

**Birmingham City Council co-produced review of day
opportunities: Phase two**

**Draft report by RedQuadrant of the programme of
engagement led by the Empowering People Team**

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Executive summary

In 2022 RedQuadrant led an independent co-produced review of day opportunities commissioned by Birmingham City Council. RedQuadrant recruited and trained people from Birmingham to lead a programme of co-production and engagement. This group formed the Empowering People Team (EPT) including people who use day services, specialist colleges, family carers, providers and other professionals. The Council wanted to understand the impact of the pandemic on people and services and wanted to hear what people valued about day opportunities.

In June 2023 Birmingham commissioned a second phase of co-production with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the aspirations, challenges and barriers that people identified in the first phase. This included a new round of recruitment and training of EPT members - the EPT grew to 23 people in total. The engagement programme sought to also reach a wider range of seldom heard voices to understand what they would want from services and how Birmingham can support people and services in the future.

This is the report from this second phase of co-production and the intention is that this will inform the development of a commissioning strategy for day opportunities and a service improvement plan for internal day services. The findings from this second phase of the review are set out in detail in this report and as with the first report, this is presented in the voice of the people attending over 40 visits and interviews with day services, carers groups and colleges in Birmingham.

Key themes from phase 2

One size does not fit all – those interviewed had a wide range of interests, aspirations and motivations for using day services. They valued taking part in activities with the people they saw as their community, supported by people they trusted, trained to meet their needs and who knew them. They didn't want to be constrained by day service location and hours – they wanted options at weekends, in the evenings and to access the community across Birmingham. People valued their day services. Many spoke of the potential for day centres to be hubs where the community is invited in and where people can get a wide range of help and support across a variety of issues.

The people we spoke to wanted to have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of life, being independent, having relationships, working and volunteering in the community. Services and staff needed the skills, flexibility and resources to support people to make the most of the abilities they had and to overcome the barriers they faced in the wider community.

Continuity and certainty were also important. Families/carers needed continuity in terms of time, location and activity as they needed to plan lives, work and other caring responsibilities around these. Staff also needed a level of continuity to enable planning in terms of resources, staffing and transport. Some staff spoke of the time, effort and logistics in organising new activities especially those in the community and the restrictions they experienced in terms of opening hours and transport.

Across the services and the people we met, there was an enormous range of expertise, energy and commitment to making the services they provided accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities and older people. However, they felt the wider community was not a welcoming place and often presented barriers to inclusion. The citizens, carers and staff also wanted Birmingham City Council to use its influence to raise the profile of older people and people with disabilities in the wider community through its powers and responsibilities in terms of employment, economic development, city centres, planning and transport. The biggest barrier was transport and this needed to be a priority.

The people we interviewed told us that they felt they didn't know about all the things that were happening across Birmingham. Many young people in colleges didn't know about the day services that were available and carers told us they felt the services they knew about were for older people and wouldn't be suitable for the people they cared for. Carers also said that finding out about services, support and getting funding for these was complicated, frustrating and a constant battle. People wanted timely and accessible information across a wide range of issues and support to help them understand the options available and to link them to other services.

People identified that high quality and accessible social work, assessment and review was essential in enabling people to get the support they needed. People spoke about delays and the quality of these and the impact this had on individuals and families. Carers were also fearful about the impact of changes. The transitions in people's lives from younger to adult services, but also as carers got older or health conditions changed, were the points at which most help was needed if opportunities were to be realised and crises avoided.

The people we spoke to wanted to have a voice and be heard. Many said they felt heard in the interviews and wanted to know what would happen next after the interviews had finished. The EPT have said they feel the work they have done through this review is important and they want this to continue. Their confidence has grown in engaging with their peers and others and they have committed to supporting the next stages of the review. The services we visited asked for feedback on the actions that will be taken forward in the commissioning strategy and the internal service improvement process. The EPT met with RedQuadrant to agree on the key points that they would like to see addressed through these processes.

Recommendations

1. People need a wide range of day opportunity options that reflect the full range of needs and preferences – including age-appropriate activities for both younger and older people, with facilities and the right support for people with multiple and complex needs.
2. Services need to be ambitious and aspirational for the citizens they support, building on their strengths and abilities and supporting them to pursue their interests, keeping them active and in touch with friends and family, and supporting them to get into employment and volunteering roles.
3. Day opportunities need to have community at the core – build on the community that exists in centres and invite in others from the wider community and other services. Services can be community hubs that connect people with each other and essential services – places where people can get advice, advocacy and guidance.
4. People want to access the wider community and activities as any other citizen can do – the community is not restricted to 10-3, Monday to Friday. People pointed out that there are 7 days a week in their lives, which start when they get up and end when they go to bed.
5. In the wider community facilities and attitudes need to change – some services already work to promote awareness of accessibility and inclusion. People want the Council to do more to improve transport, toilets and other facilities in the community through its wider powers and responsibilities.
6. Day opportunities need to be recognised as the essential services they are and be given the same status as other services. The complex and diverse range of skills, experience and support provided needs to be developed through the right training and supported by care managers, regulators and commissioners.
7. Colleges and day services want to be actively involved in supporting assessment and planning so that families are supported throughout their different life transitions enabling people to get the right support when they need it - including when needs change.
8. Services asked for greater trust and flexibility to develop new opportunities and to work in partnership with others in the community. They also wanted practical advice and support in setting up social enterprises and attracting funding.
9. Some services felt that there wasn't a level playing field when it came to funding and access to referrals. They wanted the council to encourage and make it easier to develop new partnerships, initiatives and activities and attract referrals. Direct payments were an opportunity to do this but these weren't clearly understood by families and for some small providers it presented problems.
10. Citizens, carers and staff wanted to be heard and want to be engaged in the development of their services.

The brief for phase two of Birmingham's co-produced review of day opportunities

In 2022 Birmingham City Council commissioned RedQuadrant to lead an independent co-produced review of day opportunities in the city. As part of this work RedQuadrant recruited and trained people with lived experience, bringing them together as a group to lead a programme of engagement sessions where people could give their views – together they formed the Empowering People Team (EPT). The EPT include a wide range of people involved in day services – the people who use them, families, carers, providers and other professionals. For this first phase the Council wanted to understand the impact of the pandemic on people and services and wanted to hear what people valued about day opportunities. Appendix 1 presents a summary of the findings from this first phase of co-production.

In June 2023 Birmingham commissioned a second phase of co-production with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the aspirations, challenges and barriers that people identified in the first phase. They committed to continue and extend the membership of the EPT, supporting them to ensure the voices of citizens and family carers are heard in the development of two key pieces of work:

- An internal day services improvement plan
- A commissioning strategy for externally delivered day opportunities

The brief for this phase was to deliver a programme of engagement and production of a report that would inform reports to Cabinet in 2024 setting out plans for day opportunities development in Birmingham.

This included a new round of recruitment and training of EPT that has extended to 23 people in total. The engagement programme sought to also reach a wider range of seldom heard voices to understand what they want from services and how Birmingham can support people and services in the future.

Delivering phase two of the review of day opportunities

There were three key components to delivering this phase of the review:

1. Training new members of the EPT and preparing them to contribute to the delivery of engagement (October/November).
2. Overseeing the development and delivery of a programme of engagement and co-production led by the EPT (November to February).
3. Capturing the outputs from this programme for inclusion in a report that will support the development of a commission strategy for day opportunities and a service improvement plan for internal day centres (March).

This work was to build on the independent co-produced review that developed a group of people with lived experience and carers to lead co-production activity supported by Red Quadrant. This report went to Cabinet in April 2023. This captured what's important to people who use services, their carers and provider staff. It also captured what doesn't work well currently and the barriers to people achieving the outcomes they want. The key findings are summarised in Appendix 1 below.

