge care burden and need support themselves – especially social opportunities and respite. Enabling carers to feel supported can be

as important for sustaining independent living and preventing acute admissions as the services for sufferers themselves.

- 3.15 **Start small but set clear expectations about future scale** – Some of the case studies deliberately began at a small scale to enable innovation and flexibility, but had clear expectations about growth and scaling up. Others were less clear at the outset about their longer term aims. It appears that while starting small (e.g. on branch, or a few dozen beneficiaries) is much better for enabling innovation, without clear aims about eventual scale and reach there is a risk new services can get stuck in ‘pilot’ mode or be wound-down without leading to real change.

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Halton's reminiscence boxes

Understanding the needs of care homes and their residents

In common with a growing number of local authorities, one of the priorities for Halton Borough Council is to combat loneliness and isolation among older people, as well as ensuring the most vulnerable get the support they need.

Halton library service's reminiscence box service launched last year and is now being rolled-out further. It was inspired by Liverpool Museums' award-winning '[House of Memories](#)' dementia awareness programme. *House of Memories* which is supported by the Department of Health and DCMS is principally a training and awareness programme. It aims to inspire professionals and carers about the many ways heritage collections and reminiscence boxes can be used to support people living with dementia.

Launching the new service was one of the first actions taken by Halton's newly appointed Outreach and Inclusion Officer. Hers was one of two new library outreach posts created through a staff restructure aimed at developing more community-based activities. Having attended a House of Memories course before taking on her new role, and inspired by the potential, the Outreach and Inclusion officer put together a business case for starting Halton's own reminiscence box service.

The plan was to start with a four-month pilot taking memory boxes into care settings. A launch event was used to engage partners including AgeUK, the Alzheimer's Society and local care homes. Box content included books and photographs from Halton's own local history collection, along with physical objects.

The Halton team also themed the boxes, with themes linked to the [Pictures to Share range of books](#) which Halton had previously invested in and which make up a large part of the [Reading Well: Books on Prescription](#) dementia book-list.

Many library services across the country run reminiscence activities or offer reminiscence boxes for loan. What is different about the Halton approach is that it is based on a nationally recognised model, and also that they are taking the service out to care settings (mainly care homes and sheltered accommodation) as part of a planned outreach programme.



Halton use [Pictures to Share](#) reminiscence books

The growth of Halton's community-based reminiscence activities was driven by two linked aims. One was the need to find a new way to serve residents of care homes and sheltered accommodation following the decision to close the mobile library service; the mobile service had visited 80% of the care homes in the borough. The other aim was increasing reach and ensuring the library service was supporting the most vulnerable.

Prior to starting the reminiscence box service, the outreach team had been attempting to fill the gap left by the closure of the mobile library

by taking books and other lending items to care homes in much the same way as the mobile library had done.

However, as they visited care homes and sheltered accommodation they started discussing the needs of the residents in more detail with residents themselves, care home staff, activity co-ordinators and managers. They realised that although the mobile service had been popular there were many care home residents the library service was not reaching. This was especially the case for residents with dementia and others no longer able to read for pleasure themselves. What those individuals needed more than book-lending was enriching face-to-face activity; for these groups, activities based around the collections would make more of a difference than the collections themselves.

It was this insight coupled with the learning from the *House of Memories* training that prompted the outreach team to switch from focusing only on book-lending for care settings to developing a more engaged reminiscence box model (although book lending is still offered to care settings too).

After piloting the service at six care homes and sheltered accommodation sites Halton's reminiscence box service now serves seven care settings including four from the initial pilot. The sessions are monthly and led by library staff, lasting 2 hours each time. The staff arrive with reminiscence boxes as well as deliveries of any loan books residents have ordered. Halton have also borrowed an idea from Cumbria library service, 'reminiscence bags' which are lighter, more portable and better for one-to-one use.

The box contents are selected by library staff. They prefer this to commissioning readymade boxes; not only is it cheaper but they can use their professional and local knowledge to select items with local significance. Typical

contents include; local photographs, books about the history of Halton, Pictures to Share books, smell/sniff bottles, toys, aftershave, pipes and advertisements from the past. The items tend to be from the 1930s to 1980s and follow themes (each linked to a Pictures to Share book) including *Childhood, Handicrafts, Holidays, Housework, In the Garden, School days, Sporting Life, Transport, Wartime, Working Life*.

