

Past Times: A User Guide

COMBATING LONELINESS IN OLDER PEOPLE THROUGH A WEEKLY
'NIGHT OUT ON A MONDAY AFTERNOON'

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Section One: Project Details

What is Past Times?

Past Times is a regular social gathering organised by [Arch-Way Project](#) in Halifax, West Yorkshire. Often described as 'a night out on a Monday afternoon', the weekly event is held in a traditional social club and aims to emulate a nightclub experience from the 1960's era, with entertainment including live music, a quiz, and games of Bingo. Past Times is one of several projects offered by Arch-Way. Other events on different days include writing groups, music and singing sessions and therapeutic beauty treatments.



Originally created to support members of the local community living with, or at risk of, dementia, the main attendees of Past Times were originally residents of the local Almshouses and care homes. There was a lack of provision locally for older people and Past Times began to reduce loneliness and isolation, which can exacerbate the effects of dementia and make it much more difficult to live with. With this in mind, the event tailors the entertainment to suit its audience; with the musicians performing songs likely to evoke memories and quiz questions on appropriate general knowledge, with no modern cultural questions included. Since the Coronavirus pandemic, Past Times has expanded its reach to include not just older people, but also individuals experiencing loneliness, isolation, and physical and mental health difficulties.

There is no charge to attend, and refreshments are provided. There is access to a commercial, but non-profit making bar. A recent addition to Monday's schedule is an optional lunch club where a hot meal is provided for a small fee, enabling attendees to meet sooner and enjoy a meal together.

This User Guide is intended as an informational resource; it need not be followed to the letter and indeed other groups may wish to adapt elements to suit the needs of their audience.

Aims of Past Times

The key aim of Past Times is to:

- Reduce isolation and loneliness in the community. This is achieved by providing a regular social event; an opportunity for people to spend quality time with family and friends, meet others, make new friends and have an enjoyable afternoon each week.

Further aims include:

- Supporting those with, or at risk of, dementia through triggering memories with the music and activities offered.
- Enabling shared mealtimes through the Lunch Club, ensuring a nutritious meal is available and people to eat with- especially important for those living alone.
- Encouraging physical activity, for example through attending and dancing.



Section Two: How is Past Times Beneficial?

Overview

Despite the success of Past Times, it remained unclear precisely how attending the project benefitted people, how it could be improved or how it could be replicated in other settings. The Arch-Way Project and the University of Huddersfield collaborated to explore what it is about attending Past Times that helps people, culminating in the research outlined below and this User Guide.



Study Details

The research aimed to answer three main questions:

- What is the impact of attending Past Times?
- What are the barriers/facilitators to attendance?
- What is unique about Past Times, and how can this be recreated elsewhere?

To answer these questions, a survey was completed by 26 attendees, and 13 interviews were carried out with attendees, staff and referrers to the Past Times project. This information was used to identify what it is that is distinctive about this weekly event, to explore what worked well and why, what worked less well and what could be improved. The findings informed this 'User Guide'

to help other organisations recreate something similar and with the same benefits. For further information on how the research was carried out, please see the [Research Report](#) available via the Arch-Way project (see Further Information at the end of the guide).

Findings - What the Staff, Referrers and Carers Think

“The lady I bring has made friends with the two ladies that we sit with every week. That’s a completely organic friendship that’s occurred just from me taking her there [...] I take her to get her out of the home that she lives in so she can get out and meet people. So she feels normal again. So that’s what she gets out of it, [...].. a social life in the end. Feeling like she’s got one again, and making new friends, and meeting new people.”
(Jenny, carer).

Past Times is managed and run by both paid staff and volunteers. Some attendees found Past Times after being referred from various other service-providers; dementia charities, healthcare professionals, mental health services and community integration schemes. Some volunteers also came to Past Times through referrals by service providers; one spoke about the appreciation of being given a chance to help others - something he found helped him greatly too. We interviewed staff, volunteers, referrers, and carers that bring clients to Past Times and

the concept of spending regular time with other people was frequently mentioned.

Although some referrers and carers suggested ways in which Past Times could be improved, they valued the opportunity it provided for those they cared for to get out of the house and be around others. The physical atmosphere, activities and food all seemed to be important contributors, but when we asked what the most important thing about Past Times was, several simply responded “the people”¹.

¹ Names given are pseudonyms, to protect identities

Findings - What the Attendees Think

The main feel of Past Times seems to be one of acceptance. Attendees comment on how they feel “at home” at Past Times, like they have a place, and are part of

“I like the atmosphere. I like socialising with people, and it’s like being part of something. And.. I don’t know, it just gives you self-worth, being there”.
(Joanne, attendee).

a wider “family”.

