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Memory Club Evaluation

WILTSHIRE AND SWINDON USER'S NETWORK

2016

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Memory Club Services Evaluation October 2016

Introduction

This report examines the effectiveness of Memory Club Services sponsored by the Wiltshire and Swindon User Network (WSUN). These services are provided in 3 geographic locations and are provided by Volunteers/Coordinators and planned, coordinated and supervised by the local coordinators and supported by WSUN personnel.

Objective:

To provide a social venue, meeting on a regular basis for anyone in that community who has a form of memory loss or who cares for someone with a memory loss.

Method:

WSUN development and outreach workers identify communities and seek to find a small group of volunteers/coordinators prepared to take on the task of establishing a group. Up to three such groups could be established in any one year.

WSUN initially provide all the necessary support, including financial, to establish the group and to ensure that it runs smoothly and effectively.

In time the local volunteers/coordinators form a committee with a chair person, adopt a constitution, open a bank account, fund-raise for themselves and become self- sustaining.

Those members who attend the group are closely involved in the running of the group and in the decision-making about the activities and events the group will provide.

Evaluation Method

This evaluation programme is designed to monitor and evaluate the Memory Club services provided through WSUN in terms of its effectiveness (how well it achieves identified outcomes). It employs a distinct method of data collection: through semi-structured interviews.

In total, 45 interviews were completed:

- 30 service users (some with assistance)
- 6 carers (either relatives or residential home carers)
- 12 Volunteers/Coordinators providing the service

This evaluation method will not simply provide a detached analytical view of the processes and outcomes of the Memory Club Service. It will provide a systematic and disciplined study of the service with a view to facilitating change where required for the service to achieve its declared objectives. This means that the researcher will not only take an objective view, but could be an active participant in the change process. This report will then:

- Evaluate as well as describe
- Qualify as well as quantify
- Represent subjective as well as objective views
- Be responsive to specific or unpredicted circumstances as they arise
- Reflect the programme's dynamics within the discipline of this methodology

This methodology should be able to provide some tools for organisations open to learning, tools particularly relating to monitoring of outcomes and feedback from customers and partners. Participants often expressed their opinions in very clear terms, and these statements appear throughout this report in **blue bold text**.

Purposes of this report

- To determine the level of achievement of identified outcomes for each customer receiving the service
- To identify any existing or potential problems relating to the programme's operational relationships amongst commissioners, assessors, providers and customers
- To recommend realistic solutions that may be required to achieve an appropriate level of programme effectiveness.

Key areas of focus

1. How do those attending memory clubs actually benefit?
2. What choices are available to the users of the service?
3. How do providers, customers and carers currently assess the effectiveness of the programme?
4. What should stakeholders be doing differently to maintain or improve the effectiveness of the programme?

What the service users are saying

Over 70% of users identify meeting with other members of the group is the most satisfying aspect of their attendance. Their enjoyment begins when they anticipate attending—so memory club days are very important to most. Most service users specifically indicated that they look forward to coming.

“Looking forward” seems to be a major theme for participants but for a range of reasons:

- isolation at home
- stimulation of mind and memory
- meeting new people
- the variety of events and activities
- the cakes (and other refreshments)
- being welcomed
- being listened to
- trying new things
- being told when things are not right
- getting away from the confines of residential care

“I look forward now!”

The range of activities provided during the sessions is appreciated. Specific activities were especially popular:

- singing (30%)
- games (15%)
- outings (20%)
- dancing (10%)
- guest speakers with short messages (15%)

Other specific activities appreciated included:

- cake
- being with animals
- visits from different groups
- talking about memories

Perhaps as important as the activities is the manner and atmosphere of their delivery. So listed amongst activities are comments on aspects of attending that are most important to the service users:

- kindness
- the friendly committee
- seeing familiar faces
- friendly non-judgmental helpers
- the quality of the volunteers/coordinators

“The club welcomes everyone irrespective of the severity of impairment—the only public gathering to do so.”

Service users were able to identify a range of ways attendance at the memory club has been helpful to them do what they want to do. These include:

- memory deterioration is less
- support to try new things
- interaction with others is better
- sharing of past skills with others
- keeping the brain going
- huge relief from social isolation (particularly those with short term memory loss)
- confidence to do things that have been avoided
- gives carers a rest

“I had a chance to hold a small lamb and a tiny rabbit!”

“I am being made to feel useful”

“I can’t always remember and sometimes feel lonely at home”

20% say that their everyday life and routines have not changed since attending the memory club. 30% were clear that it helped them have something positive to look forward to: The practical advice and support they receive at the memory club is important to some. Others say there is much more to talk about when they return to their residential care home. One service user says he only knows when Wednesdays come around because it is memory club day.

“The boundaries of life have changed—more to do and talk about!”

