

'Not just for young people' - Older people's views of Ageing Better in Camden's outreach events at local leisure centres

A learning report

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Introduction

As part of its work to reach older people in Camden, the Ageing Better in Camden (ABC) Outreach Team has run a number of pop up events in local leisure and sports centres, providing refreshments, the opportunity to hear about the leisure centre offer for older people, and wider information on activities in the borough. The team organised support from leisure centre staff, who assisted older people to apply for Pay and Play cards¹ and, in some cases, provided tours of the facilities.

Background

The ABC Outreach Team was established in order to identify the 'people no one knows', who are not on a 'radar', and are often not in touch with traditional services. The team aims to identify and signpost these older people into social activities in their communities. To do this, they have specifically developed and refined a street outreach approach and have actively engaged with older people on the street since February 2018.

During this work the team found that, despite being interested in becoming more physically active, many older people are unaware of Camden's 55+ Pay and Play card offer and free swimming on weekday mornings for people 60+ in local leisure centres. The Outreach Team have also found it difficult to access this information, including which activities are available at discounted rates at individual leisure centres.

What did we do?

The Outreach Team therefore developed a model of working with leisure centres to provide accessible information on services for older people during pop up coffee mornings. This provided the following opportunities:

- to undertake outreach activity, to meet and bring local older people together. As well as being a general opportunity for outreach work, it provided a reason for the Outreach Team to gain access to letter drop/door knock and street outreach in new locations near specific leisure centres
- to offer a neutral space in which to engage with older people. As leisure centres are spaces which are not usually associated with or specific to older people, the team were able to engage with some older people who are reluctant or less likely to visit community centres etc.

¹ 'Pay and Play' memberships are for Camden residents aged 55+. An annual card costs £5.50 and provides access to free (for over 60s) or discounted swimming (for 55-59 year olds) on weekday mornings, and discounted leisure facilities at all times.

- to offer a ‘low risk’ ‘stepping stone’ social event to enable people to visit the leisure centre, have a look round and ask questions, pick up information about the leisure centre and other activities without needing to commit to anything or take part in an activity on the day. Offering a range of information is key to making the event inclusive for anyone not interested in swimming/physical activity, but who may want to know about other things they could do locally or who just want to socialise
- to offer a clear transaction-based pop up which encourages participation from those who otherwise may not attend. The pop ups had a clear purpose i.e. signing up for 55+ Pay and Play card which encouraged participants, especially men, to take the first step in becoming active without committing to taking part in an activity on the day
- to act as a catalyst for leisure centres to make this information available and accessible for older people
- to provide evidence that there is demand from local older people for swimming and other activities. Hosting the events also provided an opportunity to prompt leisure centre staff to think about the needs of older leisure centre users
- to provide training to leisure centre staff on how to carry out street outreach with older people. ABC offered training sessions to leisure centres: six staff from one leisure centre attended training, one of whom also joined the Outreach Team for a practical outreach session
- to provide evidence to leisure centres that it is possible for them to engage with local older people through outreach activity
- to develop a toolkit to support leisure centres to continue to engage on their own with older people.

Between November 2018 and July 2019, the ABC team ran five such pop up events in leisure centres, with a total of 139 older people attending. Just over a third (35%) were men. All of those attending received information about a wide range of local activities led by ABC partners, as well as information on the leisure centre offer. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the types of enquiries addressed during the events.

Table 1 Range of enquiries made at leisure centre pop up events

<i>Physical Activity/Health-related Enquiries</i>	<i>Other Enquiries</i>
Swimming	Age UK Camden Counselling Service
Swimming lessons	Age UK Camden Information & Advice Service (I&AS)
Stroke	Age UK Camden Dementia Wellbeing Service
Weight management	ABC Community Connectors
Arthritis	Using the (open air) café
Green gym	Social lunches
Sauna	Support for carers
Yoga	Local accessible activities (to meet health needs)
Dancing	
Water temperature	
Returning to physical activity after a long time	
Gentle exercise	
Walking netball	
How to book/access to Later Life classes	

The majority of attendees spent time with leisure centre staff or the Outreach Team discussing individual interests and needs, planning their activity or receiving signposting or referral to other services². People took part in tours of the leisure centre facilities and the same number (73 or 52.5% of those attending) signed up for their 55+ Pay and Play card at the event. Ninety-four registered with ABC.