The inclusion of all is a key element; it is deliberately dementia-friendly

(appropriate quiz questions, regular routine, familiar faces) and supportive for those experiencing physical and mental health difficulties. Some female attendees regard Past Times as a “safe space”; somewhere they feel comfortable to go alone. There is appreciation for the relaxed atmosphere, without pressure to join in and the feeling of being treated as regular individuals enjoying “a night out on a Monday afternoon”.

The benefits of attending Past Times spanned physical, mental, long term and short term. For some, the benefits were relatively short term- that is, they enjoyed the event and looked forward to it each week, but it didn’t have a huge impact on their health, mood or the rest of the week. For others, the routine of spending time with friends and distraction from wider worries had a continued positive impact on their sense of wellbeing for the week ahead and beyond.

The opportunity for movement through walking to/from/around the venue, and dancing, provided some attendees with exercise. The activities such as the quiz and Bingo encourage mental focus and concentration and provide a sense of achievement, and many commented on the enjoyment of being able to see live music. The availability of a freshly cooked hot meal provides good nutrition, and the opportunity to eat with others; especially important for those who live alone.

The mental health benefits seem to stem largely from the regular shared experience with other people. Attendees are given the opportunity to spend time with loved ones if they go together or meet new people and forge new friendships if they usually go alone, facilitating independence in the process. Social skills are acquired, and support is offered from staff and other attendees, reducing the negative impact of isolation. Attendees noted the importance, and positive impact of, having a purpose to get out of the house. The routine and regular structure, as well as the non-

“If I hadn’t had this place, I would have been just probably stuck at home? Just doing nothing and probably just wouldn’t have even been this far in life. I don’t think. Yeah, to be without this place. .. I don’t even think I would have been here. Yeah, I think I just would’ve give up. But since I’ve come here. Like I say, it’s really changed me. It’s put my life into perspective.”
(Martin, attendee.).

“[The meal is] really good ‘cause, you know, I live on my own and sometimes I don’t eat a lot alone. Yeah so it’s nice to have a meal now”. (Paul, attendee).

judgemental spirit of the group, was discussed in relation to supporting recovery from addiction and depression.

Conclusions: Why is Past Times Important?

Past Times provides an opportunity to get out of the house, to meet friends, to make friends, to exercise, to socialise, to eat, to drink, to build social skills and try new things. The friendly atmosphere and relaxed nature of the weekly event facilitates as much or as little of this as individuals feel able to take part in. It opens doors; to improve health, to strengthen wellbeing, to access other events at Arch-Way or in the wider community. It can have a wider impact too - families, friends, carers and volunteers all feel the benefit of having somewhere to go where they can be entertained or indeed supported.

Section Three: Practical Advice for Setting Up

Venue

Past Times currently runs from a fully functional social club. The nature of the venue separates it out from other events aimed at the elderly population; coffee mornings in the local area tend to be held in church halls and cafés. Whilst offering similar activities, the venue is completely different, which seems to impact the atmosphere. In terms of interior decoration, the vintage 'club' setting is important to the overall atmosphere and sets Past Times apart from other local provisions. Closed curtains, dimmed lights and candles on the tables, along with live music performances, recreate an 'evening' event - quite different from the 'coffee morning' alternatives.

The staff recognise the venue as one of the most important factors in making Past Times a unique event: *"Choose the right location. Not a church hall, not a scout's room or a community centre - it has to be grown up"*.

Carers and referrers also noted the availability of the bar as a positive aspect of sessions, enabling individuals to make their own decisions about whether or not to drink alcohol: *"The one thing I really like about it is there's an open bar, if you want a beer. People often forget that people who are older, or with dementia... There's no reason why they would want a cup of tea and a biscuit. They might want a beer, you know?"*.

Amongst attendees, there were positive and negative views on the availability of alcohol, with some saying that being around alcohol made them feel uncomfortable and others commenting that "it's not a big thing" either way. That said, it could be argued that the nature of the venue - a club, rather than a church hall or similar - offered an alternative atmosphere that was appreciated, adding to the concept of a "night out" rather than a "coffee morning". This atmosphere in turn facilitates an entertaining, non-pressured environment where adults can enjoy the music, the company and have a laugh. In the local area, similar events take place in that there is live music, games, a quiz and a raffle. However, the venue and the atmosphere it helps to create is what separates Past Times from these.

