



# What you can do to help your Meeting Centre

Suggestions for people who attend Meeting Centres

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# Introduction

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Meeting Centres are places for people to socialise, get involved in activities and access information to help to meet their needs. They are a form of community-led support for people living with dementia and those that support them.

It can be challenging for Meeting Centres to keep going long term, so we carried out a 2-year research project called Get Real with Meeting Centres, funded by The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). This project looked at how Meeting Centres can run both sustainably and successfully, and the issues they face in doing this.

We have spoken to a wide range of people involved with Meeting Centres in England and Wales. They have helped us find out how things work and what the challenges are.

In this booklet we talk about what we have learnt, in seven broad topics:

- Health/care services and Meeting Centres
- Meeting Centre membership
- Benefits for those in a caring role
- Transport issues (Getting to the venue)
- Links with the community
- Meeting Centre personnel and practice
- Finances and funding



# Health / Care Services and Meeting Centres



Meeting Centres typically do not insist on members having a formal diagnosis of dementia. Nevertheless, whether you're a member or are considering becoming one, you may be accessing local health and care services in some way – e.g. seeing your GP, visiting a memory clinic, speaking to a dementia advisor, or getting support at home.

The health and social care system is made up of lots of different people and services from different organisations. This can be complex, so don't be afraid to ask for help and information to understand what is on offer.

You can contact a Meeting Centre directly about attending. However, various health and care services can refer people to Meeting Centres as well, and can also work with them once you are member.

### **Suggestions:**

**If you are unsure which health and care services might be available to you, or you are struggling to understand who does what, you are not alone – ask a health or care professional to explain things, or connect you with someone who can.**

**If you are thinking about joining a Meeting Centre, you can contact your local Meeting Centre directly – but you can also ask your GP, nurse or care advisor about it and see if they can put you in touch, or provide you with some information.**



# Meeting Centre Membership



## Promotion

Making people aware of Meeting Centres is key to recruiting members, but it can be difficult as promotion takes time, resources and the right contacts. Word-of-mouth in the community can help.

### **Suggestion:**

**If you go to a Meeting Centre, spread the word by talking about it with people you know, and come into contact with.**

## Appropriateness and access

Whether someone attends a Meeting Centre or not will depend upon whether they feel it is appropriate for them.

There may also be barriers to accessing it, such as cost or practical problems. The Meeting Centre may be able to help you source support with these.

Taking the step to go to a Meeting Centre may feel daunting, especially if you're not used to attending social groups or are still coming to terms with a diagnosis of dementia.

### **Suggestions:**

**If you are thinking about joining a Meeting Centre but might need additional support, discuss your situation with professionals and Meeting Centre staff.**

**If you have any concerns or are unsure if a Meeting Centre is right for you, ask to discuss this. Meeting Centre staff can help you give it a try, with no commitment to keep attending if it's not for you.**

**If you are unfamiliar with what Meeting Centres offer contact your local Meeting Centre staff for information.**

## Range of activities

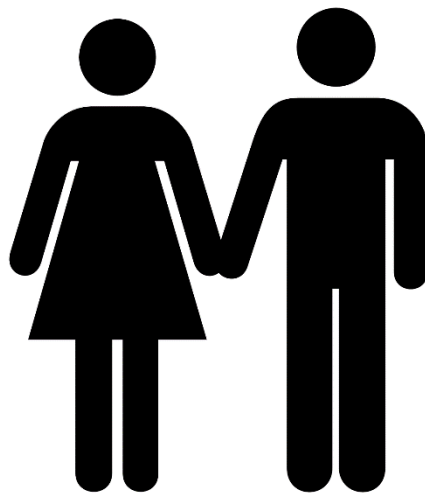
Meeting Centres aim to offer a variety of activities. People might be put off attending if they feel there is too little choice, with things that don't appeal to them. Some people might be concerned that they will be asked to take part in something they are not interested in.

