

# An Evaluation of the Social Impact of a Pilot Dementia-Friendly Walking football Programme

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## **Summary**

This project aimed to evaluate the social impact of a pilot, monthly Dementia Friendly Walking Football (DFWF) programme on the lives of men living with dementia and the people who care for them. The pilot walking football programme, delivered by Alzheimer Scotland, commenced in April 2019 and ran once a month for 6 months.

This evaluation aimed to generate new evidence on the social impact of DFWF that would inform the development of this activity within society. This report presents the findings from the research that might be relevant to those planning any future similar projects.

### **Lessons learned and best practice for future projects**

- Ensure sufficient additional staff time to support the administration and organisation of the programme is incorporated into the costing of future programmes to ensure good uptake, support and retention.
- Consider fortnightly afternoon sessions (rather than weekly or monthly).
- Be aware that participants may have deteriorating health and this could mean participant numbers fluctuate over time.
- Expect that carers/supporters may wish to use the sessions in varied ways: to watch the game; have some respite time in a separate space (cafe); or leave the facility to run errands or participate in social activities.
- Provide a safe spectating area for carers, supporters and participants to watch the games.
- Provide clear signage in the venue and/ or ensure there are people to support way finding.
- Include a warm up prior to games, but ensure this is carried out in a manner that accommodates the group in terms of their physical and cognitive ability.
- Provide an opportunity for social interaction for participants outside of the game itself within a café area and/or a changing room.
- Ensure games are short and provide a midway break in the session.

## **Report of work carried out and findings**

### **Overview of the project**

#### Overview of research

The plan was to interview 10 DFWF participants, 10 carers and 3 programme staff at 2 time points: mid-programme to assess feasibility of the programme and required adjustments, and again at 6 months following programme completion.

In the first round we interviewed nine DFWF participants, four family members who were primary carers, two paid carers, and two programme staff. In the second round we interviewed two DFWF participants, two family members and one programme staff member. We also carried out observation at all the DFWF sessions.

The poor health of some of the men and the timing of the second round of interviews (November and early December 2019) meant lower numbers. At this busy time of year, it was difficult to get people to respond to interview requests. Those who did respond felt committing to an interview was onerous and or unsettling with the various Christmas related events on and disruptions to their normal routine.

During interviews, the men were asked about their health and wellbeing, mood, energy, physical energy/activity, mind-set and social interaction. Interviews with carers explored their perceptions of the men's health and wellbeing mood, energy, physical energy/activity, mind-set and social interaction. They were also asked about whether they felt the programme had impacted on their lives in anyway. The interviews with programme staff explored their perceptions of the men's health and wellbeing, the suitability of the programme, whether any adjustments were required and the challenges and benefits from an organisational perspective.

#### Overview of the sessions

The Alzheimer Scotland Dementia Friendly Walking Football programme ran as planned with six monthly sessions at Hampden Park. Participants came from the local area. Volunteers from Alzheimer Scotland and the local Football Memories programme also took part in the football warm up and game sessions. The volunteers supported way finding for participants, families and supporters to the warm up pitch and changing rooms.

A weekly Football Memories programme takes place in the Hampden Park café on a Thursday morning. One or two men living with dementia and two to three volunteers who attended the Football Memories programme stayed on at the Hampden Park Café to have lunch and wait for the walking football programme to begin at 2pm. This often provided the men the opportunity to continue the football themed conversations and reminiscence.

Participants were asked to arrive at 2pm on the day of each event with the view of having a relaxed meeting time in the Hampden Café prior to moving to the changing rooms to get ready for the 15-minute warm up at 2.30-40pm. The layout of the café with large, round tables, each sitting 8-10 people **provided a comfortable and suitable setting for everyone to sit together prior to the session beginning.** These times were kept flexible and fluid to help ensure all participants were comfortable and did not feel rushed.