The reminiscence box service is doing more than simply filling the gap left by the closure of the mobile library. The new service is taking library skills and resources out into the community to meet a growing need as the number of people living in care homes, and living with dementia in Halton rises. Just in the five years between 2010 and 2015 the number of people aged 65+ in Halton rose almost 20% from 18,100 to 21,500ⁱⁱ.

In terms of dementia the current estimate is that there are around 1,350 people in the borough living with dementia, 72% of whom are believed to have been diagnosed by their GPⁱⁱⁱ. Then, on top of the wider challenges of an aging population, is the added local issue in Halton - as in other parts of the Liverpool City Region - of health inequalities affecting older people in particular.

Learning and the importance of engaged care home staff

Piloting the service prior to a wider roll-out enabled the library service to test and refine their approach and make modifications which are strengthening the quality of the service. One of the first lessons was that although the service had not been designed exclusively for people with dementia most of those taking part did have dementia and had either chosen the sessions themselves, or care home staff had chosen it for them.

Another important lesson which had important operational implications was in the level of commitment needed from care homes.

Although the residents have been broadly similar across the different homes the library service discovered success depends on the degree of support and prevailing culture of the staff running each care home. In some care homes the service has been actively embraced and well supported by care staff. In others, library staff have had less direct support from frontline staff or care home managers.

The sessions worked less well where care home staff were unable to join in and where the care home took less responsibility generally. Conversely where commitment was good, attendance was also good, and care home staff taking part would know the residents, their names, and crucially, their physical and mental abilities. They also knew people's backgrounds and personal histories which is important for quality reminiscence activity.



Reminiscence sessions are led by library staff in care homes

In one case care home staff knew one man's father had been a carpenter. They told this to the library staff who in turn brought photographs and books about carpentry to the next session, which got a great reaction.

The learning from the pilot contributed to an internal review, out of which the library service

developed terms of engagement for care homes wanting sessions:

- There must be more than five people in regular attendance.
- A member of care home staff be present during sessions.
- There must be two members of library staff present in those sessions where people with dementia are taking part.

Making the service mainstream

Halton are still scaling up their reminiscence box service for care homes and sheltered accommodation and see significant potential as more people in their community move into care and are affected by dementia.

The costs of running the service at this level are modest, around 2 days' staff time per month to plan and deliver sessions in seven care settings. Despite being cheap to deliver, the service is generating real value from library collections and staff knowledge. It is enabling the library service to leverage their resources to support those in need, as well as meeting growing demand within the care sector for person-centred activities.

For care homes the reminiscence box service is provides an alternative to bought-in entertainment sessions which care homes also use to create enriching environments. In the coming years care home managers are likely to buy in more services like these to add to what their own activity co-ordinators can provide.

In Halton what began partly as a response to reduce costs has in fact led to the library service developing greater impact. As a result Halton is now committed to the reminiscence box service as part of their mainstream provision, and increasing the coverage is now a priority for the outreach and inclusion team.

Contact details

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ⁱ Reading Well: Books on Prescription is a national scheme in which library and healthcare professionals create carefully chosen sets of books which are available in all public libraries, to manage health and wellbeing

ⁱⁱ 65+ population from Halton BC census information

ⁱⁱⁱ Dementia prevalence from Halton BC GP dementia register combined with NHS England diagnosis rate.

Hertfordshire's Slipper Swaps

“Doing the same things in the same way to the same people with an increasingly ageing population is not a financially viable approach. The focus on prevention to reduce demand on reactive services also allows for a shift in the way services are commissioned and operate, with outcomes being coproduced with older people as a result of empowering and re-enabling them as opposed to providing services ‘to’ or ‘for’ them”

- Hertfordshire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – Ageing Wellⁱ

Joining up preventative action

Slipper swaps are events aimed at older and vulnerable people where you can exchange your worn-out slippers for a new anti-slip pair for free. Slipper swaps are usually publicised as accident prevention initiatives aimed at reducing the risks of trips and falls in the home - one the most common causes of A&E admissions among older people. For people who are already physically frail an emergency hospital admission can lead to a lengthy episode of ill health and sometimes permanent loss of independence.

Slipper swaps, which are usually held by organisations (or multi-agency groups) who support the elderly, are also about enabling those organisations to promote what they do and identify individuals at risk or in need. The organisations involved tend to be preventative services aimed at sustaining independent living and lessening the likelihood of people needing acute or emergency care in the future.

Since 2015 Hertfordshire libraries have been building slipper swaps up as an important part of the strategic approach to social care set at a corporate level by the County Council and NHS partners.