Research methodology

Older people's views of the pop up events

We wanted to know what older people thought of this type of event, and how they think it may impact on their future participation in leisure activities. ABC's Learning and Quality Officer attended two leisure centre activities in June and July 2019³ asking participants the following key questions:

- How they heard of the event and why they attended
- What they thought of the event and what was provided
- What have they got out of it/what difference they think it makes to them

A total of 20 participants took part in the research: 15 women and five men. This summary reflects the views of some of the older people attending the two events only.

Findings

How did older people hear about the events?

The ABC team had publicised the events locally in the immediate days prior, including:

- leafleting estates and public spaces, including flyers at bus stops on the route to the Sport/Leisure Centres, in doctor's surgeries, libraries and local cafes and shops;
- door knocking and street outreach in the area surrounding leisure centres;
- sharing information directly with all ABC delivery partners and on the ABC website; with Dragon Hall, a local delivery partner/community centre;
- placing notices outside the leisure centre on the day of the event.

All of these methods had generated attendance at the events.

Nearly half of those participating (eight) had heard about the event through direct outreach work by the ABC team, i.e. a leaflet through their door, seeing a notice in their housing estate or their church or meeting the Outreach Team on the street or in their estate. Several people had heard about the event from friends or family who had received leaflets through their doors, indicating that the information had been shared more broadly.

One person came to the event after seeing the notice outside, and another six noticed the event taking place while visiting the leisure centre either as existing or potential leisure centre members.

² For example, AUC Counselling Service, AUC Information and Advice Service, AUC Dementia Wellbeing Service, ABC Community Connectors and Carers' Services.

³ At Oasis Leisure Centre and Pancras Square Leisure Centre, both operated by Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL).

Five people came after receiving information about it from Dragon Hall, our local delivery partner.

Reasons for attending the events

Older people came to the pop up event because they wanted information that would enable them to be more active and take part in exercise, in some cases saying they particularly wanted to become healthier or lose weight.

Several mentioned that they used to swim or go to a gym but had not done so for some time, and they were now looking for ways to get back into exercise. One woman had previously struggled to sign up online for the 'Pay and Play' card so attended specifically to access support to do this. A few people who were already members of the leisure centre were interested in finding out what activities and memberships were available specifically for older people. Reasons included:

“getting to that age”

“wanted as cheap a membership as possible”

“to keep mobile, keep my joints working”

One man came to find out information for other people. He reported that he meets a lot of older people in his work (as a courier) who appear isolated or “housebound” and he wanted to be able to share information with them about activities they could access at the leisure centre or elsewhere.

Provision by Ageing Better in Camden/Age UK Camden

We asked most of those interviewed how they felt about the fact that the pop up was provided by Age UK Camden as opposed to another provider. Most valued Age UK Camden’s involvement in the initial pop ups because:

- it meant they knew the information provided would be appropriate for older people
- Age UK Camden can provide information/knowledge about events in the borough so has a broader knowledge/information is not limited to the leisure centre offer
- Age UK Camden has links to other services they could put people in touch with e.g. Information and Advice Service and Community Connectors⁴
- some had experience of Age UK/Age UK Camden services and felt it was a trustworthy organisation
- it enhanced Age UK Camden’s reputation as “not just a name, but actually interested and involved”, and that it “acts as an ambassador” for older people.