It was important for this phase of the review to engage seldom-heard voices. In phase one the EPT were conscious that there were people and families who would benefit from day services who were not currently accessing these and who could potentially benefit from them in the future.

All day services (internal and external) were offered the opportunity to participate. In addition, we wanted to hear "seldom heard" voices and the programme of interviews and visits was designed to include:

- Carers groups located in the Birmingham communities including people not currently using day services.
- Carers/families and young people currently attending colleges.
- Services providing support to people with profound and multiple learning disabilities.
- Older people day services

The aim for this phase was to take the conversation on to get views on what needed to change and how best to do this in partnership with people, communities and services. The West Midlands ADASS Day Services Toolkit was a resource that the programme team drew on to develop four key questions that would frame the discussions:

1. We want to hear about what will help you do more things that you want to do.
2. What would need to change to make this happen?
3. What are your plans for the future / after college?
4. What can the council do to make your days better?

A key challenge identified at the start of the review was the need to support people to think beyond the current services that are in place. A guide to the interviews was developed to explain the purpose and context for this phase of the review and this included a summary of the key messages from phase one and 10 “images of possibility” with pen pictures of innovative services nationally and locally.

This guide and the questions were developed with the EPT and services at Moseley Day Centre, The BCC Transitions Team and Cerebral Palsy Midland (CPM). Given the breadth and diversity of services visited it was important to work closely with staff in groups and at services to support communication and ensure this was tailored for the people we were meeting. Victoria College and Heart of Birmingham College also worked with the EPT and RedQuadrant to develop accessible versions of the questions that would enable people with communication needs to contribute to the interviews. These used images and accessible language:

1. What do you do now?
2. What would you like to do in the future?
3. What help or support would you need?
4. What would make things better?
5. What ideas do you have?

Over forty interviews, visits and online meetings were held with carer groups, colleges and day services. In total over 550 people were involved including 400 people who use these services and over fifty family members and carers. Just over 100 staff supported people’s engagement and they also provided their ideas and views. These visits were led by 23 EPT members working together and supported by RedQuadrant.

Co-producing Day Opportunities – Recruiting and training new members of the EPT

This report has been developed with members of Birmingham's Empowering People Team (EPT). The Empowering People Team (EPT) was developed during the previous review of day opportunities in 2022. Membership was open to and drawn from people who use day opportunities or were carers of people who do. This included people involved both in externally commissioned services and those in internal services. The EPT has developed a set of principles as a guide co-production work and this is included at Appendix 2.

The original EPT members were approached to work with RedQuadrant and Birmingham City Council on this further piece of work. Because of the range and number of visits another round of recruitment to the EPT was undertaken and another 15 people were trained some from organisations already involved and some from new parts of the community including college students and older people's centres.

Due to Birmingham's current financial challenges the start of this co-production work was delayed thus compressing the time available for the coproduction work to take place. This in turn necessitated a different approach being taken to the induction and training of new EPT members.

People joined for a single induction and training session and then worked with original EPT members to undertake visits and conversations supported by their carers, plus Birmingham City Council and/or Red Quadrant staff.

Throughout the visits, these support staff have checked in with EPT members new and established and ensured they felt they had the information and confidence to undertake the visits

One of the outcomes of this approach was that those original EPT members have increased in confidence from supporting new members and some of the quieter members are now confident to speak up in larger group situations. The new members have increased in confidence over the period of the work. This has been evidenced by their willingness to appropriately share their personal and for some, their distressing experiences, as part of the group.

EPT members have commented on the difference it has made to them personally to be doing something important and benefitting the wider community of day opportunity users. This has been expressed as improving their confidence, speaking skills and mental wellbeing as a result of being heard and feeling useful.

This work has demonstrated not only that coproduction is beneficial to both those commissioning services but when undertaken with appropriate training and support also to those who join as coproducers.

EPT members have all said that they want to continue being part of the group and are keen to undertake further and wider projects. The expanded EPT now includes a range of people from all parts of the adult population needing support to live a good life and have good day experiences as part of that, including carers. [Think Local Act Personal](#) (TLAP) talks about effective coproduction resulting from building long-term relationships between those responsible for delivering services and those using them. If it is supported to develop going forward, Birmingham's EPT is a significant asset and means to achieve this in the city.

Findings from the visits and interviews by the Empowering People Team

This chapter details the findings from the interviews and visits. These discussions were wide ranging in nature and included contributions from staff who were supporting people with communication and in attending the sessions. The feedback is structured around the key themes from the sessions and also includes views and opinions from staff and managers from the services, in response to the issues raised by people who use the services.

The final section in this chapter highlights some of the quotes and comments from the visits to older people's services. This was undertaken as a separate programme of visits led by commissioning and a member of the EPT. This is captured in a separate report completed by commissioning and is attached at Appendix 3.

One size does not fit all.

In this second phase, we sought to hear the views of those who currently do not use traditional day services. We contacted and arranged interviews with carers groups and those from the diverse community groups in Birmingham, specialist schools and colleges and those whose self-organised activities delivered in different ways to traditional centres:

"Most day care centres are full of old people."

"We need fun places, a fun HUB, with a cinema and things we like to do. People would like to do things in the evening and at the weekend"

"My son has a PA [Personal Assistant] five days a week. We tried a day centre one day per week but there was no support."

The care staff in one community group that organises activities across the city said that more "enrichment" groups like theirs were needed:

"We want to expand what we do - Not stopping at 25 but also for older people."

"Traditional day services are seen as full of older people – our parents (those we support) would see going to these as 'regressing.'"

"When my son leaves college, he will need somewhere that is sociable, provides sensory stimulation, non-verbal-drama, music, trips out, all age-appropriate for a young man."

“Young people need to be as independent as possible. Encourage them to do work or do volunteering. Support needs to be more accessible.”

We visited colleges for young people with special educational needs. A major theme was people wanting to get training and education, support to work and to volunteer:

“I want to go part-time at college and part-time at my day centre (an external daycare centre).”

“I’d like to have a job stacking food in a supermarket, like to learn more about computers.”

“I’d like to be more involved in art, hair and beauty course, make-up, be able to go to a restaurant or the movies with friends.”

We heard many examples of people getting work placements and working with support. Many young people spoke of interests and skills they were developing:

“X buys broken phones and fixes them – look at the skills the person has and build opportunity around it.”

“I would like to be a car mechanic. I know I would need to get experience of fixing cars.”

People also said that it was difficult to get the right roles and maintain employment:

“Training and the job afterwards need to match. One person trained as a cleaner then was sent to a packing job which was not what he wanted.”

“This centre used to be a ‘forward to work’ centre but the council stopped enterprises to offer employment about 10 years ago so now people are stuck and have gone backwards. Can we restart a modern version?” (staff comment)

Many people said they had aspirations to work and to contribute positively to communities:

“I would like to be doing things that make me feel valued eg doing accessibility work for the council and working with journalists to campaign.”

“Training and getting qualifications. I would like to train and go out to work – I need help to find out about things.”

“Some people have said that they would like help with reading and writing – to be more skilled at reading correspondence.”

It should also be noted that we also spoke to some young people who were now in traditional day services, who did have ambitions to work but found that there wasn't the support required to work in the roles that they wanted to have. Others spoke of placements that had failed because they weren't thought through and the employer didn't understand what was required to make the placement work.

We heard from someone who wants to start their cake-making business and wants help with web design and business cards. Others in mainstream centres also had aspirations to contribute to their communities:

“Citizens do grounds maintenance and decorating at the centre. I want to know how to do that for people outside in the community.”

“I want to be more involved in helping to run the centre. Be part of interviews for new staff.”