All the teams from the Glasgow Cup; Celtic, Rangers, Queens Park, Partick Thistle, Clyde and 3rd Lanark (no longer a professional team) provided team kits for the participants to wear. Participants were able to choose which team kit they wanted to wear. Each session last about an hour, there was a cycle of playing for 10 minutes with a 5-minute rest. The indoor warm up pitch, where all games were played, is part of the Hampden Park Museum Tour with tours scheduled every hour. To allow for this, **a longer break was taken mid-way through the session. During this time all participants were able to walk out the main tunnel into the stadium for photo opportunities (see Figure 1) to allow the tour to pass through. Whilst this interrupted the session, the short walk to the pitch was well received by all participants, volunteers and families.** It provided an opportunity to be in the stadium, take photographs, get some fresh air and a cool down as the indoor warm up pitch became hot, especially over the summer months. During the break, the chatter amongst the group increased as teams gathered for family members to take photos and everyone looked around, pointing to different sections of the stadium and talked about the stadium and matches they remembered. The session then resumed with the matches concluding at around 3.45pm. After changing, participants and supporters left Hampden Park at around 4pm.

Figure 1: Participants and volunteers pictured at half time on the pitch at Hampden

### DFWF Participants



Participants were men living with dementia, all were over 70 years; their dementia had progressed to varying degrees, with the accompanying memory, language and communication impairments. Five of the men lived in a care home and four lived at home with either their wife, or other family member acting as primary carer. The carers who took part included three wives and one daughter of the participants. Other participants were two activity co-ordinators from the care home, an Alzheimer Scotland volunteer and the DFWF programme organiser.

## Summary of Findings

### Participant's Experiences

#### *Engagement*

Participants were highly engaged in the activity itself and with other participants, staff and volunteers before, during and after the sessions. In the café at the beginning of the first two or three sessions, most of the participants remained close by their family members or carers; some seemed visibly nervous or unsettled in the unfamiliar setting. Once changed into their team kits, they appeared more relaxed chatting with one another, engaging in football banter.

Over time as they became more familiar with the built environment, the people and the routine, they became more relaxed and by the third and fourth session the men were chatting to each other in the café. Often the chat was football related, the latest match or results from the TV, who they played for or what team they supported. **The meeting in**

the café prior to the matches, at times akin to a brief football memories session, provided the setting and opportunity for social interaction.

The men, supporters, volunteers and staff all changed together. The volunteer and programme staff reported that there was always a lot of interaction and jovial banter both before and after the games in the changing rooms.

*“It was like being 15 or 16 again, being back in a changing room, a bit of male bravado, bit of banter, somebody dropped some money and at least four people shouted scramble!, it’s just a bit of pure carry on” (V1).*

The volunteer felt like the atmosphere in the changing room helped create a sense of everyone being ‘in it together’

*“everybody helps each other..... it’s just really nice, it’s just a big gang” (V1).*

Staff from the Hampden Sport Clinic ran a warm-up session prior to each game. However, some of the men found these difficult to follow and a couple of participants with previous experience of playing professionally helped them to engage with the exercises and improve their technique. **The instructions were possibly too complicated or given too quickly for the men to follow. The men didn’t enjoy the warm-up sessions, they felt they were too long and just wanted to get on with playing the matches.** At each session there was always a couple of men that chose to opt out of the warm-up sessions and then went on to play in the matches. One of the carers commented

*“If you were a fit man, you’d get more out of the warm up than these guys, they’re not really using the muscles they’re telling them to use” (C1).*

The games themselves were played with great enthusiasm and energy. The men often had to be reminded to walk as they were running, chasing down the ball, tackling and trying to score goals. Given that all the men were over 70, had been living with dementia for a number of years it was quite remarkable to watch the physicality, intensity and speed of the games.

### *Social Impact*

The sessions provided the setting and the platform for a multitude of social interactions before, during and after the games. There were many conversations about football in general, Hampden Park and the walking football sessions themselves. One man, whose family said he wasn’t keen on speaking to people and thought he wouldn’t participate in an interview or interact much, participated in an interview and was seen chatting to other participants on numerous occasions.

The social impact seemed to go beyond the participants themselves. One man living with dementia who lived in a care home was unable to play due to poor health; however, he was an avid football supporter and came along to all the sessions to watch and cheer on his mates from the care home. The ability to spectate safely became an important aspect of the programme. At the first session, there was no safe sitting area for families or supporters to spectate, the programme organisers recognised the demand and value of doing so and from the second session onwards a different area of the warm up pitch was used so to as accommodate spectators safely. This allowed a small crowd to cheer on the men playing which enhanced the atmosphere and camaraderie amongst those attending.

