

Evaluation of the Dementia Community Dog Project



“Enormous benefits and very surprising. Brought out his tactile side and sense of humour, which is a side I had not seen in a long time. Also brought out a warmth that appeared to be lost”

Spouse of client with dementia

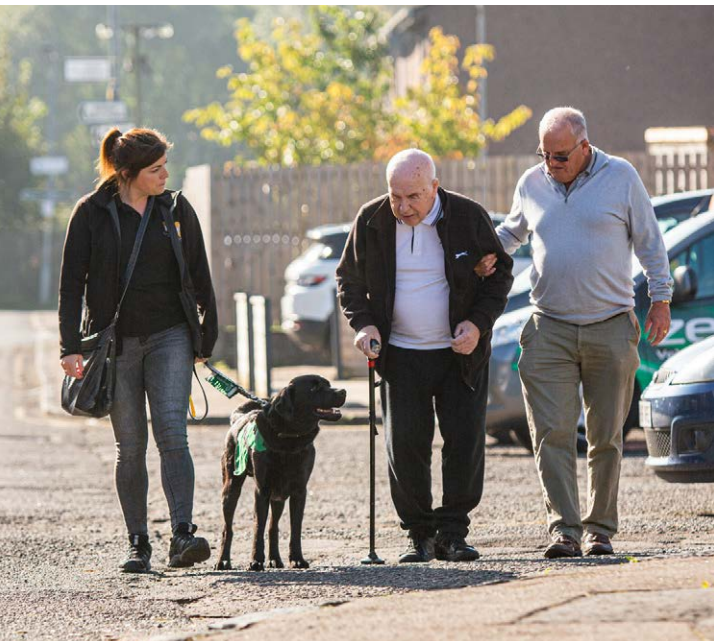


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Contents

Page 2	Introduction
Page 3	About the Project
Page 4	About the Team
Page 5	Role of a Community Dog
Page 6	Our Learning – Community Dog Interventions
Page 8	Case Study
Page 9	Our Learning – Dog Days
Page 14	Adapting to Covid-19
Page 15	Conclusions & Recommendations
Page 20	Final Reflections

Introduction



The Dementia Community Dog Project forms part of 'Dementia Dog' – a charitable collaboration between Alzheimer Scotland and Dogs for Good that explores different ways trained dogs can help people live well with dementia.

In 2017, the collaboration received a 3-year funding grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to pilot a programme of animal-assisted therapy activities, designed to pioneer and evaluate new ways of supporting people at differing stages of dementia.

Overview

Funding enabled Dementia Dog to pilot two new therapeutic approaches in the field of dementia:

- **'Dementia Community Dog Interventions'** – individual animal-assisted sessions for people with mild to moderate dementia
- **'Dog Days'** – dog-themed group events welcoming people at any stage of dementia and their carers

The Dementia Dog team set out to establish a rolling programme of project activity phased across 7 geographical pilot areas (4 in Scotland, 3 in England). In each pilot area, a monthly Dog Day event would be established, with Dementia Community Dog sessions delivered to 6 individuals in that same locality. Delivery partner organisations were identified including Alzheimer Scotland, Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and Forest of Dean Dementia Action Alliance, Hertfordshire County Council, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and OSJCT Lake House Care Home.

This report is based on the evaluation done by Jacki Gordon and Associates, and aims to summarise key learnings, adaptations to the Covid-19 pandemic and recommendations for the future.

About Dementia Community Dog Interventions

These weekly sessions are designed around the animal-assisted intervention model, where individuals are supported to identify and work towards measurable goals that can help their social, emotional or physical wellbeing.

The programme is intended as a short-term intervention, to act as a stepping-stone to help connect people into longer term outcomes – such as joining a regular walking group or building confidence to use public transport and improve their independence.

Operating as a referral-based initiative, delivery partner organisations would identify suitable clients and associated goals that the sessions aim to achieve. The aim was to support individuals with mild to moderate dementia, delivering a total of six face-to-face weekly sessions.