To open up the conversation in interviews we started by asking people what they do now and what they enjoy the most. People were encouraged to talk about all the things they do – not just those at the centre they are attending – and not just the things they do in the day.

“Because there is not enough to do I set up my own sessions for my son and others.”

“We have a weekly evening music group.”

“I am developing skills I have never had before and I am in my 30s now.”

“I work as a volunteer – however sometimes people are not understanding my needs.”

“I may look OK but they can't see the impact of my disability.”

Where it was possible, we shared the “images of possibility” we had collected and asked people what they liked. At one centre they said they were inspired by social enterprises that encouraged work and volunteering - Pulp Friction, Mudlarks and Rowan were models people liked.

One group said it inspired them to want to have a social enterprise and they wanted it based at their centre. They already had an allotment and wanted to do more.

Another spoke about the list of things he wanted to do. This included gardening, exercising in the gym, doing more sports, learning to ride a bike and getting a job:

“We haven’t done swimming here but used to take a group regularly at another place. “

“Used to have lunch there as well. In the past have also taken people to the gym. “

“Milly’s a club where citizens could meet friends when our centre was closed has closed. The support it gave (music entertainment, education crafting) is missed.”

Here is my community.

This idea of community was the major theme in discussions both in phase one and phase two and the community and friendship that people felt within services was reiterated in the interviews.

In many interviews, people spoke of feeling safe and this was a major theme for the carers with whom we spoke in phase one. What they valued most was having services that they could rely on and that they knew provided a safe and familiar environment:

“Social contact – the friendship and bonds they have with people through the service are important – someone who knows and understands you.”

“this is the only place where my daughter meets with people she has known for years and is able to have peer/equal relationships with others which is vital to her quality of life.”

“Wherever they go, trust is essential because our young people are vulnerable.”

“Where they go now the staff know them and the young people know each other. They have flourished and are kept safe.”

“Cultural understanding is important. Services need to be able to respond to different faiths and not just doing different celebrations. Everybody’s backgrounds are important. Respect and share!”

“Safeguarding – we all safeguard each other. We are all safeguarders and know what to do if we have concerns about someone.”

“A good day service is a community – needs stability and shared experiences.”

We want things to do things in the evenings and weekends

Some staff at centres we visited spoke about working closely with families to help activities fit around family time:

“People want the centre to still be here. It’s their community and want to be able to access it evenings and weekends.”

“It would be good to have more support in the evenings and weekends (lack of social interaction during the weekends).”

“I am sometimes lonely at the weekends.”

A number of the groups liked the example of Gig Buddies and their stay-up-late campaign. We asked people to use their imagination to think about anything they wanted to do. People spoke about holidays and trips to the beach:

“I want to travel to see family and friends abroad.”

“I would like to be more independent with ‘life skills’, like to be able to go to the beach or go on holidays and socialise with others more.”

“As carers, we are getting older and we want to leave our kids with memories.”

People wanted to access sports and leisure centres but they were constrained in when they could go and for how long. An example was given of a regular swimming session that a day service accesses which only provides access to the group for 45 mins at a specific time each week. This included the time for changing which, for this group, means they have 20 minutes in the water at most each week.

Inviting the community in

People and staff also spoke about the potential for inviting the community and other services into the buildings and services they currently attend:

“We should develop better links with health services inviting them in.”

“College students used to come in and demonstrate how to cook things. This was stopped by covid – could the Council facilitate cross-organisation relationships in a strategic way for all-day opportunities?”

“One service suggested the flexible use of catering staff. The staff at this centre would be keen to help teach cooking, simple food hygiene, food care food storage and other food-related things but they had no flexibility in catering staff contracts to do so.”

Day services and colleges were already accessible and welcoming environments for people, and they could be opened up to others when not in use in the evenings and weekends. This would make the most of facilities and also be an opportunity for services to find out about others, make connections and enable people to make new friendships.

“We should work better in partnership with colleges and others.”

“Perhaps the college could be open at the weekend and in the evenings – the facilities are accessible, and the staff understand the needs of people coming to the building. We could do different kinds of activities and have fun things to do.”

The idea of centres being “Hubs” was a common suggestion. There was a belief that Birmingham needs to use the community assets more, at evenings and weekends and also open them up for others to use.

“We should have young person’s HUBs across the city.”

“Facilitate people going to other centres – ideas exchange.”

“Be more collaborative and work with other centres and organisations within the city.”

“Better communication with other BCC centres, so that resources that one centre has would be available to other centres.”

Accessing the wider community

People also talked about the “community” outside of the day services. This is where many people felt the opportunities were and they had a long list of activities, excursions and experiences they wanted to have. They also wanted more independence to do the things they see others doing – many of which are the day-to-day activities that others take for granted:

“I want support to do things that I have never done independently before – the hairdressers, Cinema, Bowling, Restaurants, Holidays Theatre/concerts”

People wanted to access the community more. In many interviews people were eager to experience and be part of the “wider community”, but it was difficult to access and some were fearful of it:

“It is not safe out there so I stay in at home.”

“I don’t like the outside world as it scares me so I love coming here and meeting people like me- they don’t judge.”

“I would like to go to the pub but feel ‘ashamed’.”

This anxiety and concern was mirrored by the staff. They also felt the responsibility to ensure that trips and excursions were managed in a way that left positive impacts and benefits for people:

“challenging behaviour is misunderstood out in the community so trips needs to be carefully planned and resourced.”

People had lots of examples of activities they were either able to take part in through the centres they visited or also in their time away from centres;

“I like to do blind football and cricket (at another centre he attends).”

Others spoke about activities they used to do and how much they would like to do them again:

“Being able to go to clubs like the Special Olympics club at Kingsbury Athletics Club.”

People said they would like to do things at times and in places along with others in the community – the staff said they would like to do this but staffing availability and funding were barriers. There was a recognition that this was important for people and families.

“I want to have respite away from my family, more support in the community at the weekends and evenings”

Staff saw the value and understood the importance of connecting people with the wider community. Often staff would speak about things they used to do, sometimes before the

pandemic, and others were reflecting on activities they did in other roles which highlighted the differences present across services:

“Organising, building community links and outings with attendant risk assessments and pre-visits all require capacity. E.g. an outing to the local fire station was well received but took a lot of organising.”

“We have to build links with places in the community, e.g. gyms – have to do the groundwork – once we were regulars people knew us and knew what to expect and how to support. Important to make those connections. Need time and people which is a cost.”

“The leisure centre we use has a changing bed and a hoist on the slide but not a hoist on the changing table. They have some things (equipment) but not everything; “This is what we have got and this is all that’s provided.”

We asked everyone what needs to change to make the community more accessible. Citizens and staff were clear that accessing the community was of fundamental importance if people were to fulfil their potential and have the lives they wanted to lead. Transport was a central issue across the board and their opinions and ideas are captured below. However, there was also a wider discussion to be had regarding attitudes, facilities and resources required to enable the objective of accessing the community a reality:

“More representation of disabled people in society so people don’t stare.”

“Give Radar keys to all students, so they can access disabled toilets without having to look for people to let them in.”

“Have disabled toilets accessible from the outside of buildings, so even if the building is shut the toilet can still be used.”

“Use Day Care Centres and Youth Centres better – Day Care Centres are shut evenings and weekends – Youth Centres are shut during the day and only open evenings and weekends.”

“Sort out more changing places, ramps and transport.”

“Improve services like wheelchairs and special shoes. They take so long people’s needs have changed by the time they get them.”

“Make sure town planners consider needs of larger wheelchair users.”

“Have a disability awareness campaign to encourage a greater welcome for people with disabilities.”

“We could do more things at Longbridge care home complex (which has public access for gym, slimming world, Zumba classes and café.)”

“Training for the wider community to be accessible (e.g. symbols, basic awareness of communication needs, maybe basic Makaton, easy read).”

