

# Learning for older people in care settings

A guide for activity  
coordinators and  
care staff



Department  
for Business  
Innovation & Skills

**NIACE**

The National Voice for  
Lifelong Learning



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## Foreword

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

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

As front line staff, care workers and activity organisers have an important role in making an active programme of learning successful. Activity organisers and care workers can be true learning champions. They will be key to any successful programme of learning. First, they can help find out what the older people's interests and needs are. They can talk with their managers about their ideas. Then, once a programme of learning is decided, activity organisers and care workers will play a vital part in promoting it, encouraging older people to take part, helping to iron out barriers to participation, following the older people's progress, and giving feedback to the manager or to the learning providers. In some care centres, care staff themselves take part in a learning group!

This may all seem peripheral to the day-to-day running of a care setting – but NIACE believes that it will reap rewards for managers, staff, families and friends and, of course, the older people themselves. We at NIACE hope this guide will encourage care staff to help instigate and inspire learning programmes for the older people with whom they work.

Carol Taylor, OBE

Deputy Chief Executive, Development & Research, NIACE



## About this guide

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

This guide is for activity coordinators and other members of care staff involved with, or interested in, supporting older people to take part in learning activities.

This guide:

- explains how taking part in learning opportunities can bring benefits, both to care staff and to older people in their care; and
- offers information and advice on how to engage older people in informal learning.

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

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

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





## Introducing learning opportunities: Getting started

As an activity coordinator or a member of care staff, it is usually part of your job to facilitate and support activities. It is quite a responsibility, but the rewards are great too. Seeing someone come out of their room because of what you are doing, and joining in rather than being isolated, can be life changing.

For older people, taking part in activities can improve their memory and dexterity, increase their appetite, give them greater levels of confidence, help them socialise, or just make them smile and enjoy life more.

### Learning for older people in care settings

Learning is not just about skills and qualifications that help people get on in life. Learning also helps improve the lives and wellbeing of everyone who participates and helps us to build a better society. Learning for older people in care settings is a mixture of fun, challenge and mental stimulus, and helps in the maintenance of social, physical and mental skills.

There are likely to be many care settings that already offer activities.

Learning can take many forms; for example, chair-based exercise, watercolour painting, digital photography, reading groups, gardening and poetry. It can bring massive improvements to individuals' health, wellbeing and confidence – all the more if their achievements can be showcased through displays and exhibitions of their work, and seen by families, friends and the wider public.

Here is an example of how a regular activity can be enhanced to provide more opportunities for learning:

A regular session which involves singing familiar songs is fun, entertaining and encourages physical activity. Learning new songs also provides mental stimulation and a memory challenge. Asking participants to suggest their own favourites respects individuality and can strengthen a sense of identity. Asking older people to plan the programme of songs for the next session provokes discussion, stimulates social interaction and encourages thinking ahead – and music can provoke memories which can be an exciting gateway to shared reminiscence and valuing of the past.

More examples of learning in care settings can be found in the section, 'Learning for older people in care settings', starting on page 12.

### For you to consider:

- What activities are currently on offer for older people in your care setting?
- How might opportunities for learning be built into these activities?
- How you can find out what older people in your care want to learn about, and how they want to learn.
- How you can provide appropriate support for learning. Are you and other carers able to do this, or do you need to involve others, including volunteers?





## An activity co-ordinator's experience

We asked one activity coordinator, working with Learning for the Fourth Age (one of the case studies featured in this resource), about the part that he played in introducing a culture of learning into the care home in which he works, and what the benefits have been. This is what he told us...