About Dog Days

These informal dog-themed events were designed to bring joy and gentle interaction with dogs to engender positive reminiscing and provide respite for carers. They welcomed groups of people at any stage of dementia, with their carers and family members. The pilot aimed to establish Dog Days in all 7 pilot areas, to run for a period of at least 6 months in each locality.

Dog Days would be supported by local volunteers with their own pet dogs, who first undergo bespoke dog and dementia training and assessment before attending a Dog Day, to ensure a happy and safe environment both from an attendee and dog perspective.

It was expected that delivery partner organisations would be responsible for hosting and promoting the events and providing the staff and volunteers to run the event on the day.

Adapting to Covid-19 pandemic

In March 2020 the Covid-19 outbreak necessitated immediate halting of all face to face activity including Dementia Community Dog interventions and Dog Days. The priority for the Dementia Dog team was to explore ways to help keep people connected and to minimise social isolation during lockdown. The following project components were identified as being transferable to an online format and were developed through the final year of the project:

- **online dog bingo sessions, adapted from Dog Day events and delivered for groups of people with dementia and carers via Alzheimer Scotland's network**
- **online Community Dog interventions for people with dementia who were also living with their carer**

Establishing new standards of excellence

Through the delivery of the above project activity, the Dementia Dog team also aimed to pioneer and establish new training standards for the delivery of animal-assisted therapy in the field of dementia.

Evaluation

Aims and objectives

The evaluation focused on the following four questions: How has the project been implemented? What are the experiences of the project among stakeholders and partners? What are the impacts of the project? What lessons can be learned from the project?

Methods

The evaluation was based on data collected by: the project team, those hosting Dog Day events and the evaluators directly. This report also incorporates feedback available gathered by the project team from the online activity during 2020.





Nadia Sutherland
Dementia Specialist



Carla Haizelden
Community Dog Handler | Scotland



Julia Winters
Community Dog Handler | England

Our Team

“A truly wonderful project. Very supportive team. Thank you.”

Client with dementia



Billy
Labrador x Golden Retriever



Quill
Cockapoo



Georgie
Golden Retriever

The role of a Community Dog

Community Dogs undergo two years of specialised training to provide animal-assisted therapy interventions, enabling people to develop or rediscover life skills and improve social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

All three community dogs in this programme were trained specifically to support people with dementia and were bred and trained from puppies by Dogs for Good.

Much of a Community Dog's training focusses on socialisation skills with people and dogs that encourages calm interactions, building on their outgoing, friendly temperament. Through the latter, advanced stages of their training they learn more technical skills to support someone with dementia – such as offering headrests, walking on a dual lead, or retrieving specific objects.

Community Dogs will always work with the same handler, with whom they build a strong bond of trust. The dogs are highly adaptable to working in different environments with a range of different clients. Depending on the therapeutic goal, they may play the role of motivator, confidence booster or social bridge to facilitate communication with others.

To ensure their welfare and wellbeing, each Community Dog has its own work schedule, which is designed by their handler, in line with Dogs for Good's standards of practice, Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII) standards and the dogs' individual needs.

Billy and Quill are based in Scotland, with Billy living with his handler Carla and Quill living with a volunteer family. Georgie is based in England, living with her handler Julia.



The fact that these dogs were selected for temperament, trained for the role, and had a solid bond with their handler are likely to be key issues that contributed to their therapeutic power and effectiveness.

Source: Jacki Gordon & Associates full evaluation report



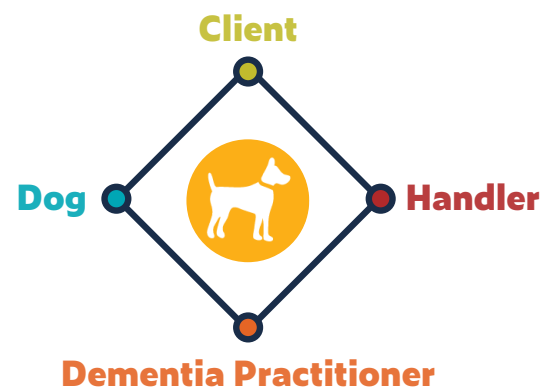
Our Learning – Dementia Community Dog Interventions

Overview

This referral-based service aimed to explore and evaluate how effective this therapeutic intervention can be for people in the mild to moderate stage of dementia.

