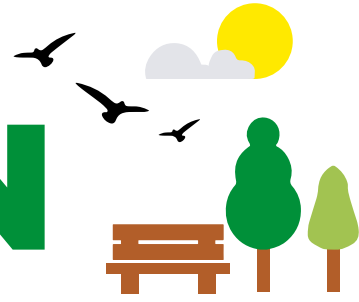


ENLIVEN



Making outdoor spaces and activities dementia-inclusive

A Policy brief from the ENLIVEN project

Key points

- The number of people with dementia is increasing as our society ages. Most live in the community and want to live as normal a life as possible. For many, this includes getting out into nature and doing outdoor nature-based activities.
 - Getting out into nature can help to support independence, health, and well-being, and provide opportunities for social contact, for people with dementia.
 - People with dementia and their families experience many obstacles to getting outdoors into nature. Businesses in the outdoor visitor economy and organisations providing access to outdoor space and outdoor nature-based pursuits can help to overcome these obstacles by becoming more dementia-inclusive.
 - In the ENLIVEN research project we connected these providers with people affected by dementia and supported them to co-create innovative ways of providing dementia-inclusive activities or making their sites more accessible.
 - As a result, people with dementia and their families enjoyed experiences ‘in the moment’ and felt listened to and valued; many made repeat visits. Organisations and businesses extended their visitor base, developed new links and partnerships, and planned further dementia-inclusive activities and innovations. Staff and volunteers grew more confident about supporting visitors with dementia.
 - We developed a free guide to ‘Making your visitor economy business dementia-inclusive’, and a set of Top Tips for visitor economy businesses.
 - In this policy brief we describe the ENLIVEN project and offer recommendations and suggestions for policy makers, organisations and businesses providing access to outdoor space, and for people affected by dementia.
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Why should providers of outdoor space and activities become dementia-inclusive?

As a nation we are living longer. By 2050, the number of people aged 85+ will be double what it is today. This should be good news, but many of those extra years of life will be spent living with disability. On average, people aged 65 now will spend almost half their remaining life with disability. One in 11 of them will develop dementia. There are about 900,000 people living with dementia in the UK, including around 70,000 people diagnosed at younger ages. This number is set to increase to 1.5 million by 2050.

Most people with dementia live in the community. Usually they are supported by spouses, other family members or friends (often referred to as ‘carers’), but about one in five live alone and some have little support. They want to be themselves, to be as independent as possible, and enjoy a normal life. For many, this includes being able to get outdoors and engage in outdoor nature-based pursuits.

Businesses and organisations providing access to nature and outdoor spaces have an important role to play in making this possible. By doing so, they can both expand their visitor base and demonstrate responsible and inclusive practice.

Why is this important for providers of outdoor space and activities?

For most people, a normal life includes being able to enjoy going outdoors and connecting with nature. Being in nature, and doing outdoor nature-based pursuits, makes us feel good and helps keep us healthy and active.

©Kew Gardens



This is equally true for people with dementia, but it can be much harder for them to achieve due to their cognitive disability. Dementia attacks the mental (or ‘cognitive’) abilities that underpin everything we do. This is not just about memory; dementia can affect language and communication, visual perception, planning and organising abilities, and mobility. People with dementia may also have physical or sensory disabilities, or other health conditions.

Putting all this together means people with dementia and their families can experience significant barriers to accessing nature. Barriers can be both personal, for example fear of getting into difficulty or getting lost, and structural, for example lack of transport options or absence of basic facilities such as signs, toilets, and benches. Getting out into nature can help to support independence, health, and well-being, and provide opportunities for social contact, for people with dementia, but these barriers need to be overcome. There is a lot that organisations and businesses can do to help. This was our focus in the ENLIVEN project.

What did we do in the ENLIVEN project?

Many outdoor natural spaces are managed by organisations and businesses who provide access and facilities, which may include a range of outdoor pursuits. We set out to work with organisations and businesses operating in the outdoor visitor economy to see how they could innovate to become more dementia-inclusive.

We planned the work with an advisory group of people with dementia and carers in a process of co-production. We set up a Knowledge Exchange Forum to connect organisation and business leaders, people with lived experience, and researchers, enabling providers to gain advice and get feedback on their ideas.