*Learning for the Fourth Age (L4A) aims to provide educational and learning services to frail, elderly people who live in social care settings. I heard about them when they got in touch with me directly about the one-to-one learning opportunities that they offered to care home residents.*

*We already had a packed programme of activities, some of which involved learning. These included general knowledge quizzes, music quizzes, visiting places of local interest, and art and crafts. When the care home signed up for the L4A weekly sessions, I envisaged some difficulties among those who have sight problems and dementia, and so we agreed only to an initial 12-week trial period.*

*All the residents were consulted about L4A and encouraged to come up with things that they were interested in. Playing the piano, poetry, musicals and social history were all suggested. In the first three months, learning was very well received by the residents. We had originally agreed that five residents would give it a go, and by the end of three months this had almost tripled. Residents learnt how to use a laptop, how to sketch and how to play the clarinet. Others were engaged in structured reminiscence and geography, had borrowed CDs, and were keen to learn languages and other new things.*

*Confidence has noticeably improved in some residents and they all look forward to their weekly visits from learning mentors. One resident spends over two hours each day practising the clarinet, another completes a different picture each week that requires a new drawing skill, and a third is looking into buying her own laptop so that her IT skills can develop further. At times, there has been a need for perseverance and patience. Many older people learn at a slower pace and, on occasion, some are too unwell to take part.*

*The manager of the care home is very supportive of the learning that is going on in the care home, and was pleased that I had identified it as an area for improvement and development within the comprehensive programme of activities that we were already providing. Other care homes in the chain have shown an interest in the idea of older people learning, and Head Office have highlighted the brilliant work carried out at the home in reports and by nominating what was taking place for internal best practice awards.*

*Without question, I would advise other activity co-ordinators to just do it! The possibility of learning again or developing new skills and passions is a priceless gift offered to too few elderly people who live in care homes. I am so grateful for the opportunity to provide residents with learning opportunities and all the care staff now are involved in supporting residents to follow their interests throughout the rest of the week. Whenever learning is taking place at the care home, there is a real buzz about the place and everyone is very happy.*

Jaye Keightley, Activity Coordinator, Aigburth Residential Care Home



# Introducing learning opportunities

## Your skills

As an activity coordinator, or a carer with an interest in learning activities, you are already likely to have many skills that will enable you to do the following well:

- Arranging outings and programmes
- Managing and discussing activities with older people, their families and friends and with other carers
- Supporting older people on a one-to-one basis

All of these skills and experiences can be built on to make you an effective learning facilitator – that is, someone who makes learning happen.

On a personal level, facilitators will find themselves calling on skills on a daily basis, such as the ability to do the following:

- Listen and communicate well
- Plan and structure activities
- Be diplomatic and objective
- Put people at ease
- Draw people out without embarrassing them
- Keep people to time
- Think on your feet
- Be adaptable at short notice
- Handle conflicts and disagreements
- Support but not take over
- Value and make use of experience
- Foster independence

On a professional level, facilitators also need to think about how to do the following:

- Organise content – how will you structure the learning in a clear and organised way that will help the older people to understand what will be covered?
- Ensure participation – how will you help the older people to understand and retain information? Perhaps by providing opportunities for group work and questions.
- Provide feedback – how will you help the older people to see what they have achieved and the progress they have made? This is important in maintaining motivation.
- Evaluate learning – how will you identify how good the learning experience was and where it can be improved?



## Learning and support available

Being a successful facilitator of learning for older adults requires a range of both professional and personal skills. If you feel you need to develop your skills further you might want to consider shadowing a teacher or another activity coordinator with experience of working with older adults.

You may also be interested in studying for a qualification. There are specific qualifications available for supporting and coordinating activity provision in care settings.<sup>1</sup>

In addition there are teaching qualifications, for example the Level 3 Award in Education and Training, which is an introductory qualification that can be undertaken by those who are not in a teaching role and for which there is a small practical element. There is also a Level 4 Certificate in Education and Training, which develops practical teaching skills and prepares teaching practitioners to work in a range of contexts.

## Considerations

- How prepared are you to be a facilitator of learning for older adults?
- What relevant personal and professional skills do you have?
- Are there skills you would like to develop further?
- How could you go about developing these skills?



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<sup>1</sup> Further information can be found on the Skills for Care website: <http://skillsforcare.org.uk>





## Introducing learning opportunities: Involving others

Designing and delivering learning opportunities for people in your care is not something that you need do alone. It can provide opportunities for people in the community to get involved with activities at the care setting.

There is a range of ways to involve different kinds of people in providing learning opportunities. You might want to consider the following suggestions.

**Organise a residents or learning group** to help decide what learning opportunities are offered, and give them responsibility to build a programme with you. Taking part in this group will provide opportunities to use existing skills and learn new ones.