The sessions were designed around the established 'diamond' model for animal assisted interventions, with each session involving the client, their dementia support practitioner, the dog handler and dog. The spouse and/or family member was also welcomed where this was appropriate.

DIAMOND MODEL FOR ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS



This therapeutic approach is well-established in other support areas, such as autism or adults and children with learning difficulties. This project represented the first of its kind in the UK to test the same approach in the field of dementia.

Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) are goal-directed, structured sessions that are delivered as a short-term programme. Goals were to be realistic, person-centred and could relate to social, emotional, physical or cognitive objectives, which could also support the development or improvement of life skills.

How the sessions helped

The project team overall aimed to deliver dementia community dog sessions to 42 clients, across the 7 pilot areas.

In each area, it was anticipated that 3 clients would still be living at home (alone or with family) and 3 clients would be in assisted living accommodation. The identified goal for each client was assessed and scored before and after the intervention so that progress could be measured.

The intended targets were impacted by Covid-19 and challenges in project roll-out; however, the completed evaluation for 21 clients shows:

- Sessions working towards social or emotional goals saw the greatest improvements and impact for clients
- Sessions working towards goals to increase physical activity saw the least improvement. This was due to wider contributing factors, including; others setting the goal for the client, lack of motivation or physical strength and poor weather conditions on the day of the session
- Sessions showed greatest impact for client's wellbeing in the areas of social interaction, confidence and quality of life.

“The dog acts as a natural motivator to enable people with dementia to build confidence and connections in their community.”

Project Manager

What Worked Well



The dog

Acts as natural motivator for client

Engages client in session, reducing formality and anxiety

Engenders social interaction with others

Acts as icebreaker with practitioners

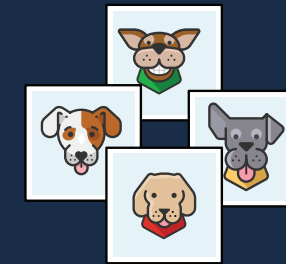


Photo albums

Photos of sessions to help reinforce benefits between sessions

Photo albums helped reminisce after sessions had ended

Created new focus for conversation between family members



Linking into Dog Days

Connecting into longer-term activity

Maintain association with dogs

Build confidence in local community

Challenges

- Due to being a new concept, uptake of appropriate referrals took longer than anticipated
- Some inappropriate client referrals whose dementia was too progressed
- Wider health issues of target demographic (especially if more progressed) necessitated cancelling of weekly sessions due to hospitalisation etc. This could impact on overall outcomes as the flow and timeliness of interventions is a key factor to success
- Goal identification was sometimes led by practitioner/family member rather than client
- Capacity of health care practitioners to support and attend weekly sessions
- Quantity of paperwork proved onerous for practitioners to complete



“The sessions with the dogs have given Alan more confidence to speak to different people and try new social groups.”

Dementia practitioner

Key Learnings

- Allow more promotion time for new concept to gain understanding and momentum, leading to more appropriate referrals
- Animal-assisted intervention, as delivered within this project, is more effective for people with mild dementia. Clients with more progressed dementia experienced 'in the moment' benefits. However, working towards longer term goals was more difficult where recall of weekly sessions was not possible
- Changing nature of dementia means timely interventions are critical
- Where Dog Days could be established in the same locality, this enabled clients to connect into longer term outcomes that maintains contact with dogs. Additionally, this cross-referral into another Dementia Dog service enables consistent support through their dementia journey
- Ensuring intervention goals are realistic and measurable
- Allowing flexibility around timespan of sessions, to extend beyond 6 sessions if goal not yet been achieved
- Find ways to reduce and streamline paperwork involved

Dementia Community Dog Intervention – case study

Carol has early stage dementia. She lives alone in a remote, rural area and was referred for Community Dog sessions by the local Community Wellbeing Service at Forest of Dean District Council.