Though 20% found all the activities helpful, there are a number of activities identified as either not interesting or not helpful:

- arts and crafts (2)
- being with animals (1)
- book-based activities with instructions (2)
- cooking (1)
- talks (1)
- “anything that taxes my brain or requires dexterity” (1)

“I cannot join in on some physical activities”

***“Sometimes I don’t always hear things and
have to ask repetitive questions”***

Thinking about improvements to the service, 10% of service users had no suggestions—positively saying that it was very good as it was. However, other service users suggested some changes:

- more dancing and music
- visits/talks from neighbourhood police (20%)
- something on the tables when we arrive
- more short games including Ludo
- a loop system
- a bring and buy
- more guest speakers
- a link with Sainsbury's for grants, food advice
- more volunteers/coordinators
- a larger room would help socialisation
- RSPB songs about birds

“We need something for non-verbals”

What the Carers are saying

Carers could be relatives supporting the service user in their own home or a member of staff of a residential care home.

Carers agree that seeing people (the same people) regularly is one of the best experiences for service users. Having something to look forward to and sharing in groups was equally important. The club is a place for fun and this includes:

- meeting new people
- being able to socialise
- experience a sense of kindness and welcome

***“It was a breath of fresh air to join the club with no bureaucracy—
just a phone number!”***

Carers were able to identify three “best” aspects of the service:

- it provides a safe and happy environment
- it allows members to maintain social contacts
- it establishes relationships of trust

“When I think of how her life might have been over the past two years without the memory club, I realize the warmth, enjoyment and interest that it has brought into both our lives”

Carers were asked to identify the activities they felt were most helpful to the service user. They identified:

- the friendliness of the group
- activities that related to the service users' past
- outings
- sessions that stimulated cognition
- music
- talks and visits from the police

Carers also identified two activities that seemed unhelpful

- long or complex talks (all carers)
- anything complicated

All carers noticed changes in the service users' daily life or routines:

- the happy anticipation of attending the club leads to conversations with carers
- service user's memory improves and they recognise people in the groups
- helps the service user be more at ease with residential care or care at home
- mood improvement—more sociable
- life is fuller—with more things to talk about
- service users and carers can continue at home things they learn at the memory club

“Part of her former self ‘kicks back in’!”

What the Volunteers/Coordinators are saying

Volunteers/Coordinators provide the service and guide the activities of the memory clubs. They identify a range of activities the service users like very much:

- indoor activities
- creative activities and handicrafts
- one-to-one conversations
- simple but practical tasks
- quizzes
- music and singing
- music and physical activity combined
- visits out
- bag making
- “no-bake baking”

Least like activities included

- long talks
- difficult access to the building
- cold activity rooms

“They throw themselves into anything and everything on offer”

“Cake plays an important part”

When asked to identify the activities that benefit service users the most, volunteers/coordinators said:

- memory stimulation (25%)
- social engagement
- sharing skills with other members
- creative activity with easy instructions—activities they can do while talking with others
- quizzes
- music
- guest speakers
- laughter –part of every meeting

***“John never wants to go out until he hears
I am collecting him for the memory club!”***

Volunteers/Coordinators observed changes in behaviour and functioning of service users while attending the memory clubs. These include:

- growth in confidence after initial reluctance
- increase in the regularity of laughter in the groups
- service users supporting each other
- service users asking for support and guidance
- increased membership
- continued attendance in spite of deterioration in health or ability
- increased level of 1-1 conversations
- more smiles
- clear friendships developing

Volunteers/Coordinators could identify organisational changes that would improve the provision of the service:

- regularised funding
- better advertising of a new group
- more guest speakers (with short presentations)
- more service users
- a change of venue (2 volunteers/coordinators)
- providing a website about the work of the clubs
- involving more people from the community
- volunteer induction and meetings
- training of volunteers/coordinators

Volunteers/Coordinators said they could show that the service was both effective and beneficial to the service user by:

- user feedback
- the maintained interest in outings
- more conversations between service users
- more laughter between service users
- continued inclusion and involvement of care homes
- increased membership
- increased signposting and advice relating to other services

“The reduction of isolation is a major outcome of the memory club”

Conclusion

Conclusion 1	Specific activities were important but secondary to the high levels of social inclusion experienced by club members
Recommendation	It is important to maintain personal preferences and capabilities when providing activities
Recommendation	The range of activities could be extended
Recommendation	Presentations and talks must remain brief

Conclusion 2	Club meetings must ensure that a range of communication methods and skills are appropriately employed
Recommendation	Volunteers/Coordinators should be trained to engage members in ways that best suit the abilities of each member

Conclusion 3	Carers and club volunteers/coordinators noticed improved independent functioning during and after club meetings
Recommendation	Volunteers/Coordinators should continue to support members and their carers to promote the members' functional independence

Conclusion 4	One facility was unsuitable for use by members with limited independent functioning—though this venue has now been changed
Recommendation	It is important to ensure that all of the facilities are accessible and usable by club members

Conclusion 5	There is a clear need for continuing funding to continue and extend the Memory Club Services in local communities
Recommendation	Continuing and extended finance to enable WSUN to provide short term financial and medium term practical support for existing and new clubs in local communities

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