

**ARC East of England  
Stevenage Dementia Involvement Group**

**Physical Activity in Stevenage 2**



October 2021

# Stevenage Dementia Involvement Group

Stevenage Dementia Involvement Group aims to provide opportunities for people with experience of dementia to have their voice heard and to have influence on research and the planning of new services. Each session the group will discuss a particular topic relating to living with dementia or health and social care services in Stevenage.

Stevenage Dementia Involvement Group met face-to-face on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021. In attendance were 15 people with experience of living with or caring for somebody with dementia.

Attending the group was Nicole Darlington (from the University of Hertfordshire) and Su Harvey from The Red Shed Project, Stevenage. Guest researchers from the *DEMCOM active* project were Elspeth Mathie, Rebecca Hadley and Erika Kazakeviciute, from the University of Hertfordshire.

The topic of discussion **Physical Activity in Stevenage** was discussed at an earlier group (December 2020) and the researchers were here to present and discuss their findings from this study.





# Summary of discussions

## Physical activities available in Stevenage

Becki introduced the DEMCOM active project and spoke about the different physical activities available to people living with dementia in Stevenage. A large map of Stevenage with the location of different activities was placed on a table for the group to see. Not all group members had heard of the following activities:

- The IRISH network provides different physical activities, such as line dancing, exercise classes and tea dances, at the Sherma Batson Centre in Stevenage. The charge for these ranges from £2-£5. See website for further details:  
<https://irishnetworkstevenage.org.uk/events/>
- Stepping Out (not Stevenage based) which provides free supported walks to scenic venues, such as National Trust locations, for carers and the people they care for. Website:  
<https://carerssteppingout.co.uk>
- Walking football sessions at Stevenage Football club. These are open to anyone (over 50s) with mixed and women's only sessions on offer. A taster session is free, with a charge of £5 per session thereafter. Carers or family members are welcome to come along with the person they care for if they require supervision. Website:  
<https://stevenagefcfoundation.com/our-programmes/coaching/walkingfootball/>
- Strength and Balance classes run by Stevenage Football club which include a mixture of seated and standing exercises. There is a beginner (Bedwell Community Centre) and an advanced class (St. Joseph's Church Hall), each charged at £3 per session. Website: <https://stevenagefcfoundation.com/our-programmes/health-and-wellbeing/strength-and-balance/>
- Clock Cricket is a seated and competitive cricket game with foam bats and balls. Some of the dementia day services, such as Hertswise, and local care homes include cricket sessions as part of the activities on offer, though this varies each session. Website for Hertswise dementia hubs: <https://hertswise.org.uk/hertswise-dementia-hubs/>

Becki showed the group a leaflet that the project is creating with a list of the different activities in Stevenage.

The group provided additional activities to add to the leaflet. Hertswise dementia group sometimes does physical activity such as singing and dancing and had themed activities when the Olympics were on. One couple attends a community centre where they go Line Dancing (through the Irish Network).

### **Potential issues with the physical activities in Stevenage**

The group mentioned there is a lack of communication surrounding the different activities in Stevenage and that they often find out about activities by word of mouth. The group suggested that a leaflet about these would be useful in a central place such as the local memory clinic.

It was also noted that physical activities for people with dementia tended to be chair based. The group want organisations to recognise that not everybody with dementia is “chair bound” and some still enjoy being active.

### **Dementia-specific vs dementia-inclusive activities**

There was a long discussion around the different “mainstream” activities that can be made dementia friendly. A number of group members continued participating in physical activities that they did before a dementia diagnosis. These included:

- Bowling
- Swimming classes (aqua fit)
- Hockey
- The gym

Specific examples of mainstream activities that were dementia friendly were given. One group member said she has been playing Hockey for many years and the team know that she has dementia and make the game more accessible for her (e.g. by having names on the back of the

vests). A similar experience was given by another member about their football team having two team members with dementia and how the team looks out for them and “makes allowances” if they kick the ball to the wrong team.

It was agreed that education is key to more mainstream activities becoming more dementia friendly.

From a person living with dementia’s view, *“I would rather attend mainstream activities and be accepted”*.

## Green spaces in Stevenage and surrounding areas

Erika spoke about her work on greenspaces. Erika suggested members look at the Park Herts website for detailed information about accessibility, such as toilets and benches, as the Council website did not always include the same level of information.

One person mentioned that accessibility is difficult as the toilets are only open when the coffee shop is open which restricts when you can visit.

Members spoke about the different green spaces they enjoy in the local area:

- Mill Green Golf Course, *Hatfield*
- Chesterfield Golf Course, *Gravelly*
- Wymondley Woods, *Letchworth*
- Oughtonhead Common Nature Reserve, *Hitchin*
- Mardley Woods, *Oaklands, Welwyn*



**Images of local greenspace.**

Top: Oughtonhead Common Nature Reserve, Hitchin. Bottom left: Wymondley wood, Letchworth. Bottom Right: Fairlands Valley Park, Stevenage.

Some members mentioned that GP surgeries Patient Public Groups across Stevenage may offer or refer people to walks. Members attended Healthwalks outside of Stevenage, such as at Norton Common, Letchworth. According to the Walking for Health website there is a walk that takes place in Fairlands Valley Park, but it is not clear whether it is open/suitable for all.

## Conclusion and next steps

This group provided people with experience of living with dementia the opportunity to share their opinions and find out new information about physical activity in Stevenage. For the researchers the session provided the opportunity to verify and discuss findings. This summary report has been read and approved by the group members who attended.

For more information about the Physical Activity and Dementia project visit

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/research/centres/psychology/research-unit-in-sport-physical-activity-and-ageing-runspaa/the-contribution-of-physical-activity-to-social-connectivity-and-wellbeing-in-older-adults-living-with-dementia>

<https://www.arc-oe.nihr.ac.uk/research-implementation/research-themes/ageing-and-multi-morbidity/demcom-study-national-evaluation>

The next meeting will take place in November 2021 and the topic will be “*dementia friendly care at hospital*”.

This group is organised by researchers from the University of Hertfordshire as part of the National Institute of Health Research Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) East of England. For more information, or if you are interested in joining or visiting the group, please contact Nicole Darlington, [n.darlington@herts.ac.uk](mailto:n.darlington@herts.ac.uk) or visit <https://arc-oe.nihr.ac.uk/stevenage-dementia-involvement-group>.