Prior to the onset of her dementia, Carol was reliant on her car, but is now unable to drive. This has compromised her independence and reduced her social opportunities. A dementia support practitioner, who was well acquainted with Carol and her condition, was concerned that she was losing confidence and becoming quite withdrawn. As this practitioner knew that Carol had dogs in the past, he identified her as a suitable client for the pilot.

When the sessions were explained to Carol, she viewed these very positively.

Following discussions between Carol, the Dog Handler and the practitioner, it was agreed that the overall aim of the sessions would be for Carol to maintain and strengthen her confidence and independence. More specific goals to achieve that aim were then discussed.

Accordingly, the first goal was to use the bus to get to places. The other goals were to establish links with a local group, and make connections with people in the local community.

Carol remembered the sessions and said that she 'enjoyed every bit' of them, commenting that 'I love dogs'. More specifically, she said of the community dog that 'I just enjoyed having her round' and 'I would have missed her if we hadn't had her'.

Carol frequently struggles to find the correct word. During the sessions, it was felt that the presence of the Dementia Community Dog (Georgie) increased Carol's confidence in speaking.

The dog's involvement was also seen to engender social interactions with people: strangers would make eye contact, smile and come over to say hello to Georgie. This was viewed as boosting Carol's confidence in talking to others.

Georgie played an important role in engaging Carol in the goal-directed activities: the dog's involvement provided a helpful distraction, allaying anxieties that Carol might otherwise have experienced when embarking on these activities.

In turn, this positive experience created a clear impact: as a consequence of her dog-assisted experience, Carol used the bus, independently, shortly afterwards.

The positive impact of the dog-assisted sessions was not limited to Carol using the bus independently, however. Carol's other goals were to establish links with a local group and make connections with people in the local community, and the project's records indicate improvements across all three goals. The client also accessed a local Dog Day event on a monthly basis following the community dog visits which enabled her to build further connections in her local community.

At the end of the intervention, maximum scores were given to all the goals, indicating that they were judged as being achieved in full.

The project records conclude:

Client has shown more confidence to try new things. Client feels like she has taken some control back over her life and her ability to go out and do things independently and is able to make her own decisions regarding social opportunities.



Community Dog 'Georgie' with Handler Julia, supporting Carol and her dementia practitioner.

“It's fantastic to see a person so animated and engaged with Georgie, who acts as the perfect motivator. We've seen a real confidence boost in people to do more for themselves and it's proving an effective way to enable someone to try new activities or maintain those they enjoy for longer.”

Dementia Practitioner who supported Carol



Our Learning – Dog Day events

Dog Days are monthly events that bring together people with dementia and their carers with skilled volunteers and trained pet dogs for gentle, joyful interaction and positive reminiscence.

Overview

The project set out to run monthly Dog Day events across the seven identified pilot areas, running for a period of 6 months in each location. The events were designed as an opportunity to meet others, positively reminisce, provide carer respite and enjoy special moments with dogs in a supported environment.

Each 2 hour event followed a guided format involving: Welcome and interaction with dogs and volunteers; a 'star turn' by an invited speaker with their working dog; finishing with a game of dog-themed bingo, with the bingo cards featuring different dog breeds rather than numbers, bringing a participative and fun activity to the event.

Prior to the first Dog Day event in each pilot area, a local pool of volunteers with pet dogs were recruited and trained through a bespoke 8-week training programme. This was overseen and assessed by the Community Dog Handler, with local training delivered by volunteer dog trainers. Overall, 34 trained volunteers (dog owners and dog trainers) contributed to the delivery of Dog Day events during the evaluation timeframe.

Thus, the project team took responsibility for developing the capacity of and quality assuring, the volunteers and dogs. It was expected that delivery partner organisations would host the events and be responsible for all matters to do with organisation, event promotion and attendance.