In 2016/17 they reached 530 individuals and gave out 372 pairs of slippers (560 pairs have been given out since the service began). The primary aim at each event is for organisations who provide support to meet as many of those who attend as possible. Typically, partner organisations arrange meet and greet tables in the room where the event is being held to catch the attention of attendees as they wait for their slippers. Some partners such as occupational therapists also give advice and demonstrate simple exercises on the spot.



New non-slip slippers are the hook for encouraging people to attend

The ageing population in Hertfordshire

According to the 2011 census there were around 170,000 people in Hertfordshire aged 65 and over. Hertfordshire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (known as the 'JSNA') anticipates that by 2035 there will have been a massive 70% increase in the number of residents aged 65+ compared to 2011. Being in poor health and living alone are two important indicators of risk among older people; in Hertfordshire around 46% of over 65s report poor health which limits their daily life, while 31% live alone.

Hertfordshire's JSNA also shows that in 2010/11 around 5,000 people aged 65+ were admitted to hospital as emergency cases following a trip or fall. The human cost of this is significant in terms of loss of independence and impact on other family members. In some cases an emergency hospital admission has then led to prolonged poor health with other complications. The financial cost is also significant. The annual cost to the NHS alone of 5,000 trips and falls across Hertfordshire is estimated at £20million. But added to this are the costs to local authorities and other agencies of additional personal and social care after someone is discharged from hospital. The costs of this follow-on care as a result of emergency admissions is estimated to be another £80million - quadruple that of the initial admission.ⁱⁱ

Scaling up slipper swaps through public libraries

With population ageing along with pressures on adult social care slipper swaps are becoming more common, often promoted by national non-governmental organisations like AgeUK and delivered by local groups. They are usually held in community halls, community centres and quite often public libraries. They

tend to be ad hoc, often paid for by short-term sources of funding or grant, and held in whatever venues are available. Their intermittent nature, and reliance on small organisations means attendance is often modest and those who do attend may see them as occasional one-offs.

What Hertfordshire libraries are trying to do is to scale up and regularise slipper swaps, holding them more frequently and in libraries where there is already high footfall.

Hertfordshire's main public service providers are very clear that the statutory sector alone cannot meet future demand for older people's care and that innovation will often come from outside the statutory sector. Not only that but they are now under a statutory requirement to advise the public on social care provision and help build the supplier market. So just as in other parts of the country Hertfordshire County Council and the local NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups are taking active steps to build a market of outcome-focused care and support for older people. To build such a market the organisations providing support must be able to reach their target audiences and slipper swaps do this in several ways.

The first is through the sheer scale and reach of libraries. In a county of 1.2 million people Hertfordshire's network of 46 libraries receive around 3.7m visits each year. The service has 158,000 unique book-borrowers and many more individuals use the library regularly to access the internet, take part in activities, and study (formally or for pleasure). Not only that but unlike other cultural institutions the demographic reach of libraries is spread equally from the most well-off to the poorest and across all ethnic backgrounds.

The second way in which slipper swaps are building reach is in the widespread level of

recognition libraries have as neutral trusted institutions and public spaces, and the practical fact that most people know where their local library is.

These two factors have resulted in Hertfordshire's slipper swaps proving an effective setting for promoting support for older people. They have also resulted in high levels of attendance which in turn gives service providers the access they need to individuals they can support.

For the library service the slipper swaps are also an opportunity to draw in new library users to whom they can also offer other services relating to health, well-being and independent living. Those services include Books on Prescription, digital skills courses, reminiscence collections, the home library service, heritage services, carer support, and social activities. Slipper swaps have also involved occupational therapists and social workers, staff and volunteers from the Alzheimer's Society, Neighbourhood Watch and Senior Watch, AgeUK, HertsHelp, Carers in Herts, Hertfordshire Independent Living and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue.

Learning and expanding

The most important aspect of organising slipper swaps has been securing the commitment and practical support of partners, involving them in the planning so they have appropriate staff present on the day (e.g. staff confident in directly advising members of the public). In Hertfordshire, the adult social care team also support the events by funding the slippers from their preventative projects budget.

As part of the partnership between the library service and adult social care, Hertfordshire libraries have prepared staff by ensuring each library branch has one person trained in approaching the kinds of social care issues and

enquiries they may face. This training is then cascaded to other staff in each branch. Each library has a designated permanent information stand for materials provided by adult social care and partners, such as AgeUK, about care issues. The slipper swap events are also used to promote the availability of social care information which is held by Hertfordshire Libraries themselves.



