"FORE" GET ME NOT GOLF

Golf, Dementia and Community Wellbeing

An Evaluation of the Fore Get Me Not Golf Café at Heysham Golf Club



Dementia friendly golf sessions

foregetmenotgolf.co.uk

"FORE" GET ME NOT GOLF

Executive Summary

Heysham Golf Club

Dementia is one of the most pressing social and public health challenges of our time, **affecting around 1 million people today and an estimated 1.4 million by 2040**. With 1 in 2 people affected during their lifetime and 57% of those living with dementia being women, its impact extends far beyond the individual to families, communities, and healthcare systems. Dementia affects not only memory and cognition but also social connection, emotional wellbeing and quality of life. Community-based initiatives that promote inclusion, activity and meaningful relationships are increasingly recognised as important components of dementia support.

Emerging evidence suggests golf may support psychological, social, and cognitive well-being in people living with dementia, though the evidence base is still developing. This report summarises findings from research conducted at the 'Fore' Get Me Not Golf Café at Heysham Golf Club in conjunction with Lancaster University Medical School. The study explored how participation affected people living with dementia, their informal carers and the volunteers who support the sessions.

Fifteen participants were interviewed, including:

- 4 people living with dementia
- 5 informal carers
- 6 volunteers

The findings demonstrate that the golf café provides much more than a recreational activity. It creates a **safe, welcoming and inclusive environment** that supports wellbeing, reduces isolation and strengthens community connections.

Key Messages

- Golf can be an effective vehicle for dementia support.
- People living with dementia reported greater enjoyment, belonging and social connection.
- Carers experienced emotional relief, friendship and opportunities to reconnect with a sense of normality.
- Volunteers gained purpose, social connection and improved wellbeing.
- Golf clubs can become valuable community assets in supporting dementia-friendly communities.

Impact on People Living with Dementia

The strongest finding was that attendance helped participants feel connected, valued and included.

Increased Enjoyment and Positive Emotions

Participants consistently described the sessions as enjoyable and uplifting. Activities such as putting, chipping, conversation and spending time outdoors created positive emotional experiences.

Many participants looked forward to attending and described the café as something that brought enjoyment back into their week.

Reduced Social Isolation

Dementia can often lead to shrinking social networks and loneliness. Participants described the golf café as an opportunity to meet others facing similar challenges while maintaining meaningful social interactions. One participant sated "Everyone here is part of the club"

The café provided:

- Opportunities to make new friendships
- Reconnection with previous acquaintances
- Multi-generational social interaction
- A supportive social environment

Maintaining Identity and Purpose

Many participants connected golf activities and the golf club environment with memories from earlier life.

The familiar sporting setting helped individuals reconnect with important aspects of their identity, supporting the idea that people remain much more than their diagnosis.

Feeling Safe, Respected and Valued

Participants reported feeling welcomed, listened to and treated with dignity.
They stated that they "*Feel supported by the people around me*"
all whilst "*being respectful.*"

The golf club environment was viewed as:

- Easy to navigate
- Friendly and non-threatening
- Inclusive and supportive
- Respectful of individual needs

This sense of safety encouraged participation and confidence.





Impact on Carers

The findings show that the benefits of the golf café extend beyond the person living with dementia.

Social Support and Friendship

Carers frequently described feeling isolated in their caring role. The golf café created opportunities to connect with others who understood their experiences. One carer highlighted that "It is perfect to be separate so he can go do something and I can have a chat with people that are now my friends." Many carers developed friendships and informal support networks outside the sessions.

Emotional Relief

Although the café does not provide formal respite care, carers reported experiencing a valuable break from the emotional pressures associated with caregiving.

The supportive atmosphere allowed carers to:

- Relax
- Share experiences
- Laugh together
- Feel understood

A two-hour session was reported as having a meaningful impact.

Restoring Normality

One of the most powerful findings was that attendance helped carers feel like themselves again. Participants described the café as "A normal activity rather than something dominated by dementia."

The sessions provided opportunities to participate in everyday social experiences and maintain aspects of their identity beyond their caring role.

Demand for More Provision

Carers consistently expressed a desire for:

- Longer sessions
- More frequent sessions
- Greater availability of similar programmes

This highlights both the value of the service and a potential gap in current community support provision.





Impact on Volunteers and Golf Clubs

The research demonstrates that volunteering benefits not only participants but also those delivering the programme.

A Strong Sense of Purpose

Many volunteers had personal experiences of dementia within their own families.

Supporting the golf café provided an opportunity to transform those experiences into positive action and community contribution.

Improved Wellbeing

Volunteers consistently reported:

- Enjoyment
- Increased happiness
- A sense of achievement
- Improved mood

Seeing participants engage, laugh and connect created a strong sense of reward.

Building Community Connections

The café fostered meaningful relationships between:

- Participants
- Carers
- Volunteers
- Golf club members

This helped create a stronger sense of community within the club environment.





Demonstrating Golf's Social Value

The findings show how golf clubs can extend their role beyond sport.

Golf facilities offer:

- Safe and accessible environments
- Opportunities for physical activity
- Access to green space
- Existing volunteer networks
- Community meeting places

These characteristics make golf clubs well-positioned to support dementia-friendly initiatives.

Recommendations

The findings provide strong support for the continued development of golf-based dementia programmes.

1. Expand the Golf Café Model

Support more golf clubs to establish dementia cafés and dementia-friendly activities.

2. Promote Golf Clubs as Community Health Assets

Highlight the wider social impact of golf clubs in supporting health, wellbeing and inclusion.

3. Strengthen Volunteer Development

Provide training and ongoing support to volunteers to ensure sustainable programme delivery.

4. Increase Awareness

Share success stories and evidence of impact with:

- Golf clubs
- Local authorities
- Health and care services
- Community organisations

5. Build Partnerships

Strengthen collaboration between golf clubs, dementia charities and healthcare providers to improve referral pathways and programme reach.



Conclusion

The Fore Get Me Not Golf Café at Heysham Golf Club demonstrates how golf can be used as a powerful tool for social connection, wellbeing and community support.

For people living with dementia, the café provides enjoyment, belonging, confidence and meaningful social engagement.

For carers, it offers friendship, emotional support and a valuable sense of normality.

For volunteers, it creates purpose, connection and improved wellbeing.

Most importantly, the study demonstrates that golf clubs can play a significant role in creating dementia-friendly communities and supporting some of society's most vulnerable individuals.

The evidence suggests that golf-based dementia cafés represent a promising, scalable and highly valued model of community support that delivers benefits for everyone involved.

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