



Experiences of day opportunity services in Birmingham

July 2022



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Executive Summary

Introduction

Day opportunity services are planned activities that support working age adults with social skills, health, nutrition and daily living. They enable people who have care needs and/or are at risk of social isolation to engage in social and organised activities, as well as providing regular breaks to carers.

This report examines the provision of day opportunity services in Birmingham and their effect on those who use them and their carers/family members. It details what users of day opportunity services and their carers/families told us they value most about the services they access, how well they meet their needs and how they can be improved.

Methodology

We designed a survey to share with people who use day opportunity services. The survey was shared through Birmingham City Council (BCC) and sent to people who use the service via various community groups on social media.

We contacted all providers of day opportunity services in Birmingham to help us access service users. We received a response from eight of the 54 providers. Healthwatch Birmingham staff visited these services and spoke directly to service users and carers. Eighty-six people completed our questionnaire online, in-person or sent us an email. We also ran a social media poll to ascertain how individuals rated day opportunity services in Birmingham, to which 61 people responded.

Overall, 147 people shared their experiences of day opportunity services in Birmingham with us between February and April 2022.

Key findings

Our research indicates that service users and their carers/families value the role of day opportunity services in their life. We found that:

- The main reasons people use day opportunity services are due to personal loss, isolation, poor health and wellbeing, to maintain health and wellbeing and to support carers.
- Day opportunity services have an impact on social and preventive outcomes by supporting continued independence of service users, supporting their health and daily living needs, and enabling family carers to have a break and/or continue with employment.
- Attending and participating in activities at day centres has a positive impact on people's mental health, social contacts, physical function and quality of life.
- The challenges faced by carers/families and service users during the pandemic, when day opportunity services were closed, further highlights the important role that day opportunity services play in supporting emotional and physical health. The pandemic has left many carers/families exhausted and emotionally drained.
- It is important that people have the choice to access services they want, including day opportunity services.
- Use of personal budgets and direct payments might be useful for enabling people to access varied services but are not appropriate for everyone.
- There is a perception amongst the people we spoke to that personal budgets and direct payments are being used to mask cuts to day service provision.
- There are inadequate services in the community that day opportunity service users can choose from, meaning limited 'choice and flexibility'.
- There is inadequate information made available on the services which are accessible to day opportunity service users in the community.
- Day centres need to be better regulated for the quality of care they provide.

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| 68% are very satisfied with the day service they use | |
| 76% use day opportunity services to reduce isolation | 65% use day opportunity services to improve their health and wellbeing |
| 78% said the day opportunity services they use meet their needs and expectations | 81% said personal budgets and direct payments might help them to access services in the community |
| 67% said there are no other services in the community they felt would meet their needs | 55% said it is very difficult to find activities and other services in the community |

Service users and carers/families would like to see the following improvements to day opportunity services:

- Provide varied activities.
- Improve availability and ensure continuity of services.
- Increase access to day opportunity services (number of sessions people can attend).
- Improve involvement of patients and carers/families.
- Improve the skills of staff.
- Improve access to social workers at day opportunity services.
- Tailor day service provision to individual needs and aspirations.
- Improve communication (between centre and service users, and between BCC and service users).
- Introduce day opportunity services for young people.
- Improve quality monitoring of services.
- Reintroduce services previously provided at day centres (e.g. meals).

Next steps

We have shared this report and its findings with BCC. The council's written statement outlining the actions they will take to address the findings of the report can be found on the next page. The report, including the council's response, will be shared on our website, and sent to service users who shared their contact details. It will also be shared with relevant stakeholders.

Six months following the publication of the report Healthwatch Birmingham will publish a follow-up report showcasing evidence of actions that have been committed to by Birmingham City Council. We will require the council to provide evidence to demonstrate that those changes have been made and an indication of targets met and how these have been achieved.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all users of day opportunity services and their carers/families who completed the online questionnaire, emailed us their views and insights¹, and those who spoke to us when we visited day opportunity services² in Birmingham. We would like to thank the staff at these day opportunity services who enabled us to engage with the users of their service including the provision of translation/interpreting services where needed. We thank Birmingham City Council for their support throughout the various stages of this research.