Slipper swaps enable preventative services to reach their target audience

Good promotion is vital to the success of these events. In Hertfordshire, in addition to central promotion, frontline library staff undertake a great deal of promotion themselves. Staff are given poster templates to adapt and modify. They also promote events on social media and face-to-face with library visitors as well as via local community groups, such as U3A.

Hertfordshire libraries are now continuing their slipper swaps as a mainstream part of their service. They are also now developing their partnership with colleagues in adult social care to plan more new services aimed at

improving the wellbeing of older people. One will be events to help older people avoid becoming victims of fraud and scams. This will also involve the trading standards department and other partners such as Neighbourhood Watch and Senior Watch, and the Police crime prevention team. Just as with slipper swaps, the format is about simplicity and scale; held in libraries to exploit footfall, offering useful gifts and giveaways to entice people through the door, and then face-to-face information and advice aimed at those who need support.

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ⁱ Hertfordshire's [most recent Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for older people](#) is focused on achieving a step-change in the model of care, towards a more asset-based and prevention-based approach

ⁱⁱ See [Exploring the system-wide costs of falls in older people in Torbay](#), The Kings Fund 2013

Touch a New World – digital independence in Kent

“Older and vulnerable residents are safe and supported with choices to live independently.”

- KCC Strategic Priorities

Helping the mentally fit but physically frail to remain independent

Over the next decade the number of people in Kent aged 70 and over is set to increase by 30% from 223,900 to 290,200.

It has long been argued that when we reach old age we are happier staying in our own homes rather than moving into residential care. From the perspective of public services this is also much cheaper.

As the population ages it is likely that even more people in their 70s, 80s and 90s will want to live in their own homes rather than in residential care. For those who fail the means test and would have to pay for a care home place the reasons for this may in part be economic. Those entitled to financial support may still choose to live at home for other reasons, for example emotional ties, wanting to stay near family, or a desire for continuing independence.

How government and society supports a growing number of very elderly people living at home is one of the biggest challenges facing the nation in the coming decades, and current systems are over-stretched. For those who choose to stay living at home the practical and emotional benefits must be balanced with the fact that in many communities community-based care and support is either stretched thin, or costly, or both.

Kent Libraries’ *Touch a New World* service is one way public services are trying to meet this challenge; it is designed to support those who are mentally fit and active but also physically frail.

The service idea is simple but in designing it the library service has cleverly combined the efforts and skills of several organisations.

Touch a New World was first piloted in 2013/14 by Kent library service and supports digital independence by providing face-to-face training at home and a tablet loan scheme. It is now delivered across all twelve districts of the county. It relies on volunteers from Time2Give; a county-wide volunteering programme managed by West Kent Communities. Time2Give has over 1,100 active volunteers who give around 5,500 days of their time. AgeUK and other organisations also co-ordinate their efforts, helping identify and refer individuals to *Touch a New World*.



Libraries work closely with Kent’s Community Wardens

The training is delivered by hand-picked volunteers from Time2Give. This includes

volunteers who are retired themselves with strong digital skills, for example someone in their 70s now who was an early digital adopter will have 30 to 40 years' experience of computing.

Initially the service was offered only to users of the Home Library Service, housebound individuals who signed up for deliveries of library materials to their homes. More recently it has been promoted further through publicity and outreach in partnership with other organisations. Nonetheless, the service is still operating at relatively small scale supporting on average one or two individuals in each of Kent's twelve districts; the speed at which suitable volunteers can be found is a key constraint.

The service is aimed at people who have never been online and never used, or owned, an internet-enabled device. Some users of the service, however, own tablet devices they have been given by friends or younger relatives which then sit in their boxes unopened. The original business case for the service focused on meeting the council's goals for shifting interactions with the public from face-to-face to online, and it was also to ensure housebound library service users did not miss out on accessing the digital training available in library branches. The reality, however, is that the service does more than simply enable older people to use touchscreens, request library books, or check their rubbish collections online.

Each *Touch a New World* user is matched by staff to a volunteer who then visits their home for weekly sessions over eight to ten weeks, lasting one hour each session. The training follows a basic progression from turning the device on, to getting online, navigating websites, communicating, and using online services like grocery shopping and banking.