In the first stage, we gathered evidence from written accounts and websites,¹ and visited sites to carry out audits and interview managers and staff.² We talked to people living with dementia and family carers about what they valued about being in nature and what activities they wanted to do.

We then invited organisations and businesses to apply for small grants to fund innovative demonstration projects that would help make their business more dementia-inclusive.

We funded 11 providers at varying stages on the journey to becoming dementia-inclusive. We supported them as they worked with people with dementia and carers to co-produce and implement their planned innovations and progressed towards their identified goals.

We observed the activities, talked with the people with dementia and carers who visited and participated, and interviewed managers, staff, and volunteers. This helped us to understand how the process of innovation developed, what the challenges were, and how well the providers achieved their goals.

For organisations preferring a lighter-touch option, we made site visits and offered advice and recommendations.

What dementia-inclusive innovations did providers implement?

The projects encouraged people to connect with nature through varied activities or through co-designing ways of improving the visitor experience.

Providers encouraged connection with nature in various ways:



Nature photography at Beamish Museum ©S Owen

- **Through the arts.** Beamish developed Framing it Differently, a ten-week nature photography course led by artist Ian Beesley; participants' work is now permanently on display at the museum.
- **Through outdoor physical activity.** Dartmoor and New Forest National Parks offered cycling trips, and New Forest involved people in volunteering sessions.

On Dartmoor, 20 people with dementia and their supporters enjoyed a trishaw ride at Burrator Arboretum, accompanied by a Ranger who pointed out local wildlife and interesting features of the environment.



Nature reminiscence at Kew Gardens ©Kew Gardens

- **Through wildlife.** The British Bird of Prey Centre ran bespoke bird of prey flying experiences at its base and took the birds on outreach visits to community groups and care homes.
- **Through reminiscence.** Kew Gardens enabled local people to connect with their heritage by exploring plants from the Caribbean.

“It was lovely to be able to walk around and touch the plants and smell, you know, and that obviously brings everybody different memories, I mean, you know, from their childhood and things. So that was nice as well.”

- **Through nature-themed events.** Seaton Tramway linked with the Seaton Wetlands nature reserve to offer watercolour painting, birdwatching, photography, and well-being activity sessions, some led by people with dementia.

Frances, an artist who is living with dementia, travelled from South Wales to Devon to lead a watercolour painting session in the Seaton Wetlands visitor centre. Participants gained inspiration from the tram ride along the estuary and the short walk through the nature reserve to the centre.

- **Through gardens.** Bishop's Palace and Gardens, Wells ran a four-week nature connection course to promote appreciation of nature and build a lasting connection with the garden.
- **Through heritage.** The Tower of London welcomed people with dementia to the newly opened historic moat area planted with 20 million wildflower seeds and used storytelling to unlock the power of nature.

“Happier...relaxed...the sound and the smell...senses...are awakened because in the moat, in a large part is reasonably calm and quiet, and yet you can smell some of the flowers.”

Providers engaged in co-production to improve accessibility and enhance the visitor experience:

- Strawberry Hill House and Garden co-created a sensory trail through the gardens, co-developed and tested an action plan to make its 'Feel Good Garden' more dementia-inclusive, and produced an access guide and film.
- The National Coal Mining Museum co-developed a dementia-inclusive action plan, leading to the development of an accessible woodland area with saplings donated by the Woodland Trust.
- Site audits and bespoke advice enabled Exeter Cathedral, the Lost Gardens of Heligan, and Stuart Line Cruises to identify practical changes to enhance the visitor experience.

How did provider organisations and businesses overcome barriers to achieve their goals?

The providers all experienced challenges but managed to achieve the goals that were important to them, including:

- Learning how to connect with people living with dementia and building contacts with dementia groups in their area. For example, New Forest National Park developed close relationships with dementia groups across Hampshire.
- Making links with other organisations and businesses. For example, Dartmoor National Park established a partnership with a local business, Dartmoor Active Leisure.
- Exploring the appeal of new or different activities.
- Making their sites more accessible with benefits to a wider range of visitors.
- Increasing the confidence of staff and volunteers to support visitors affected by dementia.

