

# Healthwatch Dudley

## Case Study

### Addressing loneliness and isolation in the face of voluntary sector cuts...

#### Age UK Dudley Day Centres:

**Where:** Myles Court in Brierley Hill and Ettymore Road in Sedgley

**Attended by:** over 150 older vulnerable people aged between 77 and 98 years old

**Supported by:** 8 paid members of staff and 25 volunteers

#### Friendship and community:



The Brierley Hill Centre is currently open daily and the Sedgley Centre three mornings a week to get older, vulnerable and isolated people involved with community activities.

People who attend enjoy companionship and activities including arts and crafts, quizzes, bingo, occasional trips out and gentle exercise classes, together with information about diet and keeping safe and well.

“I love coming here, having lunch and meeting people over a game of bingo or taking part in a quiz, it’s my lifeline.”

“We have a lunch together and if I need any help or information there is always someone to talk to. I was so lonely before.”

#### What the staff say:

“Our day centres are a lifeline for the people who come here. Before they came to us some of our clients had very little else to focus on so made regular calls to emergency services because they were so lonely.

Others fixated on small issues that they reported as antisocial behaviour whereas the real issues were often caused by nervousness due to their isolation.

Coming here allows people to talk through some the things that worry them and to find solutions.”

“We firmly believe that loneliness and isolation will lead to more people going into care, which will put more pressure on services and cost far more in the long run.”

#### Volunteer voices:

Both day centres rely on their volunteers who are an essential part of the team. Volunteers are valued and many are older

people who go on to access the day centre services themselves.

“I started volunteering as I needed to keep busy after retirement. I think it is a false economy to close the place because older people will not eat properly if they don't come.” (Penny - volunteer)

**“A lot of people don't have internet access so I help our clients to fill out forms.”**

(Chris - volunteer)

“Integrated Plus referred me to volunteering here. I like to keep busy and I am worried about the impact on the older people and also myself. I have to get two buses to get here but I love it and would really miss it if the centre closed.”

**“Loneliness is a killer. If people didn't come here where would they go?”**

(Jill - volunteer)

“I have been coming here for 21 years since the first day it opened. I was 73 then and came as a volunteer. I had a cancer operation in 1980 and then again in 1997 so after that I became a client and it has helped me so much.” (Doris aged 94)

## Regular healthy meals:

Some clients are unable to cook for themselves due to poor mobility, so these are the only hot meals they have.



“We provide good food here which is sometimes the only good meal a lot of the people attending get to eat. I eat here too so it helps me to eat more healthily.” (Judy - volunteer).



“Mealtimes are the best part because we get to eat with company at a regular time, the food is good and we get to choose and eat. I always eat alone at home and rarely cook for myself.” (Ray aged 82)

**“I don't cook at home other than toast or a sandwich. Coming here I don't have to worry about food for three days a week.”**



## Essential transport links:

Ring and Ride is the main transport link for visitors to Myles Court and the Sedgley Centre relies heavily on volunteer drivers. Both services are valued equally.



“There used to be five volunteer drivers and now I am the only one. I started volunteering because I wanted to do something after I retired.

I have to make two trips on the bus at the moment because the other bus has broken down and the one lent by the council has a different kind of ramp/lift for the wheelchairs, which takes up the space of three seats. I am 77 years old and have to have a medical every three years to make sure I am competent to drive the bus.”

“I picked a lady up this morning who said she could kiss me because I was the first person she had seen this week.”

“The drivers really look after me, they make sure my front door is locked, they help me down the steps onto the bus and when they bring me back they help me to my front door.”

“The drivers don’t go until they know that I am safe inside and the door is locked behind me. A taxi driver would be too busy to do this.” (Olive age 87)

“I have heart disease and was advised by the doctor not to go out alone but am able to come here as I get the transport, if I didn’t come here I wouldn’t be able to do anything else.” (Liz aged 90)

“I can’t get the bus by myself so I rely on ring and ride to bring me. They lock my front door, make sure I don’t fall and even carry my bag. I don’t know what I would do without them and know I wouldn’t go out.”

## What the centres mean to people who attend:



**“Have you ever sat by yourself day after day without seeing a soul? It’s a horrible feeling. I’ve felt so much better since I started to come here. Now it helps to keep me young.”**

(Joan aged 80)

“I would just sit at home if I didn’t come here, I’ve been coming for six weeks and it’s a god-send, although I live with my son and his family, they are out all day so when I am on my own I just go to sleep as there is nothing else to do.”