### **Suggestion:**

**If you go to a Meeting Centre, let people know what you're interested in and would like to do, and feel free to offer your help.**



# Benefits for Those in a Caring Role



The Meeting Centre model suggests that people with dementia and family and friends that support them should attend together where possible to fully benefit from what a Meeting Centre can offer.

However, sometimes a Meeting Centre can become so focussed on the needs of the people with dementia that it leaves little time for carers to get support, which is an issue those running the Meeting Centre should be aware of.

Carers may have to weigh up conflicting needs and demands. Attending a Meeting Centre may not be the most urgent; or they may not understand how engaging more with a Meeting Centre might help them.

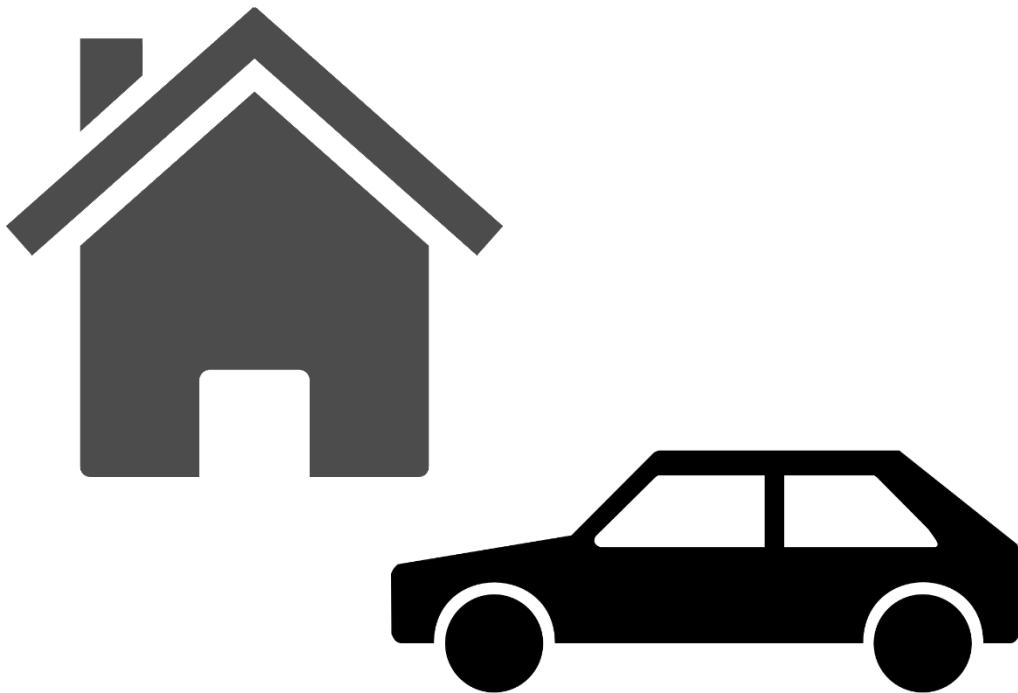
Meeting Centres need to have something to offer family carers, and it needs to be clear what that might be.

### **Suggestions:**

**If you are a carer or support someone with dementia and are unsure what a Meeting Centre can offer you, it's a good idea to reach out. Discuss your situation with the health and social care professionals you see, or Meeting Centre staff. They can also help you get the right support, if needed.**

**If you are unfamiliar with what Meeting Centres are and have to offer, you can contact your local Meeting Centre staff for information. You can also read the University of Worcester's Essential Features of a Meeting Centre booklet.**

# **Transport Issues (Getting to the Meeting Centre)**



The location of a Meeting Centre can present some challenges, including how easily people can get there.

In rural areas people are more likely to have further to travel – and public transport is likely to be less available. People with dementia, and those that care for them, might be unable to drive, be on a tight financial budget or have health or mobility issues, which can make things even more challenging. Some people may not have anyone who can support them to go to somewhere like a Meeting Centre.

If people have to cross borders into different areas or communities, that can also act as a barrier to attending.

