

Report prepared by Dr Yulia Kartalova-O'Doherty and Toby Williamson, March 2021

Evaluation – Key Points

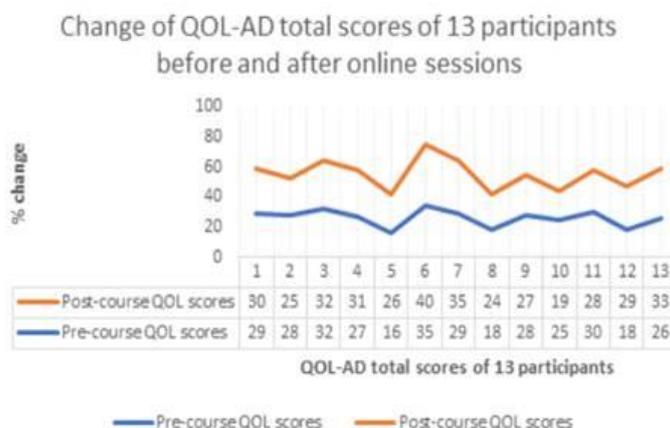
What We Did:

- 117 people referred to project
- Targeted Group:- Patients aged 50+ with dementia and/or other mental health conditions.
- 50 older people
- 37 participated in a course 15 men 22 women, plus 5 family carers
- Geographic area: Teesside & Wear Valley
- Carried out during the Covid-19 Pandemic over Late Autumn/Christmas 2020 to mid-February 2021

How Did We Capture Our Data?

- We capture our data through various medians, verbally- over the phone, written communications via email and post, online video conversations and through Upshot, data capturing software, which also generates surveys, manages and registers participants, data reporting, profile mapping and tracks progress indicators.
- Large number of self-referrals 38 and NHS 39 out of 117
- Most participants were 'young old' under 65 years old
- Depression/Anxiety/Dementia
- 172 sessions attended

Results:



- Quantitative analysis from previous presentation. 20%+ improvement in QOL-AD measurements.
- The project mostly succeeded in engaging and retaining its target group of older people with dementia and/or other mental health conditions.
- All participants of focus groups and interviews carried out for the purposes of the evaluation provided an abundance of positive feedback about the perceived emotional, cognitive, learning and quality of life benefits for both the attendees of the courses, and for everybody else involved in the organising or running of the courses.

Participant/Career Feedback:

- According to the participants, their carers and other stakeholders, the ability to socialise and to make new friends online was the crucial highlight of their participation in the UE project:

- Being able to “meet” people online transcended not only social isolation due to COVID-19, but also distances. It helped participants to make new friends both locally and across different parts of the country:
- Both participants and carers also commented that online interaction was beneficial for their family relationships during COVID-19 restrictions and beyond:
- Online groups were perceived by participants, carers and other stakeholders as a little online community where everybody could have their say and experience a sense of belonging:
- A carer of a person with a hearing impairment also commented that participation in an online group made social interaction much easier than on the phone because of the visual aspect of it, and the friendliness and patience of the group members:
- None of the evaluation participants could provide any comments about any reduction in their medication dosage or a decrease in their GP visits, which was understandable in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. An NHS stakeholder felt that the services provided by UE were social in their nature and in a way, took upon the role of community services that were stretched out at the time of COVID-19:
- Participants, their carers, group facilitators, and other stakeholders spoke about how participation in online sessions helped them learn new things, improved their confidence and reawakened their desire to learn more.
- The sessions were described as enjoyable, fun, wonderful, interesting, pleasurable, and brilliant.
- Participants felt that having at least one hour session every week helped them focus, created a routine, a structure to their week, and boosted their confidence:
- For some people who had anxiety and other mental health problems it was a nice distraction
- Carers felt that the sessions were not only beneficial for their loved ones, but also improved their own mental health:
- Participants of UE courses and their carers felt that the sessions helped them remember things from their youth that they have forgotten and activated their memory:
- Carers echoed participants commenting that the sessions helped people remember things from the past:

Key Benefits to participants/carers:

- Breaks down isolation at the time of COVID-19 restrictions for patients who live alone and or their families.
- In addition to learning new skills and gaining new knowledge, online sessions provided a social occasion for the participants and became a small online community that provided people with a sense of belonging and purpose.
- Overall quality of life scores measured via ten questions of a modified QOL-AD scale showed that the quality of life of participants increased after attending the courses- by 20%+.

“Thank you so much for giving me this great opportunity to meet other people who are also passionate about poetry and writing. It has been a joy to participate twice a week, learning from my colleagues and joining them in expressing myself through our wonderful language.