Some of the men made new social connections whilst for one man it enabled him to reconnect with an old friend. The programme organiser realised that a man, who was planning to come along to watch with his brother knew one of the participants through playing professionally together for the same team. It emerged that they had been very close and one had been the others best man at his wedding but over the years they had lost touch. The programme organiser chatted with both men prior to the session so they both knew each other would be there. At the last session, the men walked straight over to each other, shook hands and chatted like the old friends they were. They have continued to see each other and meet up every week. The family of the men, staff and volunteers all commented on the positive impact that the men reconnecting with each other had on their mood. **Some of the men and their families were so taken with the reunion they are planning to get in touch with old football friends to try to reunite old friendships.**

The setting of the sessions also contributed to the social impact of the programme. **Having a café on site for everyone to mingle and socialise helped foster interactions and relationship building.** The ability to access the stadium and have photos taken added another dimension to the programme. Being able to attend the Football Memories session in the morning and then play in a session in the afternoon particularly appealed to two of the men.

**Take home reminders such as the photos proved to be very important for some of the men; they seem to provide a talking point and something they could share with their families.** They were creating new memories, ones that were illustrating their continued engagement with a football community.

*“When we go over to visit (his) son over in Atlanta, he was showing him photos saying look, I go to play the walking football at Hampden” (FM3).*

Figure 2: Participants receiving the player of the day



At each session there was an award for player of the day (Figure 2); this was a trophy the recipient took home for the month, he then presented the trophy to the player of the day at the next session. The trophy was given to a different man each time, the award not only recognised their contribution but acted as a **tangible emotional memory** imbued with pride and pleasure. At the end of the programme there was a celebration event with a prize giving ceremony. The photos taken and medals presented at the prize-giving event (Figure 3) also provided participants with emotional memories and a tangible memento of the experience.

*“Today in particular is very special obviously you know. That’s very nice so I’ll get my wife to frame this (medal) and put it above our bed” (P3)*

Figure 3: Medals presented to all participants as part of the prize-giving day at Hampden Park.





### Embodied memories

The team kits prompted many memories and the physical act of putting on the strip seemed to imbue the men with confidence. Some of the men were visibly apprehensive at the outset of the session but this dissolved once kitted out and on the pitch. They were both nostalgic and proud to wear the team kits of the clubs they grew up watching and supporting. It was the men rather than the volunteers and staff that remembered 3rd Lanark was a professional team, they were able to talk about the games they went to see and the players they looked up to. The staff and families all felt the team kits facilitated reminiscing, embodied memories and social interaction. The observational data affirmed the discernible change in the way the men presented physically. Their posture altered, they walked with their heads held high and chests puffed out. Volunteers in the changing rooms recognised how the use of team strips increased the chatter amongst men and acted as a prop to promote reminiscence.

### Carer's Experiences

The initial plan by Alzheimer Scotland was to have a separate room where family members could have a refreshment with a Dementia Advisor on hand to provide support and advice. However, this more formal respite did not materialise as some family members wanted to watch and cheer on the games, others wanted to go to the café for a chat and others wanted to use the time to run errands or participate in their own social activities.

*"I've got a little sewing club on a Thursday and I can still do that and he can come here" (FM4).*

For some of the family members that stayed they found that they learned more about their loved ones earlier lives and their love of football and the sessions provided them with a new point of connection.

*"It's a joy actually just seeing my dad happy. Not that he's not happy..... It's me seeing a whole new side to my dad.....actually seeing it and seeing how much he loves it, I actually really like to just sit and watch him and take hundreds of photos" (FM1).*

Other family members watched some of the sessions and went to the Hampden café together during other sessions for "a wee chat" (FM2). They preferred having a separate space to socialise as when they had attended other community activities they found their husbands wanting to be with them rather than participate in the activity. In the café they were 'out of sight out of mind' which allowed them to have a break and the men didn't

look for them when they weren't there. The family members felt safe and comfortable about leaving their loved ones in the care of staff.