### **Suggestions:**

**If you are considering attending a Meeting Centre but might need additional support to get there, discuss your situation with Meeting Centre staff or care professionals you have contact with. They can offer advice on what might be available to you.**

**If you are uncertain if you can attend a Meeting Centre in a neighbouring area, get in touch and ask.**



# Links with the Community



Meeting Centres can benefit greatly by forging links and partnerships with people and groups in the local community.

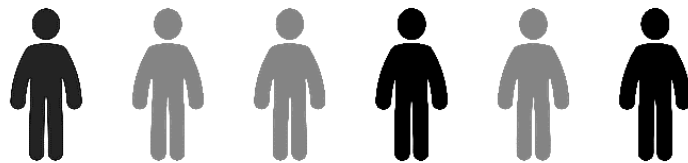
These include local businesses, charities and social enterprise groups; clubs, hobby groups, religious and cultural groups; councillors and other community leaders; police, fire and ambulance services and more. Links can be forged through inviting people in or going out to visit them; working together on small projects; or putting on events together.

This can boost promotion by word-of-mouth, and ultimately help find new members, introduce new activities and even help to source funding.

### **Suggestion:**

**If you have any links with groups, organisations or key people in the community, then talk to them about the Meeting Centre and what it does. This will help to spread the word and get support.**

# Meeting Centre Personnel and Practice



## Personnel recruitment

Having a range of skilled, motivated individuals with the right ethos and approach to run Meeting Centres is key to their quality and sustainability – whether that is managers, staff, volunteers or trustees.

Volunteers can come from various backgrounds, but often have experience of working in health and social care, or caring for a family member or friend.

Carers of existing or previous members often go on to volunteer. People living with dementia may also take on a volunteering role: for example giving support to other individuals who attend or helping with small chores or odd jobs that need doing during the Meeting Centre day. Both carers and people with dementia may act as trustees of a Meeting Centre, with some support.

### **Suggestion:**

**If you attend a Meeting Centre, or are thinking about attending, consider whether you might like to take on a volunteering role, or even act as a trustee. You can discuss this with the Meeting Centre manager.**

## Person-centred and ability-focussed practice

A person-centred ethos is at the heart of Meeting Centres. By 'person-centred' we mean valuing people with dementia and those that care for them, treating them as individuals, paying attention to their perspective and creating a positive social environment for them. Person-centredness is central to a high quality experience that meets the needs of everyone.

### **Suggestion:**

**If you go to a Meeting Centre, let staff and volunteers know what you'd prefer to do or not do. Feel free to make suggestions for future activities.**

# Finances and Funding



Many Meeting Centres run on a combination of different income and funding streams. Finding available external funding is a key part of supporting a Centre to keep going.

It is unlikely Meeting Centres will be able to offer a range of high quality provision purely on income from members fees, unless those fees are high. Therefore some external income is likely to be necessary in order for Meeting Centres to be inclusive and accessible to many.

Health services and local authorities may recognise the importance of tackling social isolation, but most of their resource is taken up by tackling urgent and critical health and care needs. This means funding for a social model of support such as Meeting Centres may be difficult to get.

### **Suggestion:**

**If you go to a Meeting Centre, make your voice heard regarding the importance of social inclusion and continued citizenship for people living with dementia and those that support them. This will help make the case for supporting more initiatives like Meeting Centres in the future.**

# About the Get Real with Meeting Centres project

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**We would like to thank all Meeting Centre attendees, staff, volunteers, trustees, and external partners, for participating in this research.**

## For more information on Get Real:

The Get Real and SCI-Dem Projects online blog: [scidemreview.wordpress.com](https://scidemreview.wordpress.com)

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**University  
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**Association for  
Dementia Studies**

### **The Association for Dementia Studies – Changing Hearts and Minds in Dementia Care**

The Association for Dementia Studies (ADS) is a multi-professional university research and education centre. We make a cutting-edge contribution to developing evidence-based practical ways of working with people living with dementia, their families, friends and carers that enable them to live well.

If you think that we can help please contact us.

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