Title:
Memory Day: Running a community event to create greater awareness and understanding of dementia and memory loss

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Article:
In 2014, the University of Northampton set up a ‘Dementia Friendly Community of Practice’ (CoP) for Northamptonshire, with the aim of bringing together like-minded individuals from across research, education, and practice to enhance the quality of care for people living with dementia and their family and carers. Members of the CoP include: Age UK Northamptonshire; Alzheimer’s Society Northamptonshire; Dementia UK; Nene Clinical Commissioning Group; Northamptonshire Carers; Northamptonshire County Council; Northamptonshire Dementia Action Alliance (DAA); Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust; St Andrew’s Healthcare; and Toller’s Solicitors. The CoP were looking for ways to raise the profile and awareness of dementia and memory loss in Northamptonshire. During one of their regular meetings, a colleague from Denmark was visiting and spoke to the group about remembrance days, which are run in Aalborg municipality, in Northern Denmark. These events are run in community venues with the aim of showcasing the work of local organisations who provide services for people with dementia and their families.

The CoP decided to run a similar day where we could take awareness and information to the community about dementia and memory loss. This led to running a Northampton
Memory Day in 2016 and 2017. The event aimed to engage with the general public and businesses to highlight the work of local organisations who provide services for people with dementia, their families and carers. The Memory Day sought to:

- Provide an opportunity to meet local services and find out about memory problems and dementia;
- Access peer support for families living with dementia;
- Share knowledge about local care and services;
- Learn how to become a dementia friendly organisation and share information on supporting dementia friendly initiatives;
- Attend a dementia friends training and other related sessions.

The CoP set up a committee to plan the event. One of the key considerations was where to situate the event which was accessible to the local community. A suggestion was made to host it in the local shopping centre, the Grosvenor Centre. The Grosvenor Centre were keen to support the event as they were already thinking about becoming dementia friendly as an organisation, and therefore willingly provided space for stands on the main shopping concourse, alongside a room for activities and training. In the second year, support was also provided by Sainsbury’s, situated in the Grosvenor Centre, who made their training room available for additional activities. This proved to be a good venue to hold the day, being in the heart of the community.

Other considerations in setting up the day were how best to market the event and how to raise funding to support the day and future activities of the CoP. Each organisation on the committee was tasked with raising awareness about the day, this involved contacting clients, distributing information to local businesses, community groups and health and social care providers. Additionally, the team worked hard to raise interest with the local press, who supported the day by running interviews on the radio and articles in the newspaper. Social media also played a part both in the build-up to the event and on the day itself, having keen Tweeters helped to generate a buzz about the event.

Funding for the event was provided through donations from CoP members, either financial or in staff time to set up the day. Further to this, a raffle was run to raise funding for future events and for the work of the CoP to support the local dementia community. This proved to be a good way to raise additional profile for the event and led to some excited winners!
The Memory Day has hosted stallholders from a range of different organisations. In 2016, 15 stallholders were represented, and this grew to 18 stallholders in 2017. Organisations/groups represented included members of the CoP and other local organisations, such as dementia and older people’s charities, public and private health and social care providers, businesses and arts organisations. The stalls were open for the public from 9am to 5pm and stalls had a range of information and leaflets to distribute, interactive displays, such as a model of the brain and video displays, examples of reminiscence materials, and twiddle muffs for audiences to explore and talk about.

On both occasions, the events have been formerly opened by key figures from the county-wide Health and Wellbeing Board and strong supporters of the need to raise greater community awareness about dementia. Councillor Sylvia Hughes, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing and Chair of the Countywide Health & Wellbeing Board opened the event in 2016 and Professor Nick Petford, Vice Chancellor of the University of Northampton opened the 2017 Memory Day. Alongside the stands, the team organised a range of activities and training sessions to be delivered. These were to provide information and practical support, and to showcase the range of support available. Sessions were made available on the day, free of charge and included: dementia friends training; chair exercise; knitting; legal discussions; 1-2-1 Admiral nurse clinics; iCST sessions; and health and wellbeing assessments.

A great addition to the day has been the musical entertainment provided by Ukes Aloud and the Northamptonshire Carer’s Choir, both drawing a crowd of shoppers and helping to raise the profile of the event.

Overall, the event has been very successful. Feedback from stallholders, volunteers and session facilitators suggests that a wide variety of people engaged with the day. There was a feeling that they had made a difference being able to speak to the public in this community setting. The facilitator for the exercise session stated that ‘one lady who had dementia, found the chair exercise session very useful and enjoyed her experience here’. Others said that the range of information available had been very useful, and provided helpful advice or signposting in an informal setting. A stallholder said they had ‘provided practical information about falls prevention and linked this in with more general information about promoting wellbeing (mental and physical) and maintaining independence’.

One of the other successes of the day was the opportunities it provided to network with colleagues from different organisations.
‘Great to network with other organisations and find out about the fantastic work being done around dementia and memory loss in the county.’

‘Days like the Memory Day provide great opportunities to engage with the public and liaise with colleagues in local organisations.’

The venue itself was also regarded as providing ‘good high footfall location’, and the Grosvenor Centre were able to monitor the footfall across both years and in 2017 we achieved a 3.8% rise in overall footfall on the day, showing that we had grown not only in terms of the number of organisations represented but also in the number of people coming to the event.

One aspect of the day which has had mixed success has been raising interest in the activity sessions. These were available to book online prior to the event and on the day. There were limited pre bookings and a smaller number of walk-ins on the day during both the 2016 and 2017 events. It has been difficult to ascertain why this might be, but might be due to the online booking system. Where sessions have taken place, they have been enjoyed. Maybe a greater focus on marketing these activities and enabling easier access to booking is required rather than the day in general.

The marketing of the event is crucial to its success. In planning the event in 2017, the team had a more targeted approach to gain interest from the local media and social media. Additionally, the responsibility for marketing was made a priority for all CoP organisations, rather than one or two as it had been in the first year. Investment in marketing paid off for the second year, but there are still learning points to take away, as has been discussed.

There has been interest in running another Memory Day in 2018 and the CoP feel that this could be expanded across the county, so that it is held in different towns, thus making it accessible to a wider number of communities geographically. This also has the potential of including a greater number of organisations - while the Grosvenor Centre has been an exceptional venue to host the day, expansion of the event is limited to the space available. Hosting the day across different sites makes this expansion possible for both the audience and organisational perspective, and offers opportunities for smaller, locally focussed organisations to participate form each locality.
The Memory Day has helped to raise the profile of dementia in Northampton and has provided a very informal way of meeting with the general public, businesses and people with dementia and their families. The Memory Days have supported the work of the DAA and Northamptonshire Borough Council to become a Dementia Friendly town. An important part of this has been about raising awareness and distributing information, but also in developing stronger working partnerships which has fostered cross-organisational knowledge about what support is available to the dementia community in Northamptonshire and how services can work together. A new award, born out of these strengthened partnerships, has been set up with Northamptonshire Borough Council and the University of Northampton, to support local businesses to become dementia friendly. The winning organisation will have a full-time intern dedicated to developing their plans to become dementia friendly. Now that the concept of the Memory Day is fully developed and tested the focus of the team for future events will be to implement an in-depth evaluation to ensure that its impact is captured, and ideas from attendees are used to further develop it in the future.