**Learn from other activity coordinators and carers** in your local area. If possible, build a bank of information and resources to be shared amongst local care settings. This can save time as well as provide access to a network of other people who can share their experiences and expertise.

**Draw on volunteers** as a way of bringing different skills and interests into your care setting. In particular, relatives and friends as volunteers can be an extremely valuable source of support and expertise.

**Make use of the wide range of local organisations** that may be able to offer assistance:

- Your local authority – talk to the Adult Social Care department, and/or to your authority's adult learning service
- Arts and theatre organisations
- Carers' organisations
- Churches and other religious bodies
- Citizens Advice (CAB)
- Local schools, colleges and other education providers
- Leisure facilities
- Museums, libraries and archives
- Older people's organisations and groups such as Age UK or University of the 3rd Age (U3A)
- GP surgeries, hospitals and health visitors
- Volunteer bureaux
- Workers' Educational Association (WEA)



## Don's story

Don is a care home resident who suffers with increasingly severe Parkinson's. His illness means that his voice is quite weak, his eyesight is very poor and he can shake violently at times. His mind, however, is completely intact and he misses doing many of the things that he used to do.

Don's major interest is in news, politics and current affairs. Don likes to be kept up to date with what is going on in the world, nationally and locally. Sadly, he is unable to follow the television, which is rarely tuned into his choice of programme. His eyesight prevents him from reading a daily newspaper and his shaking means he would be unable to hold it.

Because Don's voice is so weak and is increasingly affected by Parkinson's, he struggles to converse with the other residents, many of whom have hearing impairments. As a result, Don rarely receives any stimulation at all and is unable to take part in any group activities.

Identifying a volunteer to spend time with Don meant that the care home could ensure that he was able to engage effectively each week in topics that he was interested in finding out more about. Facilitating a weekly conversation of this sort is a very simple thing to do, but as a result Don's life and wellbeing has improved greatly. He spends the time in between the sessions thinking about what he has learned and reflecting on his knowledge. He feels like an individual and is given a sense of self-reliance at a time when he is relinquishing ever more independence. His voice has become stronger and during the sessions it improves each week.





## Introducing learning opportunities: How to make it happen

Providing learning opportunities for older people in your care need not cost a lot of money. Think creatively about how learning opportunities can be built into an existing activity programme as well as into everyday routines, or how you can draw on the support and services of local organisations and groups.

Care homes have found that the health and wellbeing benefits of providing learning opportunities for those they care for can actually create savings in the costs of care and medicines.

Many of the activities featured within our case studies have however benefited from a small amount of additional funding. Small-scale fundraising activities can therefore provide a useful source of income from which to finance learning opportunities.

The following websites provide some creative ideas for fundraising activities:

- [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk) provides an A-Z directory of fundraising ideas
- [www.fundraising.co.uk](http://www.fundraising.co.uk) provides ideas, supplies, etc. in planning your own fundraising event
- [www.fundraisingdirectory.com](http://www.fundraisingdirectory.com) supplies craft items and ready-made fundraising packs

You might also want to consider approaching local businesses, organisations and groups for support.

Formal funding applications can also be submitted to a range of organisations, such as private companies, local authorities and charitable trusts.

Finally, working with other organisations can enable you to access a range of other funding opportunities, as well as services which partners are already funded to provide, such as home library services.



## Learning for older people in care settings

Many care settings offer activities to entertain and occupy older people, but these aren't necessarily the same as learning, which is a structured combination of fun, challenge and maintenance of social, physical and mental skills.

Here's an example of how regular activities can be enhanced to provide more opportunities for learning:

Helping to pot up seedlings and watering them to provide a good show of flowers on the window sills is a pleasurable activity in its own right, but you can make it an even more satisfying and stimulating experience if you can identify those who enjoy gardening, and encourage them to help others to learn. Together they can use a gardening book or catalogue to buy seeds for specific areas, e.g. sun or shade. Older people then get the opportunity to discuss, make decisions and negotiate, as well as enjoying the fun of anticipating the results of their work. And there's no reason why you or family visitors shouldn't join in.

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

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

Learning can come in all shapes and sizes. The following seven case studies provide a range of examples of work that is currently taking place to support learning for older people in care settings.