My dementia hit me hardest and first in my use of speech, and now I feel robbed of giving my opinions and taking part fully in conversation- I am literally lost for words as I struggle to say what I think, as the words disappear before I can articulate them. I cannot tell you how empowered I feel in being given the time through writing down my thoughts and emotions and then being listened to and appreciated for what I have to say.” Elizabeth Hewison, diagnosed with moderate dementia.

Impact of Covid-19 on Mental Health & Wellbeing:

- The impact and likely aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic is that many older people, especially those with cognitive and mental impairments, will be less likely to attend face to face therapeutic and social activities, making them more dependent on online interventions and activities. It is essential therefore that digital exclusion of many older people and their lack of suitable technology is addressed.
- Through a professional approach and good partnerships, online activities can provide proxy contact and support for mental health and social care services.

How Well Did UE Perform?

- UE demonstrated a highly effective, committed learning and reflective culture enabling good problem solving, adaptability, and partnership working. UE has many features of a learning organisation and has the potential of successfully expanding and promoting their innovative and creative online services for older people to the wider market.
- The role performed by the volunteer digital buddies, UE's IT support and participant engagement and impact co-ordinator were crucial in supporting and encouraging people to join the courses and enabling people with the right equipment to participate in the courses.

Facilitator Feedback:

The tips provided by group facilitators regarding the courses were in line with NICE guidance 97 on person-centred services for people with dementia and the principles of good practice provided by NICE guideline 32 on supporting independence and mental wellbeing of older people.

These were:

- the importance of person's perspective and their life experience,
- the human value of people with dementia and their carers, and
- the importance of social relationships and interactions with others for promoting wellbeing.
- Additional "bonus" aspects of UE online services were encouragement of adult learning (including online skills) and reconnecting with individual creativity.

Group facilitators felt that activities they did together during online sessions stimulated people's minds by helping them do something new, something "out of their comfort zone".

According to group facilitators, reconnecting with their creative side helped people look at familiar things in a different way and find a new meaning in their immediate surroundings.

NHS Feedback:

"We understand that the work of the Unforgettable Experiences team is of very real importance – not only, but perhaps especially, at this difficult time – and are doing all we can to support our clients in engaging with and benefitting from connecting and participating. I urge you to do the same."

Dr Ethna Parker Wellbeing Service Lead, Primary Healthcare Darlington

An NHS practitioner commented that learning something new that was of interest to people was an essential part of adult life, and older people could benefit from it like anyone else.

The insights and learning points about delivery of online courses that emerged from the participants and group facilitators reflected NICE guideline 97 on dementia management and support, namely, the elements of person-centred care in dementia: the importance of person's perspective and their life experience, the human

value of people with dementia and their carers, and the importance of social relationships and interactions with others for promoting wellbeing. Additional “bonus” aspects of UE online services were encouragement of adult learning (including online skills) and reconnecting with individual creativity.

Fundamentally we were able to alleviate the pressures of long waiting lists and fill in the gaps between patient visits to GPs and Hospital visits. Some GP visits were avoided all together where some patients merely sought reassurance from their GP whilst waiting for the evaluation from their hospital appointment.

“Mental Health Services for Older People have found Unforgettable Experiences services to be extremely responsive to patient, carer and staff needs with a passion for supporting people at the centre of everything they do.

We were able to signpost patients to a dedicated service that helps them to maintain cognitive functioning and improves their wellbeing. Each of their artistic sessions embody the principles of personalised care and cognitive stimulation therapy and are a great way to extend that support.” Allison Cook, Locality Manager, NHS Tees Esk and Wear Valley, Primary Care Network

Evaluation Highlights:

An important aspect of UE online programme was the element of surprise that reawakened individual creativity and encouraged participants to pursue their hobbies and interests further beyond the sessions:

According to the participants, their carers and other stakeholders, the ability to socialise and to make new friends online was the crucial highlight of their participation in the UE project:

Being able to “meet” people online transcended not only social isolation due to COVID-19, but also distances. It helped participants to make new friends both locally and across different parts of the country:

Both participants and carers also commented that online interaction was beneficial for their family relationships during COVID-19 restrictions and beyond:

Online groups were perceived by participants, carers and other stakeholders as a little online community where everybody could have their say and experience a sense of belonging:

A carer of a person with a hearing impairment also commented that participation in an online group made social interaction much easier than on the phone because of the visual aspect of it, and the friendliness and patience of the group members:

None of the evaluation participants could provide any comments about any reduction in their medication dosage or a decrease in their GP visits, which was understandable in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. An NHS stakeholder felt that the services provided by UE were social in their nature and in a way, took upon the role of community services that were stretched out at the time of COVID-19:

Digital buddies also felt that participants were learning new skills and getting much better with online technology overtime. Group facilitators commented that participants acquired new skills in addition to using online technology.

Participants, their carers, group facilitators, and other stakeholders spoke about how participation in online sessions helped them learn new things, improved their confidence and reawakened their desire to learn more.