The effect of digital skills on well-being and loneliness

On the face of it this seems like simple practical training in digital literacy. But the stories from the trainers and those who have received the training quickly reveal more complex and important outcomes.



[Touch a New World](#) is part of a network of support which helps people continue living in their own homes longer

One woman who received the training was housebound in her own home following treatment for a brain tumour. She was already using the Home Library Service but it was the workers from AgeUK who suggested she try *Touch a New World*. She was deeply frustrated at her immobility and desperate to regain her independence. She was especially upset that she could no longer get to the shops or Post Office to send birthday cards and gifts to her grandchildren. The volunteer who trained her explained how she could use the internet to send birthday cards and gifts to her family even though she was unable to leave the house. This revelation was transformative in practical terms and in terms of her well-being and confidence.

Another Home Library service customer who received the training had already been given a tablet computer for Christmas by her daughter. This woman, in her 80s, had been afraid to turn it on. Although she loved the idea of 'window-shopping' online, she feared

she might unwittingly be charged for the things she looked at. The volunteer, who first encountered computers in the 1980s when she taught herself MS-DOS accountancy software loaded on 5¼" floppy disks, explained how online shopping works and reassured her that you can browse without being charged. The same volunteer had also trained a 90-year old man whose daughter lives in Malaysia. He was keen to learn how to use Skype which he now does on his own device, on his own.

The true value of *Touch a New World* as a catalyst for joined-up support was explained by Stuart, one of Kent County Council's community wardens. We spoke to him as he visited the home of an elderly resident whom he checks in with during his daily beat around the village. The community wardens provide a uniformed presence in Kent's rural communities. Although originally conceived as a crime prevention resource their roles have evolved and now resemble a mixture of 'beat' policing, community development, social work, citizens' advice, and a knowledgeable village local. The elderly woman he is visiting took part in *Touch a New World* last year. She learned how to use a tablet with Jeremy, a volunteer. Now she can now use a tablet computer to keep in touch with the news, order shopping online, and she particularly enjoys playing the Words with Friends social gaming app. But perhaps the biggest difference *Touch a New World* has made for her is that she now feels less alone. The combination of the teaching sessions with Jeremy, and the fact she feels a little more in touch with local services and the wider world,

have made a real difference to her. Things she's seen and watched online have also become talking points for her chats with Stuart when he stops by. These little things can make the difference between someone staying connected within their community and someone becoming isolated and lonely.

Potential for scale-up

So far *Touch a New World* has operated on a small scale. But in a county with nearly a quarter of a million residents (and rising) aged 70+ the number of people this could help – living in their own homes, mentally fit but physically frail - is significant. The number of older people facing loneliness is also significant, with one in twenty adults in Kent estimated to suffer from loneliness.ⁱ

The ambition in the short term is that the service could increase participation from dozens of users to hundreds. But that is only the tip of the iceberg. With the number of people in Kent aged 70 or older soon to pass a quarter of a million, and with ever more people choosing or wanting to stay living in their own homes even as they become frail, *Touch a New World* could help thousands acquire the technology skills to remain independent. If this made the difference between living at home and going into care for even a fraction of them the human and financial benefits to Kent's population would be considerable.

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ⁱ Research by AgeUK into the prevalence of loneliness found 7 per cent of people 65+ in England reported that they always or often feel lonely [Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review](#), AgeUK (2011)

The Libraries Loneliness Project in Norfolk

“We know that feeling lonely and isolated is a direct cause of poor health. And it can make people vulnerable to scams and fraud and feel that they have nowhere to turn but our public services. But we also know that helping people feel less lonely can lead to a more independent, happier and healthier life.”

- Norfolk’s Older People’s Strategic Partnership

A county level campaign led by the Chief Executive

Norfolk is a sparsely populated county whose 47 libraries (plus 8 mobile libraries and a home reader service) serve a population of just under 900,000 residents. It is also a county where around one in five people aged 65+ are thought to suffer from loneliness.

“In Good Company” is a county-wide campaign launched in Autumn 2016 championed by the Chief Executive of Norfolk County Council which aims to drive out loneliness from the county¹. It is one of the ways the Council are meeting their priority of ‘supporting vulnerable people’.

The campaign is partly an emotional response to an emotive subject. Norfolk’s Chief Executive has often said she was spurred to act by the John Lewis ‘Man on the Moon’ Christmas commercial, but it is also a very rational response to one of the major challenges of an aging population. The campaign aims to change people’s behaviour by promoting positive ways people can connect with their neighbours and others in their community.