Staff

Past Times operates using a team of seven people, five of whom are volunteers, though some staff from the wider Arch-Way Project often help with setting up the events. The roles and responsibilities are different for each member of the team, with one member of paid staff having a project manager role, but all play an important part in the smooth running of the event. Staff and volunteers undertake a DBS check (volunteers costs funded by Arch-Way) and at least two members of staff are First Aid trained.

Project Manager

The project manager is responsible for the following:

- Delegating appropriate tasks to staff and volunteers
- Promotion of event via social media
- Booking performers week-to-week
- Processing of DBS checks for volunteers
- Interviewing suitable volunteers for the role
- Ensuring the space where the event is held is suitable and safe
- First-aid trained in case of emergencies
- Training of volunteers regarding their role on the afternoon
- Overseeing staff and volunteers

Project Workers

Project workers are responsible for the following:

- Setting up the space ready for the day (putting candles, pens, paper, and bingo tickets on tables and setting up the PA system on stage)
- Making refreshments for the attendees
- Making attendees feel welcome upon arrival and comfortable throughout the afternoon

Volunteers

Volunteers are a vital part of Past Times, both for their contribution to the workload utilising individual skills as well as ensuring a warm welcome each week. Past Times currently has five volunteers, one of whom helps with the technical process of setting up sound equipment. Four of the volunteers make tea and coffee throughout the afternoon, sit with people and chat, help with the quiz and bingo (especially for those with hearing or sight impairments) and generally help people to feel welcome, comfortable and safe for the afternoon.

The use of volunteers is mutually beneficial: it keeps costs down for staffing for Past Times as well as giving others a chance to benefit from volunteering. Improving social skills, "giving back" by helping others and gaining transferable skills were all discussed in the research carried out.

Structure

Structure and routine are important for several reasons. Firstly, it is helpful for those with dementia and their carers. Secondly, it enables logistical plans such as transport to and from the venue to be put into place. Thirdly, it ensures a smooth-running, professional event. Where research participants had specific suggestions for improvements, these were more likely to focus on timing and organisation than other issues.

The current structure at Past Times is as follows:

| Activity | Time |
|------------------------|---------|
| Doors Open | 12:30pm |
| Lunch Club | 1:00pm |
| Quiz | 1:45pm |
| Performer (first set) | 2pm |
| Quiz (answers) | 2:30pm |
| Raffle | 2:40pm |
| Bingo | 2:50pm |
| Performer (second set) | 3:00pm |
| Finish | 3:30pm |

There is some flexibility in timings, however it is useful for staff, carers, attendees and performers if the structure is approximately adhered to. Some attendees also commented on it being preferable when the proposed schedule is followed, to enable transport to be organised.

Top Tips

Keep it Fresh, Listen to Feedback

It's useful to have a variety of performers for rotation. Aim to have around eight to ten different musicians that you can cycle, so that there is someone different for attendees to watch each week. Through carrying out this research, we have acknowledged that not everybody will like everything, but if things keep changing, it helps to keep people engaged and attending.

Collect feedback from attendees on a regular basis and listen to it; be prepared to change if it is what most attendees would like. Making feedback a regular part of your operations will be helpful in many ways; information can be used in funding bids as well as to improve the service, and if it is implemented at the outset, attendees will be used to contributing their opinions.

Feedback from referrers or the wider community can help to identify barriers that people face when considering attending and reasons why some people do not attend. The event will not be suitable and accessible for everyone, but if you can find out why, there is more chance of addressing any issues that could be easily resolved to create a more inclusive event.

Get to Know People and Celebrate Events

Taking note of regular attendees' birthdays and celebrating with them (a simple cake, card, asking that week's performer to sing 'Happy Birthday') is a fantastic way of adding to the individuality and community feel of the event. Celebrating Christmas, Easter, Halloween and other occasions is also a great way to bring people together in a shared experience (often those that do not attend every week will attend special events). It can also be a good way to fundraise.

It is important to think carefully about which events the local community may wish to participate in celebrating, to include as many as possible, and not exclude people. Whilst many do enjoy Past Times, not everyone will wish to celebrate the same events. Seeking feedback about this would be a useful way of finding out what people would like to celebrate.

Location/Transport

When considering a venue, think carefully about how attendees will be able to get there. Things like bus and train routes, proximity to the local Town/City centre and accessibility in poor weather are all important factors. Past Times does not offer any transport to and from the event - logistically, attendees are geographically too far apart, and the costs incurred would make it unviable - but this could be different in alternative locations. Some local councils offer funding for transport for some people, and it could be possible to facilitate a car share scheme between attendees. Ample car parking is advantageous when considering a venue.