Transport

Transport was the most reported issue across all the interviews. It was seen as crucially important, not only for accessing the community but for getting to and from services and centres. It presented a barrier to many:

“Provision of transport is essential. Son has autism and acute anxiety which prevents him travelling on the bus.”

It was also a barrier with mobility issues and in wheelchairs. Specialist transport services are seen as unreliable and difficult to book:

“The buses are taken up by all the schools – centres operate at the same time as schools – services are concentrated in certain areas at same time. Same issue with taxis – schools are prioritised.”

Other transport options were also seen as inflexible:

“Transport is a block. For example, two men who live in the same shared housing cannot go to bingo together because the one in a large wheelchair cannot get transport to get there.”

Taxis could be expensive and again there were stories of drivers whose vehicles were unsuitable for large wheelchairs refusing to take people or they were unwilling to accommodate after bookings.

One company used by BCC required that all their cabs are accessible and drivers have to be trained but even these may not meet every need they encounter – for example, newer bigger wheelchairs won't fit in all taxis safely (turned inside the cab with back secured):

“This was a health and safety and insurance issue that people needed to understand – their licence and livelihood was at stake. The fare they charge is the same regardless of access needs, unlike some taxi providers. Each

passenger has their own needs and there needs to be some way of capturing this to ensure the right allocation of cab”

Other companies were said to increase charges for people in wheelchairs or if they needed support with access. This was viewed as an equality and rights issue for people and was a significant barrier to use.

Many centres had access to their own vehicles and this provided them flexibility and increased options for the service in terms of trips and access to activities and community visits. They also reported issues in terms of cost of maintenance and staffing. Recruiting and retaining drivers was an issue and the suitability of vehicles meant that the numbers who could use and when was a restriction:

“Our service has 12 minibuses which deliver to and collect from the centre - but they are idle during the day because we don’t have drivers so people are ‘stuck’ in the centre.”

Some people spoke positively about travel training they had received and the boost to independence this gave them:

“I would like to have travel training and practice going on public transport.”

“I can travel independently and have been travel trained – I catch the bus to the charity shop I work in.”

“I used to be worried about going on the bus, but now I am able to use the bus on my own.”

Transport was recognized as a city-wide issue and people wanted Birmingham Council to take a lead role:

“the Council need to put pressure on transport providers to accommodate larger wheelchairs.”

“Day opportunities need to be local and be able to pick up the young people and drop them home.”

“Can families use their mobility payments/vehicles more for day and evening activities – can the Council help in setting expectations and fostering partnerships with families?”

“Ensure community transport is able to access the city. If we go in the centre parking is difficult and the city centre is not accessible.”

Information about what is available

In the interviews, people shared their knowledge of other services and activities. The EPT were able to share their knowledge and speak about services they liked and they were also keen to hear about the range of activities and services they had. There was considerable interest in finding out about great activities or places that people enjoyed visiting.

From the interviews, the young people we spoke to at colleges had very little understanding of the range of services available to them when they left. Staff wanted to support families in planning and making decisions but didn't know where to signpost people to and they did not have information that they could share:

“Help me to be able to find out information about opportunities more easily – perhaps online? Perhaps help my family to know about things that I can do.”

“We feel like they don't have all the information they need when looking for options and how best to advise people and families on the options they had.”

“Hockley day centre did have sessions to show what they do – all services need to go out and network.”

“The market place event was good and Seven Up attended but families are bewildered by options and practicalities like funding, eligibility and transport.”

“We want more information about what activities are out there and information for staff on equipment etc. available for less mobile people in wheelchairs. (e.g. changing rooms).”

Perceptions of current day services varied with some feeling they are not suitable for young people. Some carers were put off by the assessment processes and wanted to be able to choose their own day options:

“Finding out about options was often dependent on word of mouth. Its even worse if you are not known to Adult Social Care. It takes time to keep looking and you are too busy caring. Young people need a life”

Flexibility over opening times and use of staff

When asked what support people need, they referred to needing staff to support them in accessing activities – accompanying them in attending, providing support for transport and communication as well as for personal care, medication, eating, drinking and other essentials.

Day service managers and staff said that the availability of accessible transport and staffing (drivers and care staff) was an issue. This was in part due to funding and also due to difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. To safely deliver more activities in the community more staff were needed (for instance for those needing 1:1 support).

When asked what needed to change, staff asked for more flexibility in where and when activities take place, and in how people planned their day activities:

“Make arrangements flexible – for instance three days at home, two in Day centre, two at work.”

Using existing accessible buildings and transport at the evenings and weekends could reduce travel and preparation times:

“Look at more evening and weekend opportunities – use BCC buildings more productively.”

“Less rules and regulations – can’t do this and can’t do that. Too much Health & Safety limits what we can do.”

Some day services took people on day trips to theme parks and other activities that need to be paid for:

“Rules around use of Direct Payments are unclear, as they got into trouble for using the money to take their daughter to Drayton Manor for the day. They considered this a day activity and didn’t know they shouldn’t use the money for that. They no longer have an allocated social worker to ask.”

“Not everyone has hot meals anymore because having to pay for it differently.”

“For a lot of people it was their only hot meal. People have their own ways of managing their budgets and this new system has put them off doing this. A lot of citizens don’t have warm food anymore.” (staff comment)

“For the centre to facilitate extended hours or holidays has cost implications for extra staff hours (money, not willingness to flex their time) and for the hours citizens are funded to attend.” (staff comment).

Status and role of day services

The services we spoke to felt that they were far more than places where people came to do activities. They were hubs for people to meet other people, form relationships and build friendships and connections with others. They were also places where people could get support and gain access to a wide range of information and services:

“Services enabled “total communication” – enabling people to connect in ways that suit them so they are understood.”

They were also a “safety net” for people and families to fall back on. Services had to respond to a wide range of needs in very personalised and tailored ways – this may require them to learn different communication skills, find out about different medical conditions and cope with emotional trauma and other issues around mental wellbeing.

Some services felt having improved status could help with staff training – day services do not have the same access to the range of training that home care and residential care providers have access to.

“Training needs to be tailored for day services and it’s a specific set of skills and knowledge that’s required – they need to be person led and each person has different needs and they need to help staff be trained and confident in meeting these.”

“We just had new equipment set up – 10 laptops and 2 desktops – going to set up a new learning zone for people to learn IT skills rather than just watching films and You Tube, etc. It has taken longer than expected to find staff who have the IT skills to teach others. Always difficult as staff are carers and not necessarily teachers. We are trying to introduce new things so that people get more out of coming to the centre.”

In discussions, staff would comment on the breadth of support that’s provided by day services. They often would highlight the support they give in enabling people to access other services like assessment and health services, as well as advising on home care and other support for families and older carers:

“We helped X’s grandmother, who is her only carer, get a social care package.”

Some services felt they provided personalised responses and as such needed to adapt and take on new skills. This may be concerning communication skills but also to fill gaps related to specific needs:

“There is limited access to SLT or physio in community so we fill the gap – we do lots of work with people to support rehab and increase daily living skills – this is a constant focus.”

Many felt their services were in effect a community hub for the families, carers and citizens who need it, checking they are ok in their home and living arrangements. This idea of a local hub was mentioned in several interviews and they felt it was important to recognize this when thinking about the needs of communities, families and people and the potential benefits that day services can deliver.

Life transitions

Throughout the interviews people and staff spoke about significant transitions in people’s lives. As young people moved from school to college and then into adulthood the changes that meant for them individually and the services that were available to them:

“We have established a day service for the students who wanted to continue their association with the college. This provided continuity and an option for students who didn’t want to go to services that were mainly used by and for older people.”