The County Council is seeking to encourage individuals to make pledges of support to the

campaign. Pledges can involve an action such as volunteering with charities, inspiring businesses to offer staff time off to volunteer, or simply being more conscious and proactive about ensuring that people who are displaying signs of loneliness are not forgotten or ignored.

The campaign has also prompted staff across all public services in Norfolk to consider what more they can do to tackle loneliness.



Norfolk libraries’ Knit and Natter

The library service response

Soon after the campaign was launched in late 2016 library service officers quickly saw that the scale of their service, with 4 million visits each year and a trusted presence in 47 communities, gave them a unique role and

responsibility to help tackle loneliness and respond to In Good Company.

“Libraries are places that are consistent in people’s lives, we don’t keep moving around we are static and reliable. People should be able to come to us and be assured of a warm welcome, be able to join in with something which will help them feel part of a group, feel wanted and connected again.”

- Norfolk libraries staff member

The *Libraries Loneliness Project* was launched in November 2016 and is the library service’s contribution to the council-wide campaign. The aim is to deliver a consistent county-wide offer so that anyone - library service staff, community groups, other statutory organisations - can signpost a lonely person to a library, confident that quality and effective support will be available. That consistent offer consists of:

- A warm and welcoming atmosphere, where staff actively listen and notice people.
- A weekly ‘Just A Cuppa’ social session.
- A timetable of regular activities (depending on size and staffing) including board games, local history, and arts and crafts which are equally attractive to men as to women and to people with different interests.

The aim is also to find local residents interested in helping run these activities so that they can be offered in all branches, even branches run by a solo member of staff.

Doubling of the number of activities

In the first few months of the *Libraries Loneliness Project* it has become the focus for a major effort to increase the number of activities hosted by libraries for older people.

It is also valued by the County Council at the corporate level due to the reach of the library network and the skillset of staff around information, advice, and signposting.

Although only a few months in, Norfolk libraries staff have already been able to double the number of weekly activities in libraries which older people could take part in from 57 weekly sessions to 113. These now include:

‘Just a Cuppa’ where people are invited to join each week for a cup of tea and conversation. This now takes place in 17 out of 47 libraries. Not only does it provide company and the possibility of friendship it also means staff can identify signs of loneliness and offer further support.

Colour Me Calm now runs in half of all library branches and is a great way to take part in a group activity but with less pressure to make conversation. For people who are shy, or out of the habit of socialising, the focus on colouring-books means you can dip in and out of conversation without fearing awkward silences. The sessions are very popular with women.

Knit and natter sessions are also run in half of all branches in partnership with Norfolk Knitters and Stitchers, a network with 87 groups across the county. They are run by a ‘tight knit’ group of volunteers meaning sessions require little additional support from library staff; all they request is a venue, tea and coffee. The group have also secured Lottery funding to buy materials with which they knit saleable items which are then sold by the International Aid Trust to fund overseas aid projects.

Scrabble sessions run in 15 libraries. One group of Scrabble diehards have turned their session in Kings Lynn Library into a daily occurrence, to the delight of library staff. The

players did not know each other beforehand, and travel in from outlying villages where some struggled to find opportunities to socialise. One man in his 80s is a fulltime carer for his wife but now regularly walks 5 miles in to Kings Lynn just to attend the Scrabble sessions. Just like the knitters, the Scrabble group ask only for a scrabble board, table, tea and biscuits.



Scrabble sessions are a great way to socialise

Library Impact Stories

The management culture of Norfolk’s library service places great importance on ensuring the actions of staff achieve the impact and effect they intend. One way they do this is to routinely gather data in the form of ‘impact stories’. These have a standard structure so that the data gathered over time is comparable and consistent. They have been doing this since 2015 and have collected 320 impact stories to date. Collecting impact stories for the *Libraries Loneliness Project* is treated just as importantly as other areas of the service, and staff use a data template to record:

- The library user’s situation
- The action staff took
- Any result for the library user

- How the interaction and action contributed to Norfolk County Council’s priorities

Staff also record their own reflections.

In Good Company along with the *Libraries Loneliness Project* are still in their early stages but already the library service has gathered 30 impact stories from the groups which are enabling them to increase and improve what they do. As they collect more impact stories the staff will be able to identify harder outcomes but for the moment the strongest evidence comes from the immediate reactions of people joining the new groups in Norfolk libraries.