Some of the trained pet dogs that supported Dog Day events

“I thought the training worked really well because we had eight weeks and two very detailed assessments and I thought that the assessments were very good. More details than I probably expected but I think that's a good thing.”

Volunteer dog owner

“You can just see the joy on their face, the happiness when the dogs are coming in.”

Volunteer dog owner

“Obviously, the dogs were well prepared. I think it was good that we did our training in the place where we would be having the Dog Days, so the dogs were familiar with the surroundings. That was all really good.”

Volunteer dog owner



“I thought they were a great idea at the outset, and I still do. I think the benefits of having that contact time with dogs, especially for people that maybe aren't in a position to have dogs in their life now, but have had in the past, I think the benefits are tremendous and the feeling of wellbeing afterwards is really significant. So yeah, I was delighted that we were going to be hosting dog days and happy to be involved in recruiting the volunteers for it.”

Dog Day host

“I think overall the flow of the day and having the guidance, and their general structure was really helpful to get the group going.”

Dog Day host

Feedback from the questionnaire, interviews and evaluator observations testified to the transformational effect of the dogs: the dogs trotted in with their owners and the whole mood in the room changed in a positive way.

Source: Jacki Gordon & Associates full evaluation report

What Worked Well

The Dog Day concept was readily grasped and favourably received by the partner organisations.



Challenges



Key Learnings

The project team overall aimed to offer 42 Dog Day events across the 7 identified pilot areas, running for a period of 6 months in each location. Due to challenges of Covid-19 and project roll-out, completed evaluation data was limited to 27 events. The summary of these findings are set out below:



“There were people who were in the later stages that really opened up...who were perhaps non-verbal, didn't make much eye contact, but through their interactions with the dogs on that day, they began to relax, and that was just wonderful to see. The staff that were supporting them couldn't believe the difference in them, and we saw it ourselves from when they came into the session and when they left.”

Dog Day host

Carers / family members often specifically said that, for them, the best thing about the event was seeing the person they cared for interacting with the dogs:

“Seeing my mum happy, socialising and smiling.”

Carer, Forest of Dean

“Seeing people enjoy the dogs.”

Carer, St Albans

“Watching the interaction with the dogs.”

Carer, Adderbury

Some people with a diagnosis of dementia said that interacting with the dog(s) at the event brought back happy memories of their own dog:

“Reminded me of my own dog.”

Person with dementia, Perth

“Being close to dogs again.”

Person with dementia, Stirling

“It's lovely that you can come here and meet dogs when you can't have one of your own.”

Person with dementia, Helensburgh

One carer suggested that the benefits of the event were likely to continue after it ended:

“I came down with my Mum and it was lovely to have change of scenery and a different focus. This will give us something to chat about later too.”

Carer, Stirling

Adapting to Covid-19

In March 2020, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic halted all project activity overnight. The project team set out to explore how elements of the face-to-face programme could be transformed and delivered in a meaningful way to people online.

During the remainder of 2020, this resulted in the trialling of online dog bingo or scavenger hunt sessions (for groups) and weekly tailored online Community Dog sessions (for individuals). These adaptations were delivered via secure video-based platforms with the primary aim of reducing isolation and helping keep people connected.



Online group sessions

Dog bingo and scavenger hunt activities were designed to connect in as part of the online support sessions Alzheimer Scotland were quickly establishing across the country for people with a diagnosis and their carers. Unrestrained by geographical boundaries, the online sessions enabled the Dementia Dog team to reach a far wider population than would have otherwise been possible face to face, delivering 70 sessions between May and December 2020.

The online dog activities lasted 20 minutes, and involved the dog either selecting numbered bingo balls, or different coloured scavenger hunt items from a box visible via the video screen. The handler would then call the number or describe the item for participants to find. This way the dog led the selection process, injecting a fresh sense of spontaneity, creativity and anticipation into sessions.

The project team reported that the sessions evoked fun, conversation and positive reminiscing amongst participants.

