

## The UK Meeting Centres Support Programme: Helping to support people and families directly affected by dementia

### What is a Meeting Centre?

It is a local resource, operating out of ordinary community buildings, that offers on-going warm and friendly expert support to people and families affected by dementia.

At the heart of the Meeting Centre is a social club where people meet to have fun, talk to others and get help that focusses on what they need. Meeting Centres are based on sound research evidence on what helps people to cope well in adjusting to living with the symptoms and changes that dementia brings.

### Where did Meeting Centres start?

They were first developed in the Netherlands 25 years ago. Currently, there are 150 Dutch centres with a national network that local groups can utilise. Dutch research, and now European research, demonstrates that Meeting Centres have positive outcomes for people with dementia and for family carers.

### What goes on in a Meeting Centre?

A team of staff and volunteers trained in the Meeting Centre ethos provide an enjoyable and flexible programme for both the person with dementia and their family carers. The social club meets regularly usually 3 days per week for 15-20 members per day.



All activities are designed to help people adapt to the challenges that living with dementia can bring. This involves a chance to get together socially, to be creative, to get active and to share lunch.

Everyone brings their skills and talents to the Meeting Centre and the programme is driven by what people want to do. People attend as little or as often as they need.

***“It’s the day to day activities that they do here. You know, having a cup of tea with people, having their lunch with people. All the normality of being with a group of people, which when you’re isolated on your own, you don’t take part in”***



Family carers get assistance with practical and emotional issues, as well as being able to contribute to social club activities. Some family members use the opportunity to have a break from their caring role. Couples consulting sessions, social activities and excursions also help people to enjoy life together.

## **Adjusting to Change**

A diagnosis of dementia is a huge challenge to come to terms with. If people make good emotional, social and practical adjustment to dementia following diagnosis, then it is likely that they will experience fewer distressing symptoms later and will be able to live at home for longer with a better quality of life for them and their families. Help and support for families and people affected by dementia is often fragmented. People often feel overwhelmed and confused about where to get help. Meeting Centres are a way of providing accessible support on a local level to act against this.

The Meeting Centre supports people (members and family members) in helping them cope with the consequences of living with dementia and to make the best possible lifestyle adjustments for them as individuals.

- Firstly, it helps people adjust to the cognitive impairments by helping people to deal with disability by understanding their changing symptoms and how to deal with them.
- Secondly, it helps with emotional adjustment by supporting people get back on an even keel, to preserve a positive self- image and to prepare for and deal with the uncertainty that dementia brings.
- Thirdly, it helps people adapt socially by developing and maintaining good social contacts with family and friends, with their local community and the professional services that they will need support from as time goes by.

***“It’s being able to talk about these things with other people who are in exactly the same boat as you are, and they understand”***

## **What’s the evidence that this helps people?**

There is good evidence both from Dutch research and recent UK research that people attending Meeting Centres experience better self-esteem, greater feelings of happiness and sense of belonging than those who don’t attend. Those who attended most regularly showed fewer of the more distressing symptoms of dementia and a greater feeling of support. Family carers also experience less burden feel better able to cope. People with dementia and carers report high levels of satisfaction with the programme, seeing it as an important way of keeping active and feeling supported.

## Community Engagement and finding out more

Many towns have initiated Dementia Friendly Communities.

Meeting Centres build on this. They generally start from a care organisation or group of people recognising that there is a need for more structured support for people affected by dementia in a local community. It is not really important who comes up with the idea to initiate a Meeting Centre, because collaboration with other organisations is essential to getting the initiative off the ground.



The Dutch have a well-developed community process for developing new Meeting Centres that engages all local stakeholders in both the local development and longer-term implementation.

Two demonstrator Meeting Centres were established in Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire and Leominster, Herefordshire in 2015-16 as part of the research supported by Alzheimer's Society. We are now building on this in the UK with the help of [National Lottery funding](#). This helps us to provide advice and training to community groups setting up new Meeting Centres. See separate flyer – What support is available?

## Finding out more

For further information and/or to contact us for support, please visit

- <https://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/uk-meeting-centres-support-programme.html> and <https://www.worc.ac.uk/discover/meetingdem-ipnd.html>; or
- email [meetingcentres@worc.ac.uk](mailto:meetingcentres@worc.ac.uk)

## Watch these films

- [The Meeting Centre Trailer \(2 Minutes\)](#)
- [The Meeting Centre Support Programme](#)
- [What Is A Meeting Centre](#)
- [Who Gets Involved In Setting Up A Meeting Centre?](#)
- [How do Meeting Centres help people affected by dementia?](#)
- [Adjustment To Change Model](#)

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