“If you are a widow you don’t have anyone to go out and about with”

“If I wasn’t able to come here I wouldn’t have anywhere else to go”

“This group thing is fantastic – you’re meeting people getting out and about”

- Attendees at Libraries Loneliness Project groups

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ⁱ [In Good Company](#) has become a major county-wide campaign since its launch in December 2016

Wakefield – the first fully dementia friendly library

Caring for a loved-one with dementia

Richard and Barbara live on the outskirts of Wakefield, he is 89 and she is 87. Richard still drives and is physically active but Barbara cannot communicate verbally; she has had dementia for around 5 years. Richard is Barbara's husband and now her carer. Their daughter lives in Australia with adult children of her own. Richard and Barbara used to see their daughter and grandchildren regularly *"it was a wonderful chance to see the world - I got to know Melbourne better than Wakefield"* says Richard with a smile.

A care assistant comes to their house twice a day to help Barbara get up and dressed, and then in the evening to clean after dinner and get ready for bed.

Richard recently discovered that they also qualify for someone to come once week to take Barbara to the shops for two hours. He took it up as soon as he found out *"well why not!"*. The two hours are now his main respite when he has time to himself. He could book more respite time but it costs £15 an hour and comes in a minimum two-hour block. He does this occasionally but it's not something he can afford regularly.

Richard tells us that although Barbara is unable to speak, or interact socially, people with her stage of dementia still need to get out of the house regularly and see different surroundings.

Several times a week Richard drives Barbara to groups put on by community centres, churches and libraries for dementia sufferers. Besides the Active Minds session at Sandal Library they have found two other weekly 'dementia teas'. Richard enjoys getting out and about but Barbara's dementia is more advanced than most others who come to Active Minds at the library. When he first came he was surprised there was no-one else as advanced as Barbara and he wondered where everyone else with her stage of dementia was; he is still not sure.

We asked Richard whether he gets much of a break, *"not much"* he says, and that is a large part of why he comes to Active Minds. It takes the strain off him and he can have a normal conversation with staff or other carers. *"It's getting harder"* Richard explains, *"with an aging population – I retired at 65, I am 89 now. That's a long time."*

Dementia: the challenge for sufferers, services, and carers

In 2015 Wakefield's small branch library in Sandal became the first fully dementia friendly public library in the whole of the UK. It was the culmination of an ambitious project which began in 2012 when Wakefield library service secured a £1.1 million capital investment for

library buildings as part of its whole service review.

Other libraries around the country have integrated dementia friendly designs but thanks to a partnership with the Alzheimer's Society Wakefield Libraries were able to commission a full building refurbishment

steered by a comprehensive set of Alzheimer's Society guidelines.

Using the guidelines ensured everything from surfaces and signage to carpet and entrance mat colours were all designed to be more usable for those library users living with dementia.

There are an estimated 850,000 people in the UK living with dementia today. This is set to rise to one million people by 2025, and by 2050 the figure is projected to have risen to 2 million. The risk of dementia rises as we get older and among those 850,000 people living with dementia 773,500 are aged 65 and over.

Wakefield's over 65 population as a whole is close to the national average (one in five) but around Sandal library the older population is much higher making it an obvious location for the dementia friendly refurbishment.

As the numbers of those living with dementia increases so will the burden on the NHS and social care budgets, not to mention the increased responsibility for children and spouses who take on the role of carer for a loved one who develops dementia. Besides the demands on health and social care agencies those who care for a family member also need support themselves in what can be a demanding role emotionally and physically. Public Health England and others have highlighted the risks faced by carers of isolation, anxiety and depression.

Partnerships lead to new ways of working

Wakefield's capital investment for library buildings came at the same time as revenue budgets were being reduced. It also came just as the library's development team moved into a new civic building, "Wakefield One". The team found themselves sitting in open plan with officers from finance, building services,

sport and leisure and public health.

Serendipitous conversations were struck up about how services could work closer together to get more done with reduced budgets.

In the new open plan office library staff also began bumping into external partners they had never met before and seized the chance to network. One new relationship was between the libraries staff and workers from the Alzheimer's Society. On hearing about the capital investment in libraries the Alzheimer's Society staff shared their long-held frustration that they often found themselves being shown around buildings after the main construction was complete and being asked how to make them more dementia friendly. Almost always it was too late; if only they were asked 12-18 months earlier in the process it would be easy to make the right choices on layout and design (for little or no extra cost) to implement their best practice guidelines for dementia friendly buildings.