This was a difficult transition for families and they felt the process of change was complex, worrying and difficult to navigate:

“For families with younger people, there is a fear of social workers.”

One young citizen spoke of the experience from previous assessments when she asked for help with her dyslexia:

All that’s important is the words “open and closed” – this was a real kick in the teeth”. Important to have professionals who will help and not discourage or laugh at people

Many staff said that they did not understand the options and services felt that parents were unprepared:

“We are struggling to also help X transition out of the college.”

“We need more help parents to think about the longer outcomes, so they get what they need.”

“At our college, we try and engage parents early in thinking about options, but this needs to be a key part of EHCPs.”

“We need Day Care Centres for younger people – a HUB – where they have a base but can go out and connect to other opportunities and organisations.”

People in interviews also spoke about other transitions in people’s lives. As they got older, conditions changed and getting assessments and reviews was difficult. Carers and families ageing was also an inevitable transition, one that worried families and staff could see the impact it was having on them:

“More support for ageing parents as when they can do less citizens do less at home Acquired brain injury and the changes this brings to people’s lives means big changes - it doesn’t fit easily in a health and care “box” so gets left out or people pushed from one service to another.”

One of the centres visited was a specialist service for people with learning disabilities who also had dementia. This was developed out of an identified need and they were successful in winning funding in a ‘Dragon’s Den’ style process. They developed specialist knowledge and skills. However, during the pandemic, they lost a number of citizens to COVID-19 and they have not been getting referrals in the numbers needed to maintain the staffing and transport options they had built up, so activities have had to be scaled back. They now only have one bus to support transport to the centre and for trips and this severely restricts what they can do.

Key role of funding and assessment

A key question in the interviews was what more can Birmingham City Council do to support you. More staff and more funding were often quoted as something that would help. For families, the support they receive is precious and there is anxiety and worry about this changing or reducing.

For the majority of day services funding was directly linked to care management assessment and referrals they received:

“We need regular reviews so package meets/reflects changing needs.”

“People should be placed in the right service and regularly reassessed. With people with progressive conditions what they needed when they came 20 years ago and ambulant is not what they need now and in a wheelchair but the package has never been reassessed.”

From feedback in the interviews social work assessment was often seen as an essential route to exploring care needs, and opportunities and enabling people to achieve the outcomes

they wanted. However, for carers, dealing with social work and assessment processes was often seen as a battle and a constant source of worry:

“It’s difficult to get to speak to a social worker even if one is allocated. You are never told if the allocated worker has left.”

One of the EPT members told the group about their experience in seeking to change what they do. They also said things don’t always work out and they needed to be able to change what they did and that’s OK – it’s important to have people to speak to and support you when things need to change.

Social work assessment and review processes were seen as a barrier to people getting the support they need and a fear that things will be taken away:

“Direct payments are an opportunity for flexibility and choice but doesn’t work currently for everyone - families need to understand opportunities.”

“Caring for a family member is not the issue, it’s the bureaucracy. Too much paperwork, too many professionals asking the same questions. You have to be careful what you say. It’s stressful and causes too much worry.”

Services said they worked with families to get assessments and reviews but they also found the process difficult and time-consuming:

“Our service has eighteen people on our waiting list that they can provide support to – we have spaces and this is important for people and us as a business.”

“Can we be trusted assessors to assess for needs and packages of care?”

Comments from provider staff and managers

For this phase of the review, the visits and interviews enabled more staff and managers to interact with discussions. Staff were invaluable in conveying the more complex set of questions we were asking and in adding context and their own experience to the discussions.

For instance, often people would say they want staff to support them to do things. In exploring this further in conversations we hear from staff about the barriers and constraints they felt existed. This is reflected throughout the discussion above.

These discussions enabled us to probe and explore these issues and to ask “what can Birmingham City Council do to support services?”

- Council investment in training and support with recruitment and retention
- Help to identify startup funding for social enterprises - the YMCA have a fundraiser but this would be a new area if, for example, they were to set up a café they would need equipment, premises, and furniture.
- Make applications easier and less additional expectations, so that they can get on with supporting people and providing a service instead of paperwork
- Localise services, build up the 3rd sector
- Have a fairer funding system
- More support for families applying for Direct Payments and Care Packages and better information sharing
- More community ownership – so as not to rely on caretakers – give us a key, you can trust us!
- The recent forums for providers have been useful and they would like the council to continue to bring together providers in a forum
- The externally commissioned services could come together to discuss and plan around common challenges
- We want to expand our service to help us in the community and others at home.
- Improve referrals and funding. An example given was that the increase in National Living Wage in April 2024 will add £20k + per annum to costs
- Our organization is planning to merge 2 sites (currently 2 small sites with max of 12 individuals at each). However, this needs stability in referrals and funding
- Develop opportunities like those in the images of possibility

In many discussions there was an awareness of the financial challenges facing the council:

“We want to know where money we are paying for services are going – we would like to see money we pay for services go into services and not go into getting Birmingham out of its mess.”

“We felt heard today. We want the council to come back and tell us what they are doing next in response to the views and ideas we have given.”

Co-production visits to day opportunities for older adults in Birmingham

The themes from the interviews with people from older adult services mirrored many of those from other interviews. When asked what they liked about coming to the day centre, the sense of friendship and community was a strong theme:

“At the centre, I can get help and advice when I need it, there is a very friendly atmosphere almost like a family”.

Loneliness and isolation were a big factor. This was especially so with those who had little or no immediate family and were living on their own:

“Meeting with others, making friends, having a safe friendly place to go which is different to normal”?

When asked what they would like to do there was a wide range of ideas and requests:

“I’d love to be able to go and watch football”.

“I would like to be able to go dancing with people of my own age”.

Staff talked about the challenges they face in finding new and interesting activities for people:

“Funding and transport are always a problem when planning anything”

Providers also said they would like to be able to provide more holistic support involving other services. They wanted advice and support from health professionals such as district nurses as well as visits from hair and beauty specialists.

Having support through life transitions was a key theme in discussions. Some carers highlighted the physical effects of ageing on their ability to cope with caring.

“It helps to have breaks to take care of myself so I can be a better caregiver.”

“I feel sad at times, I know this is part of the bereavement process because of the changes that my mother is going through, and that we have to make changes to our lives, but it can be tiring at times, physically and mentally”.

Carers talked about the importance of being able to talk to members of the care staff so that they can share knowledge, experience, and advice:

“I feel supported – not alone in the journey because we have others, we can talk to about our struggles”

Next steps

The findings from this phase of the programme will inform the development of a day opportunities commissioning strategy and the service improvement process for internal day services. Some of the people attending day services in the interviews said they were pleased to have a voice and the opportunity to be heard. They also wanted to be kept informed on the next steps in the strategy development and the improvement plans. They wanted to know how their views and opinions were responded to in these processes and have invited commissioners back to update them as this important work progresses.

The Empowering People Team met in February to review the key themes from the interviews they led and agreed on the main findings. They also reflected on their work and the support they received. Their views are ideas reflected in the report above. The EPT were keen to continue their work and to build on the experience they had gained in leading co-production for this review. They want to continue to support the strategy development and implementation and the service improvement process. They are also taking forward opportunities to work with others such as transport providers to improve day opportunities for people.

The EPT is currently working with SERCO which runs Leisure Centres in Birmingham to co-produce improvements across the city. They visited Ladywood Leisure Centre and met with the community inclusion leads for SERCO. Two members of the group are also working with health and others to support Autism friendly services in Birmingham.

These programmes of work are already moving forward in 2024 and there is commitment from commissioners to continue support for the EPT and continue to co-produce the development of day opportunities in Birmingham.

Appendix 1 – Key findings from phase one

Fourteen people with lived experience were trained and worked with RedQuadrant consultants and the commissioning teams to deliver 35 in-person and online engagement events attended by over 400 people.