**“The Parkinson’s Society referred me here. I live alone and don’t have any family. I wouldn’t see anyone if I didn’t come here.”** (Lil aged 87)

“Before I came here I had been on my own for five years after my husband died. I was incredibly lonely but then I found out about this and it has been a lifeline. I don’t know what I’d have done without it. My children like me coming here as they know I am happy and am seeing other people, only one of them lives locally and she helps out when she can but they have all got their own lives and families.” (Brian aged 90)

**“I come here once a week because that is all I can afford. I don’t get out if I can’t be brought here apart from some Sunday mornings when a lady I know takes me to church. However, she goes away on holiday a lot so it is not a regular thing. I don’t have a husband or any children.**

**I have nieces and nephews but they all live away. This centre is my social life and my company. I would really miss it if it weren’t here.”** (Phyllis aged 86)

“I moved from London and found out about the centre at the library. I live alone in my flat and I would be devastated and very sad if were to close as I enjoy it and have made so many friends here. I can just about get around myself but it is very hard.” (George aged 88)



**“It costs less to help people here and in their own homes than in hospital, so more should be done to prevent people going in to hospital in the first place. Centres like this should not close. We are all getting older and need more support not less.”**

“If it closes I’ll be stumped, it is the only place I come out to, I am here three times a week and I don’t see anyone else apart from my daughter-in-law who takes me shopping on Wednesdays which is her day off. If I wasn’t coming here she would probably need to cut down her hours to help look after me, she knows I am looked after here and that I am safe and get fed.” (Glenys aged 78)

“I come here for company as I live by myself. For some people this is the only place they ever go other than to see the doctor.”

“If I sit at home all day, every day then I will start to get depressed and talk to myself.”

“It breaks my week up coming here as I don’t do much else, it would break my heart if it closed as I would be totally on my own.” (George aged 79)



“How will it save money for the council if they have to send carers to people individually to care for them, as they get worse as they don’t get out and about?”

“I come here once a week and don’t do much else as I can’t see very well, the volunteers help with my food and I get the transport here and back home, everyone is very supportive.” (Ingrid aged 82)

“Places like this are really important as they stop people becoming housebound and deteriorating, people need company and to use their brains.”

“I’m new to the area so coming here has helped be to get to know people but if I didn’t come here I wouldn’t go anywhere. I use a walking frame so I really struggle, I would stay in watching television all day.” (June aged 88)

“Before we came to Myles Court we used to meet in a church hall. We’re more settled here because the building is designed for us to get around safely and it isn’t freezing cold.”

“I’ve been coming here since it opened and it’s a lifeline for me, the carers here are amazing and really look after us.”

“I really enjoy the exercise classes because they keep me going. I can feel the difference in my fingers and feet. I worry if I stop exercising that I will stop moving altogether and will be put into a care home.”

“I feel that older people are not being catered for and it is no quality of life for us just looking at the same four walls. We really need this service. There are so many vulnerable people around me and if this centre closes there will be a much wider impact on support services. I think that the funding cuts are very short-sighted.” (Bob aged 78)

Healthwatch Dudley carried out interviews at the Age UK Dudley Day Centres at Myles Court in Brierley Hill and in Ettymore Road Sedgley during August 2016.

*Some names have been changed.*



## Impact of voluntary sector cuts to The Beacon Centre Day Services:

**Where:** Beacon Centre Sedgley and Stourbridge day centres

**Attended by:** Over 200 registered clients referred by Dudley Council

**Volunteer support:** 20 - 35 volunteers get involved each week.

### What the centres mean to people who attend

- I wouldn't go out at all if I didn't come here - I am housebound
- I attend twice a week - it gives me and my wife breathing space and respite from each other. I attend so she can do the things she wants to do without having to worry about me tripping over when she is doing housework, so it is beneficial to both of us
- I have been coming once a week for 20 years, I would really miss it
- We have been told that we will have to pay an additional £15 a day which is a lot
- Many people won't be able to get out which will lead to people being lonely and depressed
- I occasionally get out but only when my son can take me which is usually to go to the doctors
- It would make me depressed if I couldn't come here
- We would end up with dementia!
- We can't get out so there is nowhere to go
- Where are people supposed to go?
- I come here twice a week - my partner is bedridden so I need the break away from him, if I didn't come here I would go up the wall
- I am on my own if I don't come here, I will go 'doo-lally'
- Cuts are hitting the pensioners the hardest
- There will also be a wider impact on our families, as well as staff and volunteers if there are less people coming to the centre
- I live here and we rely on the support workers at the centre who help with everything from shopping trips to help completing paperwork
- People have been coming here for many years and lots of friendships have developed. It would be devastating if everyone lost touch
- The council seem to have taken the policy of 'if you want it you pay for it', but have struck at the most vulnerable
- Where has the 4% rise in council tax gone?
- I am one of seven drivers and we bring 150 people a week to the centre each week- the cuts will not only affect the people with sight loss but there is a wider impact on people's livelihoods

Healthwatch Dudley visited Beacon Centre to listen to people who access day centre services in July 2016.

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