“Participants can't wait for the next session and they love the fact that it's the dog that picks the bingo balls. It's a real boost of positivity in the day.”

Dementia support practitioner

“The Dog Bingo was a delight to participate in. For the first time in ages I was laughing during the session and felt it was beneficial to my health and wellbeing.”

Dog bingo participant, Lanarkshire

Online individual interventions

During 2020, three one-to-one online sessions were also trialled as an adaptation of the Dementia Community Dog interventions. The trial involved sharing an online dog walk, with mobile phones connecting the Dog Handler and her Community Dog with a person with dementia and their carer / family member via a secure video link.

The project team were keen to explore if virtual involvement of the dog helped provide added motivation and confidence for the client and carer to leave the house for a walk.

The video link enabled everyone to share experiences while out on a walk, with the client and carer accessing their local area, and the Dog Handler and dog in theirs.

The client was also able to interact with the dog through the phone and cue the dog to do certain things such as sitting at the roadside.

Despite some challenges with phone signal, the project team noted that one of the clients displayed 'almost immediate motivation to be involved, motivation to go out for a walk improved, even on wet days when previously he would have refused.' The client and his wife progressed to walking, just the two of them, beyond the intervention.

While within the evaluation timeframe, it is too early to conclude how effective the online walks have been, anecdotal feedback from family members suggest they were positive experiences and did help reduce a sense of social isolation.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Findings from this evaluation are unequivocal insofar as they indicate positive impacts on participants' emotional wellbeing. There was evidence to indicate that the Community Dog interventions and Dog Days were largely successful in achieving their respective outcomes.

There was evidence from across the entire evaluation that the dogs were instrumental in bringing about the changes seen. Their involvement was viewed as engendering social engagement with people and motivation to participate in goal-oriented activities, with greatest positive impacts noted in relation to social and emotional outcomes.

In relation to the Community Dog sessions, interviewees talked of the dog engaging and motivating clients. The fact that these dogs were selected for temperament, trained for the role, and had a solid bond with their handler are likely to be key issues that contributed to their therapeutic power and effectiveness.

In relation to the Dog Days, the feedback from the questionnaires, interviews and evaluator observations testified to the transformational effect of the dogs: the dogs trotted in with their owners and the whole mood in the room changed in a positive way.

Another recurring theme in this evaluation was the role the dogs played in triggering memories and prompting reminiscing. The value of such reminiscing is also well-recognised in producing positive feelings and reducing agitation.

Under the right circumstances, the Community Dog and Dog Day programmes are good concepts, and this evaluation points to many examples of them working well, and importantly – effectively.

However, the evaluation has also shown some unevenness in its findings. There were two key issues that contributed to this:

- The project team, particularly in Scotland, experienced significant challenges in establishing and delivering the Community Dog programme and Dog Days in the manner intended.
- There were certain factors (discussed overleaf) that contributed to just how valuable and effective the Community Dog interventions and Dog Days could be.

These have to be seen within the context of this project being a pilot; the project was trialling new approaches in order to learn from these.



Establishing and delivering the project

The project plan was ambitious. In hindsight, there was an under-estimation of just how long it would take to introduce an initiative of this sort. This was particularly the case in Scotland, which was attributed to a lack of awareness and infrastructure for dog-assisted activities and interventions. In addition, external factors arising as a consequence of other services (such as staff changes and shortages) impinged on the project timescales.

- **There will always be factors outwith the control of any project. As plans are drawn up for the future, it will be useful to identify potential risks, and as far as possible, to incorporate measures to mitigate these.**

Establishing and delivering the project across seven pilot localities created logistical challenges, e.g. in terms of partners being required to deliver within certain timescales and the travel time for Dog Handlers.

- **Any future rollout should consider how many new partnerships it can handle, and the opportunity costs of travelling far from base, i.e. what could be achieved by consolidating efforts within a smaller geographical area.**

Community Dog programme

There were a number of assumptions that underpinned the development and delivery of the sessions at the outset. These included: the level of understanding that there would be around dog-assisted interventions; individuals with dementia having a practitioner who knows them well; practitioners' abilities in discerning how advanced their client's dementia is; and the availability and feasibility of a practitioner attending / supporting the delivery of the interventions. There were also assumptions about how well the notion of a goal would be understood.