A wide range of people involved in day services were engaged including the people who use them, families, carers, providers and other professionals. The aim was to understand the impact of the pandemic on people and services. It also asked what people valued about day opportunities. Key findings are detailed below:

The impact of the pandemic

The closing of day opportunities during the pandemic had a major impact on people using services and their carers. It was also a very difficult time for the staff and other professionals involved. Initially, there was a lot of worry and confusion and there was a sense of crisis. Providers and the council came together to find new ways of supporting people and their families. People across the engagement sessions spoke with pride at the way staff, the council, commissioners and families supported each other by providing Zoom sessions, meals, activity packs and garden visits.

The impact of the pandemic has been detrimental to people's health and wellbeing, exacting a cost on people who use services and their carers with many reporting a decline in physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. That impact is still being felt and for providers, many were finding it difficult to return to pre-pandemic levels of service.

The importance and status of day opportunities

People using day opportunities spoke passionately about how much they valued the support they received through day opportunities. It is their community; it is where they meet friends to do the things they enjoy with other people.

Carers saw day opportunities as essential in enabling them to have a quality of life outside of caring. It allowed them to do the things they needed to do to maintain their own health and well-being and to do the everyday tasks necessary for themselves and their families.

As well as being places where people meet their community and friends they are 'hubs' in which people get a range of care, health and other support. People wanted personalised support with high levels of training in a wide range of communication, support and care skills.

The barriers people faced

The importance of transport in enabling people to take part in day opportunities was a key issue. The review highlighted the problems that people currently experience on a day-to-day basis and the EPT felt there was a need for providers of transport (public and specialist transport) to understand the impact it has when it doesn't work well.

People wanted to engage with wider community activities more but felt there were numerous barriers to them doing this, including the lack of facilities like changing places, the accessibility of venues, spaces and buildings and the attitudes and understanding of the public and staff in mainstream services.

As a consequence, many were often anxious about engaging in wider community activity on their own and even in groups many felt they were not welcome in places like shops, leisure centres, restaurants and places of entertainment.

There were some views that the facilities, activities and level of staffing and training were not the same across day opportunities. For example, some older people felt they didn't get the same access to activities as young adults, while the range and standards of provision for young people with complex disabilities in specialist schools and colleges were not as widely available in adult services.

Many carers felt that they had to fight to get the services that were essential to enable them to undertake their caring roles. They valued the access to services they had gained and wanted continuity and certainty, which they felt was threatened by the assessment and review processes they faced. Providers were also concerned about the access to social work assessment, review and referrals. This led to delays and uncertainty for families as well as for services in planning and making continuity of care difficult to achieve.

The importance of everyone working collaboratively to achieve outcomes for people

The EPT members and providers involved in supporting them in this review felt that a collaborative, co-productive approach was essential if the findings identified in the review are to be addressed. They wanted to continue to be involved in taking this work forward together with the council and providers.

Appendix 2 – Empowering People Team principles for co-production

Effective Coproduction: Understanding between Volunteer Coproducers and Day Service Commissioning Colleagues in Birmingham City Council.

Below are the issues which we the Empowering People Team (EPT) volunteer Coproducers have identified as needed for us to be effective and equal partners in future Coproduction activities requested by Birmingham City Council.

During the training sessions we undertook before beginning work as a Coproducer we agreed we need to feel confident and understand what is being asked of us to be able to bring our best thoughts and ideas. The following are the things we ask of colleagues.

Things that will help us feel confident.

- Treating us as equals.
- Working with peers in groups where we know some of the other people.
- People from the council and other organisations build trust with us by being open and honest with us.
- Working in small groups supported by a familiar person
- Being given enough time to speak and be understood.
- After we have had a first try at using questions or other materials, we have the chance to review and coproduce changes to them.
- New EPT members have another EPT member with more experience working with them until they feel confident.
- Meetings are short enough so we can concentrate (ideally 1 ½ hours with a break after 45 minutes).
- Practical things are thought about
 - The timing of meetings will fit with our transport needs
 - The room is warm enough and accessible
 - Refreshments are available
 - There are accessible toilets

Things which will help us feel well informed.

- Being told what the purpose of the meeting or project is when we are asked to join them.
- We are given information and agendas at least a week in advance.
- We are given the questions you want us to think about in advance so we can be prepared.

- People speak to us in plain English not jargon.
 - People know our communication needs and meet them before, during and after meetings. E.g., Large print, sign language, easy read, time to type answers when using a digital communication device.
 - Things are presented visually as well as verbally in meetings, (maybe with a small YouTube video about the project or meeting to explain it in advance).
 - We leave knowing what will happen next.

Appendix 3 - Day opportunities for older adults in Birmingham 2023/24

Introduction

Between 2022 and 2023 Birmingham City Council commissioned RedQuadrant, to review day opportunities post-pandemic. The review was co-produced in partnership with the Empowering People Team, a group of volunteer experts by experience. The report of the review was presented to Council Cabinet in April 2023 where approval was given to co-produce a commissioning strategy for the external day opportunities market and a service improvement plan for the internal day centre service.

This report forms part of the commissioning strategy and focuses on the day opportunities available for those people who are of the age group 65+ and their expectations.

Definition:

“A day care service offers communal care, with paid or voluntary carers, in a setting outside the user’s home. Individuals come or are brought to use the services, which are available for at least four hours during the day and return home on the same day”. (Tester, 2001)

Nationally, people are living longer and the demand for care continues to grow however the day opportunities provided for older people are reducing in availability due to over stretched resources. This is impacted on by the fact that as the person being cared for is getting older so too are the caregivers of those individuals. There is however limited factual data available on this subject.

Drivers.

The Council’s Corporate Plan 2022 - 2026 provides a common basis for our strategic planning and a focus on tackling inequalities and creating opportunities for citizens to live longer, healthier, and happier lives. Our ambitions for Birmingham are:

- A Bold Prosperous Birmingham
- A Bold Inclusive Birmingham
- A Bold Safe Birmingham
- A Bold Healthy Birmingham
- A Bold Green Birmingham

The Council has set out a bold and challenging agenda to ensure Birmingham is a city in which every citizen can live a healthy enjoyable life. Where every citizen, at every stage of their life, in all communities can make choices that are affordable, sustainable, and desirable to support them to achieve their potential for a happy, healthy life. We will work to support our citizens (including families and carers) to understand their own physical and mental health and wellbeing and know how to access and get support in a timely and culturally appropriate way when they need it. We will create a city which is compassionate and inclusive to citizens, including people with disabilities and limiting longstanding illness, when they need support and assistance and work together to help them remain active participants in our city throughout their lives.

Vision for Adult Social Care

Most adults can enjoy access to mainstream services independently or with help and support from their families, friends, and social groups. However, for some citizens this is only possible with support from social care services. While Birmingham is one of the youngest cities in Europe, the older population is growing rapidly. There are an estimated 14,000 adults living with dementia, with a further 3,000 people expected to be diagnosed over the coming 20 years. The resources previously available to the Council have been significantly reduced and remain under significant strain, making the use of available resources more important than ever. The public have higher expectations of the public sector, and rightly so, the standards of care they expect are rising. It is increasingly recognised that people want support to enable them to exercise independence, choice, and control.

The aim of adult social care in delivering the Council's ambition is to protect and empower the most vulnerable citizens. This means supporting vulnerable people to maximise their independence, health, and wellbeing, whilst ensuring that publicly funded care and support provides value for money for Birmingham citizens and is provided only when it is really needed.