*"... I can leave him here and know he's safe with (staff) and the lads" (FM4).*

Family members reported that their loved ones looked forward to the sessions and got excited about going on the day. They felt it lifted their mood and the physical activity improved their sleep pattern on the night after they played because they were physically tired after the exercise. As the pilot evolved the plans for having a respite session changed as it became clear the families wanted to use the time flexibly, sometimes watching the games, sometimes going to the café for a chat and for some the time allowed them to pursue their own interests.

### The DFWF programme and any adjustments required

#### *Programme organisation and setting*

Everyone felt that the programme was well organised with good communication between Alzheimer Scotland staff and participants. Families received emails and/or phone calls from Alzheimer Scotland staff prior to each session to check if they would be attending and to confirm arrangements. Families appreciated this as it made them more comfortable and less nervous attending. **From the organisational point of view, the amount of administration and communication required to run the programme was more substantial than anticipated.**

*"There's just a lot to organise, the amount of people involved, the clubs, the volunteers, trying to get the right amount of volunteers involved, trying to generate the interest, that's a lot to cope with and just the numbers in general" (S1).*

The location of Hampden Park was convenient for participants. Hampden Park offered a café space which was viewed very positively as it provided a meeting point where people could arrive early, have a refreshment and it also provided a break out space for families during the sessions. The café is full of football memorabilia and pictures of past matches and players. The artefacts in this environment not only orientated the men to the football session but also provided visual prompts for conversations and social interactions before each session.

However, navigating Hampden proved problematic for families and participants. On arrival at the Hampden Park foyer, there was no visual signage to direct participants, family

members or volunteers to go to the café, which was downstairs. Usually the receptionist in the foyer provided directions for visitors, however on one occasion the receptionist on duty didn't know the session was running so wasn't able to provide directions or assistance which resulted in small groups of people sitting around reception looking a bit lost and unsure. Programme staff and volunteers responded quickly and led everyone to the café. Following this, everyone was reminded to go straight to the café on arrival.

The numerous corridors that led to the changing rooms and indoor pitch were all painted the same dark blue colour and there was little or no signage, which made it difficult at times to navigate to and from the sessions.

*"We stayed upstairs just for a wee chat the last time and then we got lost... finding our way to the pitch" (FM3).*

*"Every corridor in here looks the same so it's something in terms of signage that we can do better on the day, and having more staff members involved" (S1).*

**Welcome and navigational signage or volunteers in the foyer and corridors to provide directions would improve the experience.** Despite this, the venue was still viewed positively; it was geographically accessible, provided prestige and added value with the access to the stadium, Museum, café and Football Memories sessions.

The celebration event after the programme was held in the Hampden Museum. The interactive exhibits gave families and participants an opportunity to reminisce about matches and cup finals gone by, have a laugh and banter about their team's players and results. For two men this was particularly poignant, when they saw pictures of old team mates, which elicited memories and conversations about of their professional footballing days.

There were a variety of views on the frequency of the sessions. Some participants wanted the sessions to run more frequently, however the monthly sessions fitted well with those who had busier schedules attending other community activities. Others suggested that two sessions per month would be ideal. Having the sessions in the afternoon appeared to suit everyone.

#### *Lessons learned about recruitment and retention for the programme itself*

The programme organiser would aim to increase the staff resource to promote, recruit and deliver any future programmes. The delivery of the programme was in addition to his regular role and he felt unable to dedicate as much time as he would have liked to

promoting and recruiting to programme. For any future programmes, additional support from Alzheimer Scotland marketing staff and some funds to 'boost' social media posts may increase awareness and interest. Alzheimer Scotland provide a person centred service and work with individuals and their families before, during and after each session, **the resource implications of increased numbers would need to be taken into account for any future programmes.**

Retention was generally not an issue, all the men who participated enjoyed it and wanted to attend, indeed would have attended more frequently given the opportunity. Two men were unable to complete the programme due to a deterioration in their health. The men and care staff from a local care home were not able to attend one session due to staffing and transport issues. This led to very low numbers of players at this particular session.