- **Going forward, it will be important that practitioners' roles and responsibilities are discussed and set out within a partnership agreement, and that each referral is supported by documentation that formalises the nature and level of practitioner input during and outwith the sessions, e.g. in terms of reinforcing client progress and in terms of completing the required paperwork.**

- **Practitioners and also clients' spouses / family members would benefit from clear information and tangible examples of what might constitute a goal, and the types of (realistic) outcomes that might be achieved.**

A conundrum remains, however: the theory underpinning the sessions is that clients will have a practitioner who knows them well and who can refer them to the project. In the early stages of dementia, this is often not the case.

- **The project team should re-think the process for recruiting / referring clients to the project. One option might be to use existing networks (such as dementia resource centres and support groups), and encourage families who use these services to self-refer, and for a dementia advisor to assess the client's suitability for the sessions.**

The project team placed a high value on using the diamond model for animal-assisted interventions. This model proposes that (ideally) the same practitioner attends and supports (all) the sessions. However, this rarely happened in practice.

- **In view of difficulties in securing regular and active involvement of a practitioner, the project team should consider whether to revise their model of delivery so that sessions are attended either by a practitioner or by a spouse/family member. If this is to be the case, roles and responsibilities need to be clearly communicated and understood.**

Dog Days

In relation to the Dog Days, assumptions were made regarding the availability of volunteer dog trainers, dog owners and suitable dogs.

- **Attention should be given to how dog trainers and dog owners might be encouraged to become involved in greater numbers. It would be useful to identify whether there are barriers to involvement that might be overcome, e.g. by remunerating dog trainers and offering flexibility in training timescales and format.**

At some of the Dog Days, due to the location and setting of venue, eg. integrated care facilities, there was a mix of people with dementia and individuals with other (non-dementia) needs or conditions.

- **If Dog Days are to be part of the options for support delivered to people with dementia, steps should be taken to ensure that the Dog Days are focussed solely on people with dementia.**



“This is a really new, emerging and exciting area of therapeutic offerings that we're keen to embed as part of our future aspirations with Dementia Dog.”

Project Manager



Online adaptations

The project team responded flexibly and creatively to the Covid-19 pandemic via the introduction of online interventions, mostly via group sessions. These may have a life both throughout the pandemic and beyond.

With a view to sustainability and increased reach, volunteer dog owners that were supporting Dog Day events have since been trained to deliver online bingo sessions. The project team reported that there had been international interest in the online interventions as described and shared their learnings with therapy dog handlers in Hong Kong in November 2020.

- **The bank of volunteer dog owners who are being trained to deliver the online group sessions provides a useful resource for their continuation and for increasing reach. To encourage their continued involvement, they should routinely be given feedback and thanks – factors that were important to them in relation to their input at Dog Days.**

- **Online Community Dog sessions require further trialling on a larger scale before judgments can be made about their value and effectiveness.**

Circumstances that contributed to impact and effectiveness

Dementia Community Dog sessions

The sessions were felt to work better with people in the early stages of dementia, when individuals were involved in setting their own goals, when practitioners were highly involved in the delivery of sessions, and memories and learning from the sessions were reinforced. In turn, these signal very obvious considerations that should be addressed in any sessions in the future.

- **The sessions are a resource-intensive intervention that should be targeted at, and delivered to, those with early-stage dementia.**
- **For each client, an action plan should be agreed that details not only what will happen in the sessions, but also the roles and responsibilities of those involved, and how progress is to be reinforced between the sessions, and after the final session.**

Many expressed the view that clients would have benefited from receiving more sessions.

- **While the project may wish to allow some flexibility in the number of sessions delivered, it needs to avoid creating client dependency. Furthermore, such flexibility could potentially make it difficult to schedule in start dates for new clients.**

Safety is the key principle underpinning the diamond model for animal-assisted interventions.