During the 2022/23 review of day opportunities post-pandemic, there were several comments from both service providers and carers that identified the view that older adult services were regarded as being less important than those for younger adults, especially regarding funding and the expected type of activities and care provided. This is reflected in a recent research paper by Bennett and Cameron et.al 2023, where they stated:

“Diverse and purposeful activities are important, older people welcome choice and variety, built on personalised and tailored opportunities that reflect and appeal to the diverse interests and experiences of all older people. In many cases, this was described as thinking beyond traditional, artificial, or ‘childish’ activities often associated with day care, to offer opportunities that provide a sense of purpose.”

Methodology

Currently Birmingham has 12 organisations providing day opportunities for older adults, across 18 venues. 205 individuals were interviewed - citizens (129), staff (32) and carers (44) mainly in person but some via questionnaire. The questions and questionnaires were the same across all three groups but with paraphrasing to be inclusive of different levels of understanding.

The questions used were developed by the Empowering People team and reviewed for relevance to the different groups participating in the interviews.

The responses provided depended a lot upon the group interviewed due to a range of factors such as their first language, the cognitive ability of the participants and of course if they were interested in contributing.

Responses

Six key questions were asked of the participants, and their responses varied depending on the nature of the group being individuals, and how much prompting was required.

The responses are listed under each of the key questions.

I. “What do you like about coming to this centre?”

It was clear from responses received that to a large degree that the people attending day opportunities did so because they provided a break from being alone at home, and that they found going out and meeting other people and being in a different place helped their mental and physical well-being.

This was born out by a comment from another service user who stated that the centre provided...

“Comfort, I felt very lonely until I came to the centre. At the centre I can get help and advice when I need it, there is a very friendly atmosphere almost like a family.”

Similarly, other comments included, *“the centre gives me something to look forward to.”*

“Companionship, meeting up with a group of people who are good to get on with.”

“Meeting with others, making friends, having a safe friendly place to go which is different to normal.”

From the conversations that were had with the people who attended the day opportunities, loneliness and isolation was a big factor. This was especially so with those who had little or no immediate family and were living on their own.

It was identified that loneliness is often exacerbated when people have difficulty communicating with others locally because their first language is not spoken by others, or when the physical impact of illness, e.g., stroke, affects their communication.

On several occasions it was noted that some individuals spontaneously translated the questions being asked into the language used by another so that they could participate in the conversation. This was particularly apparent with the Chinese community who used very little English and were often reliant on a translator being present.

Another participant raised an important point about attending her centre:

“Being able to have a hot meal at least once a day, I find it difficult to cook for myself sometimes.”

This was a sentiment which was echoed on several occasions by different people and at different centres. It was also mentioned that some groups would like to have a more active part in the meal preparation at the centre as this was viewed as both a social and meaningful activity for them to engage in.

II. How does coming to the centre make you feel?

Replies to this question unanimously positive across the groups.

“It really lifts my spirits.”

“I recently had a family tragedy and was feeling down almost about to give up but attending the centre and the help of the staff helped me carry on and pulled me out of my depression, now I’m beginning to feel much better”.

whilst others stated

"I am better when I come here. When I come here, I see people. They are very nice people, and I am happy here."

Being at the centre supports people to feel valued and develop friendships.

"I have made a lot of friends and have come out of my shell. I am not as shy as I used to be."

"Attending the centre makes me happy, it really lifts my spirits and makes me feel safe and secure."

"It makes me feel looked after and it's great to be able to get out of the house".

Some of the people attending the centres also mentioned how they felt for their family and carers whilst they were attending the centre:

"It makes me feel good that my wife has some time to herself."

"It makes me feel better that I am able to give my daughter the opportunity to have some time to herself as she also has to care for her husband and son."

The comment above is a type of care which is becoming more common, where a member of the family often has 2 if not 3 age groups to be looked after and they are finding themselves in the middle. "Sandwich carers"

Safety and feeling safe at the centre or with staff and others present were also mentioned.

"I worry about going out on my own these days." This was echoed by another person who said, *"I feel safe here, the people who support me are special."*

III. What activities do you do and what else would you like to do that you don't do now?

When asked what activities you do now, some attendees responded with physical activities such as carpet bowling, hoop-la, snooker, table football or even gardening.

Other activities included more sedentary activities such as board games, dominoes, cards, chase the ace, crafting including card and decorations for festivals, sewing and needlework, knitting, crochet, poetry days, singing, dancing/ballroom dancing exhibition, use of memory boards, discussions / reminiscence These activities according to providers were encouraged to promote mental acuity and a sense of achievement.

However, when asked what you would like to do that you don't do know a large proportion of those asked replied with suggestions which could be comparatively considered as perhaps more adventurous but also maybe, considered by some as mundane and indeed usual, these included.

Going to events or sport, one lady said, "I'd love to be able to go and watch football", a sentiment echoed by several others, other attendees said that they would like to be able to go dancing with people of their own age. Other popular suggestions were, " go out for meals.", "go to the pub", "go to the garden centre." , "be able to go on day trips, to places of interest.", "a trip on a narrow boat."

There was limited use of IT because of cost with limited funding for equipment and materials. There was also a concern with using devices due to inexperience, knowledge, and lack of understanding, this was noted at one centre when the attendees said they would like to learn but thought it would better if this was done in a face-to-face manner rather than by computer, "because it is not the same."

There is a sense that older people would still like the opportunities to learn and participate in learning an example is the Chinese people who we met who wished to be able to communicate with the local population even to the point of one person wanting to learn to speak English with a Birmingham accent!

IV. What are the challenges that you face in providing activities for people who attend your centre?

This was a supplementary question asked to all but mainly aimed at providers who in general replied with a similar answer which can be summed up by:

“It is always a challenge to find new and interesting activities for our people to do, however we try to accommodate any suggestions that they might have”. “Funding and transport are always a problem when planning anything. The logistics of getting a group of people with limited mobility to places is difficult due to the availability of public transport and the cost of hiring a coach or minibus.”

This was a statement echoed by several providers not only during this exercise but via conversations at other events and meetings held in the course of council business, further attendees from different day opportunity centres mentioned that often the transport requested to take them to their destinations was often not on time or didn't turn up at all as one person put it regarding the reliability of busses

“They just don't turn up when they are supposed to and Taxis are too expensive” and another added, “Waiting for a bus can be difficult, I can't stand like I used to.”

Day services for older adults also have an effect for family members involved in care on a day-to-day basis. This was born out by the information provided by family members such as *“More help with transport which would allow us to have longer breaks and less stress worrying about transporting, loved ones to the centre.”*

V. What effect does the person you care for attending the centre have on you, and how does it affect your life? (Carers)

Carers responded to the above by telling us that it gives them the opportunity to have a break from being responsible for caring for someone and allows them time to pay attention to other members of the family, their homes or their own interests and allow them to relax and reduce their own stress and anxiety.

Carers talked about the importance of being able to talk to members of the care staff so that they can share knowledge, experience, and advice. This, as one carer expressed: *“I feel supported – not alone in the journey because we have others we can talk to about our struggles.”*

It was noted that a great deal of the carers spoken to were also of an age where they were finding themselves potentially in need of some services to enable them to continue in the caring role whether this is mentally physically or emotionally.

Some carers highlighted the physical effects of aging on their ability to cope with caring; *“As an elderly woman, taking care of him is stressful and tiring, especially at my age. When he is at the centre, I can get the rest my body needs.”*

“It helps to have breaks to take care of myself so I can be a better caregiver. It is great to know that my loved one is well cared for by the staff, so I do not feel worried when they are attending the centre.”

Some of the carers added to the above question by saying, that they felt *“Sad at times, I know this is part of the bereavement process because of the changes that my mother is going through, and that we have to make changes to our lives, but it can be tiring at times, physically and mentally.”*

VI. Is there any difference to the person when they attend and what do you think is the benefit for the person attending?