Fortunately the library refurbishment programme was at an early enough stage of planning that the library service could decide to use the Sandal Library refurbishment to create the UK's first fully dementia friendly library.



Wakefield's Active Minds session at Sandal Library

What does a dementia friendly library look like?

The Alzheimer's Society recommendations for dementia friendly environments focus on how to make visitors with dementia feel "comfortable, supported and more independent". Some of the main features are:

- No purple, green or blue colours which dementia sufferers can find hard to distinguish (Wakefield use a lot of red for coloured furnishings).
- Grey skirting boards and door frames to create visually well-defined entrances and exits.
- Flat colours instead of patterns, as spots and stripes can appear to move.
- Plain carpeting and no contrast-coloured mats as these can look like holes in the ground.
- Minimising mirrored and reflective surfaces because people with dementia often perceive themselves as younger than they actually are, and mirrors can cause confusion and distress.
- Traditional furniture e.g. chairs, which look like traditional chairs. Also higher arms and seats to make getting up and down easier.
- Wood finishes to provide a warmer more traditional feel.
- Symbols to accompany all text signs for those who cannot read. All the signs at Sandal library are accompanied by library-specific symbols and logos which Wakefield commissioned.
- TV screens displaying old photos of the local area and messages about services.

The detailed specification for a dementia friendly library is available on Wakefield Council's website.ⁱ

Active Minds sessions – high impact and low cost

Sandal Library is now the centre of Wakefield's library service activities for people with dementia. The core of these services are the regular Active Minds sessions. The library also holds a set of reminiscence boxes containing multi-sensory objects, including photographs, smells and sounds – and a guide to using these resources for a structured session.

Active Minds sessions were not designed exclusively for people with dementia but it is mainly people with dementia who attend, either with a friend or carer. Staff from NHS organisations also often attend as it helps them identify individuals who may be eligible for further support. As in many parts of the country, NHS and social care professionals are actively seeking opportunities to identify people who might benefit from preventative help which could sustain independent living for longer.



Playing the 'Countdown' board-game at Sandal Library

There are two parts to an Active Minds session, the 'active' part and the 'mind' part. The 'active' part is usually a physical activity like indoor bowls on the carpet played from seats. The 'mind' part is a cognitive or talking activity such as a quiz (e.g. the board game of the Countdown TV show) or jigsaws. The level of participation is entirely up to each person and their ability, and library staff keep constant

watch making sure everyone is involved and the difficulty level is appropriate.

Besides the refurbishment costs of Sandal library the Active Minds sessions have added virtually nothing to the cost of running the library except for teabags, milk and biscuits and a few dementia-appropriate board games (some of which were bought with donations). Equipment and refreshments are estimated to cost £300-400 per year. Staffing arrangements have not changed and the activities have simply been integrated into the team's working day. In addition the growing collection of 'dementia kit' Sandal library now holds is now also loaned to other branches and sent from branch to branch via the library service vans.

Rise in visits and transferable lessons

User numbers at Sandal Library are up since the refurbishment and in the first 12 months visits increased 73%. That initial surge has now levelled, with the library now welcoming 6,000 more visitors per year than before the refurbishment.



Sketch of the community garden being built at Sandal Library

The popularity of Active Minds means staff often have to divide the attendees into two

smaller groups, but they feel this is a good problem to have. The increased buzz and popularity along with the refurbishment has also helped a new Sandal Library Friends group to get established. The group are now raising money for a community garden at the rear of the library and have drawn up a set of plans themselves.

Wakefield libraries services now have another series of Active Minds sessions up and running at nearby Normanton Library. Even though the branch has not been fully-refitted for dementia the activities take place along similar lines showing that the approach can adapt.

Sandal will remain a one-off, a 'concept library' of sorts, which is helping others in Wakefield and across the country understand how to put dementia friendly ambitions into practice. As a unique fully-operational example it is packed with lessons to borrow or transfer to other libraries across the country. One obvious transferable approach is the dementia friendly signage (text and images) designed for Sandal Library but replicable anywhere, the colour schemes for floors and surfaces, and the furniture choices. The Active Minds activities can also be replicated anywhere at little or no cost. These sessions in particular, alongside the design and layout, are what bring the dementia friendly library alive and provide the much-needed respite for carers like Richard.

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¹See <http://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Documents/libraries/sandal-library-making-it-dementia-friendly.pdf> for the detailed specification of Wakefield's dementia friendly library