

Good practice in Bidford

We visited the Dementia Café at West Holme Court in Bidford on Avon on the 10th July 2017. The purpose of our visit was to see what's going on there and to see if there was good practice that could be shared

The Café is supported by the GP Practice in Bidford and aims to provide a safe space and social environment to help and support people with memory problems / dementia and their families, carers, and volunteers.

Importantly the Café makes a point of continuing to be in the lives of people who had previously been supporting loved ones with dementia but are now bereaved. This is a very welcome attempt to stave off the cliff edge which is so often at the end of the caring experience.

The Café is run by volunteers on a weekly basis every Monday (except Bank Holidays) between 10.30 am and 12.30 pm on a “drop in” basis and is open to residents in Bidford and the surrounding areas. On the day we went there were roughly 30 people there, although on some days there are significantly more.

We witnessed a varied programme of activities which took place in a very supportive and friendly atmosphere, although there was a slight competitive element in a sort of mini Olympics which involved doing a circuit with several “events” with prizes for the eventual winners. The competition was fierce!

There was absolutely no pressure to take part in the Olympics and we saw several people just sat around comfortably socialising. From the beginning of our visit there was a pleasant buzz and good energy about the Café.

The Café is still fairly reliant upon Wendy and David Lancaster who provide the direction and support that it needs, although they do get increasing amounts of help from other volunteers both on the day and at other times. Wendy and David are also active in the Patient Participation Group at Bidford Practice and are a good link between the Café and the Practice.

The most difficult challenge appears to be in the initial phases seeking to establish the Café. This requires a lot of input, usually from a few key individuals who have the drive energy and vision to keep on going. Supporting those individuals seems to give the greatest chance of success. Longer term it also seems to be important that the volunteer base is widened and relationships with other local community and faith groups are developed.

The Café is funded largely by donations from those who attend, and it has built good relationships with the local community. This helps to enable the Café to remain self-sustaining and financially viable. The Cafe performs an invaluable function for people living with dementia and their carers at staggeringly low cost. It is an example that many other practices might do well to look at.