“Mum appears brighter in herself when she returns. Mum is stimulated mentally, and she can socialise outside of the house, it adds to having a positive and purposeful routine and she gets her some enjoyment in her life. “

Conversely.

“There isn’t much difference in him when he is attending as he doesn’t remember much but, I am glad he gets to socialise with others, and it gets him out of the house and away from the TV.”

When a group of carers were asked, they replied that generally the people they cared for benefited from the social interactions and exercises, they were also less anxious and stressed on the day that they attend.

Discussion

Aging is a process which affects everyone. In 2017 figures published by the Office of National Statistics it was stated that; *“The UK’s population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years 1 in 4 people will be over the age of 65.”*

Further as we get older there is potential for conditions to become more prevalent and have more of an impact on both the individual and society. This was born out by a study entitled ‘Dementia Prevention, Intervention and Care’, published in the Lancet in 2020 by Livingstone and Huntly et al. Where the first line of the summary states *“The number of older people, including those with dementia is rising, as younger age mortality declines.”* The document goes on to say, *“Wellbeing is the goal of much of dementia care. People with dementia have complex problems and symptoms in many domains. Interventions should be individualized and consider the person as a whole, as well as their family carers.”*

Research into older adult day services is limited and even recently only a small number of documented studies have been produced, the most recent of these being the study *“Reimagining collective day care for older people”* by Bennet and Cameron et.al. and the case study *“what happens in English generalist day centres for older people?”* by Orellana, Manthorpe and Tinker in 2023

From the conversations that were had with the people who attended the day centres, together with the providers, and carers, the following can be noted:

1. Most of the attendees interviewed responded by saying that they enjoyed attending the centre because it gave them an opportunity to meet up with others and make friends and achieve a sense of companionship.

Very often older people are of an age where their social circles are diminished, due to family and friends moving, or, passing away, a very real consequence as age increases. This is even more so in the case of women where, as stated in the Lancet paper 'Dementia Prevention, Intervention and Care of 2020', "disproportionate numbers of women are widowed as they outlive their husbands, thus reducing their social contact." This then means that the opportunity for social interaction is reduced and again becomes limited as medical conditions increase and mobility is reduced due to their increasing age. This increasing lack of social interaction has been attributed to an increasing occurrence of dementia and frailty in the population over time due to lack of social stimulation and exercise.

The opportunity to access activities in the community when organized by the day centre are preferable to accessing them as individuals because of real or perceived risk and challenge e.g. feeling threatened or vulnerable. This was often because of a loss of confidence due to advancing age, something which was alluded to during conversation with several people saying that they found it physically difficult to get out on their own and they worry and do not feel safe which made them less inclined to venture out, however, with people around them whether it be other attendees or staff when they went out they were more confident.

2. Regarding being occupied when attending the day centre, attendees found some of the activities offered were stimulating and provided a point of interest in their week, further they stated that they would like a greater range of activities which were assumed as being offered to the younger 18-64 group.

Clearly, the types of activities generally offered are sedentary and often solitary such as colouring or jigsaw puzzles. Whereas, when asked what the group would like to do the responses were often more of a social and active type, such going out as group, possibly going recreational shopping or for a meal. Often they stated they would like to be able to go to the theatre or a national trust garden, or perhaps a garden centre; activities which although viewed as 'normal or run of the mill' for people in younger age groups are often not provided for the stereotypical older person who are characterised as a "homogeneous group characterised by passivity, with failing physical and mental health and dependency" (Kings fund report on age discrimination in health and social care)

It should be said however that the providers spoken to would be happy to support the aspirations of their client group, however there are mitigating circumstances which often conspire to prevent this such as funding and transport provision.

Even though levels of provided care are often comparable to other groups, older adult day services are some of the lowest funded organisations per individual in the city.

Unless a centre has its own transport, it is difficult for them to support people to be out and about and be independent. Often public transport is unreliable including more bespoke arrangements where there are issues of where these services are restricted in relation to the destination and pick up and drop off. the amount of distance to then be traveled on foot.

3. Providers would like to be able to provide more support of a holistic nature such as including involving other services such as opticians, chiropody services, perhaps advice and support from health professionals such as district and diabetic nurses in their daily or weekly programs together with perhaps visits from hair and beauty specialists.

Most providers agreed that it would be good to have visits from health care professionals to offer advice and information together with treatment referrals should these be needed. It was pointed out however, that although some centres did used to have some of these visits, they

stopped during over the pandemic and have not since restarted. Some providers stated that they are finding it increasingly difficult to contact and arrange visits from professionals. This is seen as being a problem for some of the citizens, especially those with early signs of dementia, in that some forms of care could be delayed and conditions which could be treated easily in the first instance could become a problem as time increases.

It was also said that some of the centres had access to health and other services more easily than others due to location i.e., at least two of the centres visited were in or attached to care centres where due to their nature services were available. This applied also to the provision of hair and beauty care as these were provided for residents.

It was clear from these responses that the location of the centre within the community and the availability of local health related services in the area there were also problems communicating with health professionals and being able to fund visits where necessary.

4. Carers stated, especially those of dementia sufferers and who shared the home with them, found some relief in their daily or weekly routine enabling the carer to be able to have a period to themselves or 'respite' where they could approach tasks which would be difficult with the person around, be able to spend time with other family members or have time for themselves. This was a common thread amongst those carers who were responsible for the care of a person living with dementia. Indeed, there were some family members who were not only having to care for the older adult, but they were also responsible for the care of other dependent family members – children, younger disabled adults. This applied to, but not limited to, individuals from traditionally multigenerational family settings.

Very often the comment was that the carer was able to manage these day-to-day tasks and stresses if they had a period to themselves to do their own life tasks or relax. This was emphasized during the pandemic where stress became an ever-increasing factor in carers lives.

This period of respite for carers was also recognised by some attendees who stated that they felt attending the centre provided a period where they themselves could get a break from their families or carers providing a break for both groups.

In Summary

The information collected confirms that older adult day opportunities provide value to not only those directly involved, as in the older adults themselves, but also provide a benefit to the families and those who care for them, working towards lessening the pressure on all parties, this then acts to prevent family breakdown, and feelings of guilt which can have a detrimental effect on the health of all of those concerned.

Having visited a variety of day services for older people it became clear that often older adults were regarded, as one person put it the 'lost generation' in that when a person achieves the distinction of 65 years of age and are classed as a senior citizen and very often, they are regarded as having little or no worth and only capable of very limited activities. The aspirations of the attendees themselves are far from this in that even though they are classed as being 'old' they have a sense of pride and want to be regarded as useful members of society, who are capable of and desire to do things other than the usual activities in place. In fact, a quote from Reimagining Collective Day Care for Older People by Bennett and Campbell et.al. says "I don't do bingo; never did bingo I think it's a horrible thing" which goes to show that the activities presented are not one size fits all and must be tailored to the individual such as the lady we encountered who used to be a sempstress and wished to pass on her skills to others.

Recommendations

- Increased parity across the day opportunities market.
- Review funding to recognize the aspirations of older individuals and provide services which reflect the ability and skills which people have built up over a considerable number of years.
- For services to provide stimulating and meaningful activities enabling people to pursue diverse interests keeping both their body and mind active.
- Grow better links with the local community and the services available, enabling older people to have a greater range of interests and shared interests.
- For services to have closer ties with health service colleagues so that conditions associated with age are recognised and treatment suggested to enable the individual to have a longer more fulfilling life.
- Explore opportunities to improve specialist and bespoke transport solutions so that older adults can safely and confidently travel in their communities.
- Commissioning to implement a detailed open book exercise to develop a better understanding of the business model across older adult's day opportunities.
- Teaching and education services to be made available and supported by services to allow people to be able to learn in a face-to-face manner subjects that would be both useful and interesting to them.

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