



Alzheimer's Society services evaluation 2019

July 2020

Spotlight on
Side by Side



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‘She has brought me back to life again.’

Person with dementia

Alzheimer’s Society’s Side by Side service matches people living with dementia with a volunteer. Their regular contact may be face-to-face or via telephone. The volunteer helps the person with dementia to continue with their hobbies and interests and to start doing new activities. The service helps people with dementia to live the life they want to lead, to the best of their ability.

In 2019, evaluation data was collected from 503 people with dementia who used the Side by Side service.

Did people who used Side by Side feel supported by their volunteer?

Most of the people with dementia (98%) agreed that they were supported by their volunteer. They felt their volunteer enabled them to make their own choices about which activities they did. Some people said their volunteer helped to make a choice easier for them by suggesting a shortlist of options. This worked because the volunteer understood their needs and preferences. Being open to trying to new activities also enhanced people’s experience of the service.

‘He asks me all the time what I want to do and has a few suggestions of places to go based on what I have enjoyed in the past. The volunteer is the right person for me as he understands my culture and has an understanding of my health concerns.’

Person with dementia

‘My volunteer always gives me suggestions because she knows I like that instead of leaving the decision completely up to me to decide. We have written plenty of ideas for outings and activities in a notebook which

I keep in my house to look through so I can have a think about where to go next.’

Person with dementia

Did people who used Side by Side feel it helped them to do things they enjoyed?

All the people with dementia (100%) enjoyed the activities they did with their volunteer. These included going for walks or drives, attending concerts and visiting local shops, garden centres and parks. Some people with dementia who use Side by Side are frail or have other health issues – this means the activities they do are weather and context dependent, or focused on conversation and companionship.

‘I really enjoy seeing the volunteer and going on the bus every other week. It is great to see places that I haven’t been in years and great to share my knowledge with the volunteer.’

Person with dementia

‘The volunteer is a lovely girl. It helps me bring back memories, and my family say I am more talkative and able to recall past events better after she leaves.’

Person with dementia

Did people who used Side by Side feel they had more social contact (with people other than their volunteer)?

Only 61% of people with dementia agreed that they have increased their social contact with other people (not including their volunteer) as a result of Side by Side. This was because many people used a telephone-based service, which did not involve going out in the community. Other people told us they were content with their existing social network and did not need more social contact.

‘I might enjoy getting out to sit in the sun for a bit, but I don’t want to socialise more.’

Person with dementia

Some people who had increased their social contact said they enjoyed both building relationships with new people and reconnecting with their family and friends. The service helped to increase their overall confidence and feelings of independence. This meant their social contacts extended beyond the activities they did with their volunteer.

‘We go into a café in a local garden centre and I chat to staff because I have got to know them by going every week. They know my name and I feel welcome and comfortable.’

Person with dementia

‘I have joined other groups in the village because of the confidence I have gained with my volunteer.’

Person with dementia

Did people who used Side by Side feel it made their life better in any way?

Almost all the people with dementia who gave feedback on Side by Side (99%) agreed that their life was made better in some way. Several people said they felt happier and had a sense of purpose as a result of contact with their volunteer. Although Side by Side is not a respite service, people acknowledged that it could help to give their carer a break.

‘I am happier. It makes me feel that I have a purpose and that I have not just been left in the corner without interaction.’

Person with dementia

‘I feel happy after I’ve been out with my volunteer. I regained my confidence and I am happy that it gives my husband a break for a couple of hours each week.’

Person with dementia

Did people who used Side by Side feel it made their life better in any way?

In 2019, for the first time we asked carers of Side by Side services users for their views on the service. Carers said they saw a positive change in the mood of those they care for. They felt reassured that for a while, their loved ones were in the safe and capable hands of a volunteer who understood their individual needs.

‘The volunteer is perfect. I know she is left with a happy feeling and it means a lot to her. It is a break for me. I know that she is safe.’

Daughter of person with dementia

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