



Mental Health Matters

Case Studies: Experiences and insights

Mental health matters delivers tailored activities for inpatients with dementia, bringing meaningful occupation, social connection and stimulation into the hospital environment. Staff and patients describe the service as something that brings joy, builds confidence and helps people move through a very difficult time with more support and hope.

During the year, we conducted semi-structured interviews with people associated with the project and thematically analysed the responses to summarise people's experiences and the impact of the service.

Bringing joy, connection and stimulation

- **Bringing joy and helping people feel connected:** Activities like music, arts and group sessions help people feel less bored and alone, and bring moments of genuine enjoyment into the ward.
- **Breaking the hospital routine:** Regular, varied activities break up long days on the ward and make hospital feel more than just treatments and observations.
- **Variety and stimulation for everyone:** A diverse range of activities, from opera and dance to crafts and games, means there is usually something that can engage each person.
- **Supporting emotional recovery as well as physical rehab:** The service recognises that rehabilitation is not only physical and that emotional and cognitive stimulation are essential parts of recovery.

"Seeing patients come out of their shells, be more engaged, smile, laugh and then say, 'oh the hospital's not too bad.'"

"The big activities are really successful, especially because you can see how much the patients enjoy themselves, to see them smile or even sometimes tears of bringing them memories."

Building confidence, identity and relationships

- **Building confidence and self-esteem:** Activities help people see themselves as able and capable again, whether that is being creative, solving puzzles or joining in games.
- **Supporting a sense of identity:** Taking part in meaningful activities in hospital gives people a chance to be more than a patient and reconnect with interests, skills and roles they value.
- **Trust and familiarity with the team:** Consistent presence on the ward means people start to recognise the team and feel they can trust them and relax when they visit.
- **Meaningful relationships and informal peer support:** Friendships develop between patients and staff, and patients encourage each other to join in, creating a gentle peer support network.

"There is that moment where things click where they know, 'OK, we can trust those people, they're in the red T-shirts, they're our friends.'"

"All those activities give the opportunity to see themselves as able to do things, especially to enjoy and socialise as well."

Positive change in patient experience and outcomes

- **Emotional transformation during admission:** People often arrive anxious, withdrawn or overwhelmed, and are later seen laughing, joining in and saying they will miss the activities when they leave.
- **High engagement and participation:** Well attended events and busy group sessions show that many patients want and value the chance to join in.
- **Reaching the most isolated or vulnerable:** Staff are most proud when someone who has been very withdrawn or “forgotten” starts to attend, relax and become involved.
- **Supporting discharge and reducing readmission:** By giving people more “security” through social prescribing and practical support, the service is seen as helping discharge and reducing the likelihood of coming back into hospital.

“Some people who maybe were so anxious or stressed in their room, looking like they’re not fitting anywhere, then they come into these activities and they ease down and just get involved.”

“For me the most successful is when we managed to reach those who are usually kind of forgotten, but then they come into these activities and they ease down and just get involved.”

Activities and team working that make the difference

- **Music, dance and creative engagement:** Concerts, singing, dance and arts activities are often described as highlights that bring the ward to life and create shared moments of joy.
- **Gardening and using outdoor space:** Gardening groups and outdoor activities are particularly valued, giving people a sense of purpose and connection with the outside world.
- **Flexible and adaptive approach:** The team adapts to different environments, ward routines and patient needs, adjusting sessions so that people can still benefit despite pressures.
- **Strong relationships and communication with ward staff:** Close working with nurses, OTs and ward leaders means activities fit around care routines and are seen as a core part of the ward offer rather than an add-on.

“All the patients and the relatives say the good thing is we have regular concerts with the Welsh National Opera, and that’s been really lovely.”

“We have developed excellent working relationships with clinical staff, now we’re a welcome part of the team and they’re always happy to help out and are grateful for our support.”