Lunch Club

Offering a Lunch Club can provide a good income as well as all the benefits to attendees of eating a nutritious meal in company. At Past Times, it has been relatively straightforward to set up as there is already a commercial kitchen on site; this could be something else to consider when identifying a venue. The person responsible for cooking meals will need a Food Hygiene Certificate, and the kitchen will need to be inspected if it has not already been done.

Charging an Entrance Fee/Donations

Past Times is a free event, though donations are welcome. When thinking about charging an entrance fee, it is important to weigh up whether the income you generate would make a tangible difference to offset costs, whilst being affordable enough to not restrict access for people. An entrance fee could limit your audience.

At Past Times, the reasons for not charging for attendance go further. One member of staff said "I don't want people to have to pay to not be lonely" whilst another stated "You wouldn't have to pay to go to the pub would you? And that's what we're trying to capture, the feeling of being young again".

Costs

Costs to consider, especially for initial funding applications, include but are not necessarily limited to: venue hire, staff, musical equipment (PA/sound system), musicians, volunteer expenses/travel, tea and coffee/biscuits. Holding events for special occasions will incur further costs but can be a great way to reach more people, and additional funding pots can be acquired for this.

Section Four: Troubleshooting Guide/FAQs

I'm struggling to secure funding, what can I do or try?

Check with the local Integrated Care Board (ICB, formally the Care Commissioning Group (CCG)) - events to combat loneliness and isolation, as well as dementia-friendly events, are in such high demand that a clearly written funding bid should be positively received. In funding bids, it is important to highlight who the beneficiaries will be and how they could benefit from the service you are proposing - utilise published research and reports to demonstrate how loneliness impacts local health and wellbeing and how triggering memories through music and social engagement has a positive impact on people with dementia. Local evidence of needs and the benefits of your event will also help. For example, the Arch-way project used the [Age UK loneliness map](#) to support a funding application. It is also useful to establish what is already available in the local area, gaps in provision and ensure that your proposed event is designed to address these gaps. Once established, feedback from attendees to evidence the benefits and demonstrate effective mechanisms for identifying and addressing shortcomings is vital. The Big Lottery Community Fund also offer grants for new start-ups. It is also worth approaching local businesses, both small and large, for support and sponsorship. Supermarkets such as Lidl, Tesco, M&S and ASDA can offer regular donations through their Community Champions commitments.

Where can I get volunteers?

Lots of volunteers come through word of mouth. Some are referred through agencies that also refer attendees, indeed sometimes the volunteers started off as attendees at Past Times. Reaching out on social media can help, although with the older population it can have more limited scope. Highlight that costs incurred can be covered, to encourage participation for those facing financial barriers. It is important to get to know your volunteers, both so they can feel comfortable volunteering and help effectively by utilising any existing skills.

How can I persuade musicians to play?

The budget for musicians may vary; initially at Past Times it started off at around £20 for an hour set (split in to two half hour slots). The budget has increased and is now closer to £60, but some musicians see this as too small a fee. When approaching musicians, highlight the incentives: some attendees have gone on to book musicians for further private events, including Care Homes, so the advertising can be valuable to them. As Past Times is held on Monday afternoons, it is unlikely that the booking would interfere with another more lucrative booking. Approach the local college music department too - bands often appreciate the practice of playing to a live audience - but do check the style of music is appropriate.

I don't have experience of setting up musical equipment, what can I do?

If you don't have experience of setting up musical equipment, you can learn the basics from YouTube or again, approach the local college music department. Often, performers will bring their

own equipment and set it up themselves, but this shouldn't be relied on. Past Times have a volunteer and member of staff with specialist knowledge of the equipment - this is clearly the ideal but not essential.

We're set up, but it's so quiet. How can I get more people through the door?

Advertising to local care homes and Almhouses is where Past Times initially started. Ask to speak to the events or entertainment manager and explain what you are setting up. Past Times even visited care homes for a short demonstration - a mini 'Past Times' - in the home for the residents. Speak to local charities such as Age UK and the Alzheimer's Society so they know about the event and can refer people on. GP surgeries can also refer people through the Social Prescribing initiative.

It is important to network in the local community, as many people hear about different events through word of mouth. Flyers in the area local to the venue can also bring people in, though it can be labour intensive. Think about your target audience carefully though; if you are aiming to reduce loneliness and isolation but advertising heavily as a dementia-friendly event, you may limit your scope. Stigma around dementia remains, and people may be put off attending if they think it is solely for people with dementia.

For Further Information

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