Trishaw experience at Burrator Arboretum, Dartmoor. ©J Connell



How did people with dementia and carers benefit?

- The activities enabled people with dementia to have valued experiences ‘in the moment’, often shared with others.

“I haven’t got a garden where I live, and I know that being among plants and being outside is such a great thing for your mental wellbeing and I loved it today. It was just great, and it gave me some ideas for when I do move and have my own garden. Yes, that was very inspirational.”

- Carers could relax and enjoy being in nature.

“It was just relaxing for me, I got to enjoy the day as well as him, rather than me... caring for him all the time.”

- The co-production process meant that people were listened to and felt valued.
- Co-creating group experiences was a good way to increase confidence and counteract the negative effect a dementia diagnosis can have on confidence to engage in outdoor activities.

“There are a lot of different mobility issues and that’s absorbed by the group, it makes it easier....to give us confidence as well.”

- Comments about the activities were overwhelmingly positive but also offered constructive suggestions for further development. For example, people advised the New Forest National Park about the right level of physical challenge for volunteering activities.
- Where providers offered a series of one-off events, many people made repeat visits.



What recommendations arise from the ENLIVEN project?

For policy-makers

- Ensure that people living with dementia or cognitive impairment can get outside and into nature if they wish; this is as important for people living with dementia and their families as it is for anyone else and should be part of their lives.
- Invest in community resources that can support people with dementia to get outdoors and engage in nature-based outdoor pursuits – this will help to keep people healthy, support well-being of family carers, and reduce demand on health and care services.
- Invest in and support accessible transport options and availability of outdoor leisure facilities to enable people with dementia to get outdoors and lead as normal a life as possible, also benefitting their family carers.
- Support and encourage businesses and organisations to meet the needs of people living with dementia and their families – this will both promote leisure-led economic growth through leveraging the dementia pound and demonstrate socially-responsible business practice.
- A recognition scheme for dementia-inclusive providers of access to outdoor space and activities would be informative and provide reassurance for prospective visitors.

For more information see enlivenproject.co.uk

For organisations and businesses that provide access to outdoor space and activities

- Make sure your staff are trained to understand the needs of people with dementia.
- Consult people with dementia and their families and involve them in co-creating new developments; one way to do this is by connecting with local dementia groups.
- Look at improving the visitor experience across the entire journey, from the initial idea of visiting through travelling to the site and spending time there to returning home.
- Be imaginative about the kinds of activities that people might enjoy.
- Promote sustainability by getting staff involved; do not leave this to one individual.

For more information see our Guide to 'Making your visitor economy business dementia-inclusive' and set of Top Tips for businesses, available to download at enlivenproject.co.uk

For people with dementia and their families

- Keep going outdoors and enjoying nature as much as you can – don't give up
- Look for interesting places and enjoyable activities that are dementia-inclusive.
- If possible, get involved in a local dementia group and work with organisations and businesses to help them become more dementia-inclusive.

Have a look at our films about people living with dementia and their experience of nature – see enlivenproject.co.uk. You may also find the Living with Dementia Toolkit interesting – livingwithdementiatoolkit.org.uk

How can I find out more about ENLIVEN?

The 'Extending active life for older people with cognitive impairment and their families through innovation in the visitor economy of the natural environment' (ENLIVEN) project was led by the University of Exeter Business School, University of Exeter Medical School, and Hertfordshire University Business School, in collaboration with the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration South-West Peninsula, Innovations in Dementia CIC, the Sensory Trust, Bradford University, Brunel University London and Manchester Metropolitan University. ENLIVEN was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council through the UK Research and Innovation Healthy Ageing Challenge, and ran from 2021-2024.

For further information about ENLIVEN please see enlivenproject.co.uk. For other queries related to living with dementia please email DeNPRU@Exeter.ac.uk

References

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2. Page, S., Connell, J., Price, S., Owen, S., Ledingham, K., & Clare, L. (2023). Operationalizing transformative tourism: creating dementia-friendly outdoor and nature-based visitor experiences. *Journal of Travel Research*. [hdl.handle.net/10871/134556](https://doi.org/10.1080/1087134556)



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