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

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



## Open Age

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

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

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

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

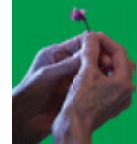
‘You [the link-up coordinator] have been really helpful, you have helped me out so much, I can’t see how much more you could do for me.’ (Open Age learner)

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

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

For more information contact [hleech@openage.org.uk](mailto:hleech@openage.org.uk)





## First Taste

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information contact [firsttaste@btinternet.com](mailto:firsttaste@btinternet.com) or visit [www.firsttastecharity.co.uk](http://www.firsttastecharity.co.uk)



## Learning for the Fourth Age

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information contact [enquiries@l4a.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@l4a.org.uk)



## Nightingale Hammerson

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

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

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

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

For more information contact [activities@nightingalehammerson.org](mailto:activities@nightingalehammerson.org)



## iPad engAGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For further information contact [claireford88@hotmail.com](mailto:claireford88@hotmail.com)



## Silver Lining

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For further information, contact [silver@thesagegateshead.org](mailto:silver@thesagegateshead.org)





## Alive!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For further information, contact [info@aliveactivities.org](mailto:info@aliveactivities.org) or read the Alive! blog: [www.aliveactivities.org/blog.asp](http://www.aliveactivities.org/blog.asp)



## What are the benefits of learning?

Taking part in learning can help increase an older person's quality of life, as well as reduce health and social care costs. In addition, it can bring a range of benefits for family and friends, as well as for carers.

### Benefits of learning for older people:

- Improves enjoyment of life and self-confidence
- Those who are engaged in learning say that they feel better about themselves
- Increases independence, control and choice
- Reduces dependency on others
- Increases levels of resilience and ability to cope
- Reduces depression and diminishes the effects of dementia
- Improves levels of motivation to participate in day-to-day activities.

Describing the impact of learning upon residents, one carer explained that *'residents communicate more openly and they are prepared to try new things'*. Another reported that *'residents are a lot happier in themselves when they have done [learning] activities; it gives them an aim in their daily routine'*.

### Potential benefits for carers

- There is more time to provide a better service.
- Carers have greater job satisfaction.
- Work becomes more sociable, with increased conversation and activity.
- There are raised expectations of the older person's capabilities, again reducing levels of dependency.
- Supporting older people to learn can help staff to get to know the people they care for much better.
- Opportunities to support older people as they learn can also result in carers learning about new topics and developing new skills themselves.

As one care home manager explained, *'It's [learning is] important – and more interesting – than 'up you get, here you go, here's your dinner'. It's more than task-orientated work.'*



## Iris's story

Iris was diagnosed with dementia a few months before she moved into a care home. She began taking part in learning activities when she was still in the early stages of the illness and her dementia has progressed only slowly. Before she retired, Iris was a poet and worked at a university. Her husband was also an academic, as were most of their friends. They had a real enthusiasm for learning and the sharing of ideas and opinions.

At first it was difficult for Iris to settle into the care home, despite the best efforts of the care staff. She missed the stimulating conversations of her old life and she missed learning. To help with this, Iris was assigned a learning mentor called James.

At first, Iris was closed, abrupt and difficult to engage. However, as time went on and she learned to trust James, she opened up and shared more and more of her thoughts, passions and opinions. It became clear that she and James shared a love of modern poetry.

Each week James would visit Iris and engage in discussion with her. Sometimes, in the early days, this would focus on discussing the lack of meaning in life, or the challenges of life in a care home that was just metres away from where Iris used to live independently. However, as time went on, James's visits helped Iris to become happier and more content in the care home.

Recently, Iris has written some poetry again. James knows that it is very good and of a similar standard to her last published work. Iris says that this is mainly a result of the conversations that she has been enjoying with James. At first, Iris was reluctant to let anyone read her most recent work, but as time passed she has let James read the work and the next step is for them to type it up together on the computer and look at poetry on the internet. These will be yet more new skills for Iris to learn.





## What are the myths about older people and learning?

As a society, we hold many misconceptions about older people and their appetite for learning. Here are just a few of them.