- **In the interests of client safety, and to allow the Dog Handler to focus on the welfare of the dog, no session should go ahead without the involvement of either a practitioner or a family member.**

Dog Days

Dog Day participants derived pleasure and other benefits from their direct interactions with the dogs, and also with the dog owners. Thus, successful Dog Days are those in which participants are actually able to see, pet and talk to the dogs.

- **Consideration should be given to the ratio of individuals with dementia to dogs, and to the physical set-up of venues to ensure that all attendees can see the dogs from where they are seated.**

Some Dog Days were better planned than others, e.g. in terms of people knowing what their roles were, and knowing (in advance) the number of participants and dog owners attending.

- **Care should be taken to ensure that there are sufficient numbers enlisted to support the running of the Dog Days so that they are positive events for all attendees. In order to know how many will be attending, it can be useful to ask attendees to register in advance. All those involved in the delivery of the Dog Days should be briefed on their roles and responsibilities.**

- **Hosts should be given the freedom to adapt the programme to their clients' needs. However, dogs and their owners should continue to be the backbone of the Dog Days.**

Sustainability of the Dog Days

At the project's outset, there were hopes that the model for the Dog Days would be a sustainable one. Certainly, the picture here is a favourable one: two hosts had continued to run the Dog Days beyond the six month trial period, and others expressed an interest in continuing to run Dog Days once their six month pilot ends. However, sourcing contributors to do a 'star turn' was a challenge, and so hosts and their staff came up with other activities to run instead.

- **Alzheimer Scotland should consider setting up a section on its website to enable and support sharing of ideas on dog-themed activities that might be incorporated into Dog Days.**

For their part, most of the dog owners became involved with the Dog Days because they wanted to benefit others. Most also found the experience personally rewarding, and felt committed to continued involvement. Such commitment was predicated on believing that they were making a difference to people with dementia.

- **To keep dog owners engaged and make them feel valued, it will be important to provide feedback on how their and their dogs' input is being received, particularly by individuals with dementia.**





“We see the dog acting as such a fantastic natural motivator in all the natural ways a dog can do that, by perhaps helping someone's confidence, because their focus is on the dog and not on the task in hand.”

Project Manager

Final Reflections

The project evolved flexibly, adapting to challenges and building on insights around what worked well and less well. In doing so, it amassed considerable experience and expertise. This gives it a strong foundation for continuing to develop and refine a programme of Dementia Community Dog interventions and Dog Days.

As the project moves into its next phase, it will be important that it continues to capture information that will allow it to continue on a trajectory of service improvement. Such information-gathering should be focused and proportionate to ensure the most relevant data is collected without over-burdening clients and dementia support practitioners.

For example, for the Dog Days, it may be adequate to simply monitor how many people with dementia are attending and the number of dog owners. The programme of AAI interventions would benefit from assessment or case reviews of each client regarding their stage of dementia, goals set, and progress made.

Importantly, insights from these sources should be used to drive continued improvement in the role of dogs in community settings to benefit individuals living with dementia.

The project team are now looking into applying this learning and recommendations into future delivery models, to ensure Dementia Dog continues to provide effective and meaningful person-centred support for those with a diagnosis and their carers.

This evaluation is based on a small number of interventions and as the programme grows this will present opportunities for the team to collect more data and information.

The project team has created and established new standards of dog, handler and volunteer training for the delivery of dog-assisted therapy for people living at varying stages of dementia.

Together, Alzheimer Scotland and Dogs for Good have therefore created a legacy for the future. This has the potential to expand and to strengthen dog-assisted therapy interventions and activities across the dementia spectrum.



This report is based on the full evaluation done by Jacki Gordon and Associates.



Dementia Dog, a charitable collaboration between Alzheimer Scotland and Dogs for Good, acknowledges the following delivery partner organisations who were involved in this pilot programme:



To protect individual anonymity, where relevant, alias names have been used for case studies or quotes within this report.