Comments included:

“Good that Age UK are doing it because you get to the age where you have to be helped”

“Great that Age UK did it because I’m not sure if Age UK didn’t do it that anyone else would”

⁴ Community Connectors is a free service for any Camden residents aged 60 or above, which aims to connect older people to community activities or other support services. <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/camden/our-services/community-connectors/>

“It made us think it’s something for my age group”

However, some felt it didn’t matter who ran the pop up, as long as it was specifically designed for older people. One suggested that while the lead organisation didn’t matter as such, the fact that the leaflet clearly said the event was for those aged over 55 and free caught her attention. While Age UK Camden was able to provide a range of information on broader local activities, older people greatly valued the specialist information on the leisure offer and the opportunity to discuss this with leisure centre staff. The success of these events should give confidence to leisure centre providers that there is value in providing this type of event to reach older potential clients.

Views of the events

We received positive feedback on the events.

Some said they had enjoyed the social aspect of the event; the opportunity to meet others, to be out of the house, to chat, and “because otherwise I would be sitting at home”. One commented that it was a friendly and easy event to access; she felt comfortable arriving because notices on the door directed her and the team were looking out for her as she arrived, and she was greeted with a smile.

Older people valued receiving information on the leisure centre offer:

“Brilliant, makes it easy”

“Makes a lot of difference because I’m now aware, especially after the tour, am aware it exists and can help the old with exercise and at a low or no fee”

Many also valued the information available on activities elsewhere in the community beyond the leisure centre. Several reported they were pleased to find out about such activities for older people and were taking ABC leaflets away with them to read further. One (who already regularly swims at the leisure centre) mentioned it is difficult to know what else is in the borough that is appropriate for older people. He reflected that although information may be available in libraries he doesn’t go there anymore, and there are few or no free newspapers which historically would have included this sort of information.

“Opens my eyes to what’s happening in the borough- would not have known what was on if not for this, if this hadn’t been on this morning”

A small number reported that while they felt the event was valuable for others, they did not gain anything, having established that their current memberships were more suitable for varying reasons e.g. disability. One wanted information that was more local to her but was intending to read the information she had collected about other community-based activities.

Perceived impact- what did older people get out of the event?

Many of those attending indicated that they were going to become more active as a result of receiving information on the leisure centre and/or signing up for the Pay and Play card (22 older people registered for the ‘Pay and Play’ card at the two events). Two people spoken to had collected information about the membership to investigate further at their local leisure centres.

Seven people indicated they will begin swimming at least once a week: one couple went swimming immediately following the pop up event, also saying they were going to try the water aerobics class in future. A small number intend to try the gym facilities or use the sauna.

Others indicated they would follow up information given by the team to attend other activities for older people, including computer courses and physical activities. One of those spoken to had collected information he intended to share with others.

Two women who lived above a leisure centre intended to use the café as a social space in future – they had not realised until the event that this was permitted.

“Now I am the old bone-creaking age of 55+ I may as well take advantage of it”

“Will do the sauna once a fortnight – it’s good because it’s cheap membership and local”

“None of these people would be here if not for you, they’d all be sitting at home watching telly”

“Quite likely to do walking football, walking for health”

“I gained a lot”

Summary

- ABC’s outreach work generated attendance at the events. Friends, family and neighbours had shared the information with others
- Older people found the events to be friendly and an opportunity to socialise
- Those attending valued the event for information provision, on both the leisure centre offer and broader activities suitable for older people in the borough
- Many participants successfully signed up for the ‘Pay and Play’ card
- Some indicated they would now start swimming regularly, a smaller number said they would use gym facilities and others were investigating other activities in Camden
- Older people recognise how important exercise and socialising is for their health
- The events enabled the Outreach Team to locate and engage with older people who have not previously accessed our services
- The events enabled the Outreach Team to test and successfully develop a model for connecting older people to leisure centres. This model can be used in future by leisure centre providers to broaden their client base and enable older people to access the Pay and Play card and free swimming offer in Camden.

The ABC Outreach Team is producing a Toolkit for Sport & Leisure providers to help them independently deliver pop up activities for older people. This is available on our website:

www.ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/outreach