### Myth 1: Older people are not interested in learning

Although older people are statistically less likely to take up learning opportunities than younger people, this doesn't mean that they are not interested in learning. In fact many older people have positive experiences of learning. Here is what two older learners told us about how they feel about learning:

'Learning is living. It brings joy and fulfilment. All cares and woes, aches and pains fade away to nothing. I am very fortunate to have this in my life.'

'Learning to me is not the spice of life but its essence ... I regard learning as a lifelong process.'

A recent study into older people's learning found that a passion for the subject, pleasure in the act of learning and the opportunity to develop as a person are all powerful incentives for older people to engage in learning.<sup>2</sup>

Older people will be interested in learning different things in different ways according to their individual preferences and determined by what's available, affordable and accessible. Some may be keen to join a group, while others may prefer learning through books, magazines, DVDs, TV, radio or the internet.

### Myth 2: Older people are not interested in learning anything new

It's often thought that older people prefer to live in the past but, in fact, evidence suggests that many older people want to pursue new interests in order to maintain mental sharpness, face a challenge, make new friends or do something different with additional leisure time.

### Myth 3: Older people are not able to learn anything new

There's a widespread presumption that older people's brains are slow. A research report explained how important it is to challenge this stereotyping:

'... in the absence of specific brain-related diseases, the adverse effects of intrinsic ageing on memory and capacity for intellectual work are greatly exaggerated in the popular mind; this has been demonstrated repeatedly by psychological testing. The resulting negative stereotyping of older adults by society, including their peers, is a critical factor in the massive waste of mental capital in the later decades of life.' Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008, p.224) *Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century. Final Project Report.*

The more we use our brains, young or old, the more likely we are to retain our mental faculties. Keeping the brain active through learning or activities such as cards, word games and crosswords has beneficial results in the same way that exercising a muscle or joint helps to keep it more mobile.

<sup>2</sup> McNair, S. (2012) *Older People's Learning in 2012: A Survey*. Leicester: NIACE.





## For you to consider:

- How best might you find out what older people in your care want to learn about, and how they want to learn?
- Have you thought about offering 'taster sessions'?
- How can you provide appropriate support for learning? Are care staff able to do this or do you need to involve other people?







## Building on and celebrating success

Once you have begun to introduce learning opportunities into your care setting, take a look around you; look back at activity programmes and care plans and see what changes you have made.

What difference has it made to the older people in your care? What difference has it made to you and other carers?

Now you have a model in place on which you can continue to build, consider the following questions.

- Can people progress to a higher level of skill?
- Do others now want to join in?
- What's new out there that can be offered?
- How can you encourage more people to get involved in offering and supporting learning opportunities?
- Were there things that didn't work out so well that you could learn from next time?
- How will you review the learning provided?
- How will you identify, record and celebrate the benefits of learning?
- What mechanisms will you use to ensure that the outcomes of any learning are used to inform an individual's wider care package?

Celebrating success is an important way of recognising what people have achieved, motivating them to continue and raising the profile of your work. This could take the form of hosting a celebratory afternoon tea in the care home, putting on an award ceremony, displaying work, or talking to the media about the work that you are doing.





## Where can I go for help?

Key national organisations that you may wish to contact for further assistance include:

### **Age Exchange**

Working with older people in a wide range of reminiscence-based activities.

Tel: 020 8318 9105

Web: [www.age-exchange.org.uk](http://www.age-exchange.org.uk)

### **Age UK**

Tel: 0800 169 6565

Web: [www.ageuk.org](http://www.ageuk.org)

### **Alzheimer's Society**

Tel: 020 7423 3500

Web: [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

### **Care England**

Representative body for independent care providers.

Tel: 08450 577 677

Web: [www.careengland.org.uk](http://www.careengland.org.uk)

### **Carers UK**

Information and help for the UK's 6 million carers.

Tel: 020 7378 4999

Web: [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

### **Community Service Volunteers**

The UK's largest volunteering organisation.

Tel: 020 7278 6601

Web: [www.csv.org.uk](http://www.csv.org.uk)

### **Contact the Elderly**

Groups nationwide who organise gatherings for older people who live alone.

Tel: 020 7240 0630

Web: [www.contact-the-elderly.co.uk](http://www.contact-the-elderly.co.uk)

### **Dark Horse Venture**

An award scheme which recognises new learning achievements for older people.

Tel: 0151 256 8866

### **Digital Unite**

Providing computer training for the over 50s.

Tel: 0800 228 9272

Web: [www.digitalunite.com](http://www.digitalunite.com)

### **Extend**

Providing training for anyone wishing to deliver exercise classes for the over 60s.

Tel: 01582 832760

Web: [www.extend.org.uk](http://www.extend.org.uk)

**JABADAO**

National charity linking specialist movement practitioners with communities.

Tel: 0113 236 3311 (Yorkshire) or 01473 328 330 (Suffolk)

Web: [www.jabadao.org](http://www.jabadao.org)

**MIND**

Leading mental health organisation in England and Wales.

Tel: 020 8519 2122

Web: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**NAPA (National Association for the Providers of Activities for Older People)**

Supporting care staff with an interest in providing activities for older people.

Tel: 020 7078 9375

Web: [www.napa-activities.co.uk](http://www.napa-activities.co.uk)

**National Care Forum**

Representing the interests of not-for-profit health and social care providers in the UK.

Tel: 024 7624 3619

Web: [www.nationalcareforum.org.uk](http://www.nationalcareforum.org.uk)

**National Listening Library**

An audio book library service available throughout the UK.

Tel: 020 7403 1377

Web: [www.listeningbooks.org.uk](http://www.listeningbooks.org.uk)

**NIACE (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)**

The national voice for lifelong learning.

Tel: 0116 204 4200

Web: [www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)

**Residents and Relatives Association**

Tel: 020 7359 8148

Web: [www.relres.org](http://www.relres.org)

**Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)**

Tel: 0808 808 123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

Web: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

**Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

Tel: 0303 123 9999

Web: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

**Skills for Care**

Working with employers in England to develop effective tools to develop and support the social care workforce.

Tel: 0113 245 1716

Web: [www.skillsforcare.org.uk](http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk)

**Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)**

Telephone: 020 7024 7650

Web: [www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)



### Speechmark

Publisher of practical resources for education, health and social care.

Tel: 0845 034 4610

Web: [www.speechmark.net](http://www.speechmark.net)

### Thrive

Promotes and supports the use of gardening to improve the lives of people with all kinds of need.

Tel: 0118 988 5688

Web: [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk)

### Timebank

National charity that matches volunteers with suitable organisations.

Tel: 0845 456 1668

Web: [www.timebank.org.uk](http://www.timebank.org.uk)

### U3A (University of the Third Age)

Tel: 020 8466 6139

Web: [www.u3a.org.uk](http://www.u3a.org.uk)

## Other useful resources

As well as the material available on the websites listed above, other useful resources include the following:

*Adult Education Working in Care Settings: NIACE Briefing Sheet 67.* Available for download at:

[www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/67-Adult-education-working-in-care-settings.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/67-Adult-education-working-in-care-settings.pdf)

### Alive!

Web: [www.aliveactivities.org](http://www.aliveactivities.org)

Provides learning activities for people now living in residential care

*CSHS Good Practice Guide No 5: Digital Inclusion and Older People.* Available to purchase from

[www.chs.ac.uk](http://www.chs.ac.uk)

Dutton, Y., Gladdish, L. and Soulsby, J. (2006) *Adult Education in Care Settings*. Leicester: NIACE.

Gladdish, L. (2010) *Learning, Participation and Choice: A Guide for Facilitating Older Learners*. Leicester: NIACE.

### Learning for the Fourth Age (L4A)

Web: [www.l4a.org.uk](http://www.l4a.org.uk)

Provides learning opportunities to older people receiving care.

**Online basics**, available free of charge at [www.learnmyway.com/online-basics](http://www.learnmyway.com/online-basics). This short, free course covers the basics people need to know to get going online – from keyboard and mouse skills through to email, internet searching, and how to stay safe on the internet.

Soulsby, J. (2002) *Days Out, Days In: Learning Opportunities for Older People at Home and in Day Care Settings*. Leicester: NIACE.

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**[www.niace.org.uk](http://www.niace.org.uk)**

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