¹ People told us about their experiences at the following services: Age Concern, ARK Centre (The), Care First Management, Ebrook Day Centre, Fairway Day Centre, Focus Birmingham, Harborne Day Centre, Headway Birmingham and Solihull, Mackadown Day Services, Moseley Day Centre, Robin Centre (The), Trinity Specialist College, Trusted Local Care Saxon Court, YMCA/Stepping Up

² In addition to the above services, HWB staff visited the following day services: Mackadown Day Care Services, Sutton Support Services, Trusted Local Care Ltd, Balance Day Centre at The Kenrick Centre, Chinese Community Centre, Apna Ghar Day Opportunity Services, The Cotteridge Church Day Opportunity Services and Better Pathways Day Opportunity Services

Birmingham City Council response

Birmingham City Council thanks Healthwatch for undertaking the study and engaging with users of day opportunity services, their carers and providers. The findings reinforce the importance of engaging with service users and involving them in improving the quality and choice of services across Birmingham. The report demonstrates the valuable role of day opportunity services for our citizens in reducing social isolation, improving physical, emotional and mental wellbeing as well as providing opportunities for building friendships. In our Day opportunities update report to BCC Cabinet in December 2021 we acknowledged the approach taken during Covid 19 to keep citizens and carers safe and recognise that there is more work to do to improve the quality, breadth and choice of day opportunities provision for those that need it now and that will require services in the future. It is for this reason, that we sought Cabinet's approval to commission an independent co-produced review of day opportunity services in light of the pandemic. This work will take place during 2022. Your findings and recommendations will be reviewed alongside the independent co-produced review of day opportunity services, and we will ask Healthwatch to engage with us as we embark on this journey. In the meantime, already established work programmes will continue including quality assurance visits to day centres, planning for day time support for younger adults who are eligible for support from the Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood Service, and a refresh of how information about day centres can be found on Connect to Support, the Council's online social care information and advice guide, community directory and marketplace for citizens of Birmingham.



Introduction

Understanding the experiences of those using day opportunity services was an issue selected for further exploration under our Topic Identification Process¹ in August 2021. The feedback that we have received concerning day opportunity services over the past years has been both positive and negative. On the one hand, users of day opportunity services and their carers have told us about these services' positive impact on their health and wellbeing. However, they have told us of difficulties getting assessments and access to services, hardships faced during the lockdown when services were not open, and lack of substitute services during the pandemic.

Background

Day opportunity services are planned activities that support working age adults with social skills, health, nutrition and daily living. They enable people who have care needs and/or are at risk of social isolation, to engage in social and organised activities, as well as providing regular breaks to carers. Activities may include social, leisure, entertainment, skills-based, educational and employment opportunities whilst others offer services such as hairdressing, assisted bathing, cutting nails and chiropody as well as advice and support with health issues.

The settings², activities and groups using day opportunity services vary. They may be owned by different types of providers, operate in different types of buildings, and may differ in size, target clientele and funding (Scie, 2021; Orellana, 2020). Individuals that access day opportunity services have different support needs and may require specialised care. They may be older people, people living with dementia and adults with a learning disability and/or autism, brain injury, mental health problems and long-term health conditions.

Day opportunity services have been guided by principles and objectives set out in various policies and guidance documents. Key themes across these have been the promotion of good health and wellbeing, prevention of decline, and voluntary or community support to both older people and carers, enabling people to choose to remain at home while growing older, to 'age in place' (Department of Health, 1998, 2006; HM Government, 2010, 2012 in Orellana et al 2020)³. As far back as the National Assistance Act 1948, day opportunity services have been an important part of social care. The National Assistance Act gave local authorities responsibility to fund voluntary organisations that provided recreational facilities, such as day opportunity services for adults with disabilities. An amendment of the Act in 1962 extended this to include older people. From 2014, local authorities were required, through The Care Act 2014, to arrange services that promote wellbeing and help prevent or delay deterioration and to support a market that delivers a wide range of care and support services. Enhancing the quality of life of people with care and support needs, delaying and reducing the need for care and support, ensuring that people have a positive experience of care and support, and safeguarding vulnerable adults, are key themes of the Outcomes Framework for Adult Social Care 2014/2015 and 2018/2019 (Department of Health, 2013; 2018).

Alongside these policies has been the personalisation agenda and individualised finances such as direct payments and managed personal budgets. However, these policies are set

¹ Healthwatch Birmingham's Topic Identification Process (TIPs), is a process where we explore the feedback that we have received over the year, theme the feedback and identify the key issues that can be further explored through a deeper dive.

² The setting for day opportunity services may be purpose-built day centres, day centres attached to or part of a care home, community buildings (with shared use), sports and leisure activity venues, cafes, restaurants, and pubs (for example, lunch clubs), outdoor private and public spaces.

³ Orellana, K., Manthorpe, J., & Tinker, A. Day centres for older people: A systematically conducted scoping review of literature about their benefits, purposes and how they are perceived. *Ageing and Society*. 2020; 40(1):73-104

against a backdrop of reduced funding and consequently, a lower proportion of older people with higher needs receiving publicly funded care. Consequently, this is impacting on the provision of day opportunity services and to an undersupply of collective and public goods¹ (Orellana et al, 2020).

In Birmingham, there are over 1600 people, with varying support needs, using day opportunity services. The majority of these are working age adults with a learning disability or autism, followed by older adults age 65+ with an increase in those with dementia. There are also services that support adults with Cerebral Palsy, Acquired Brain Injury and other physical disabilities.

Day opportunity services in Birmingham are mainly building based. BCC supports younger adults (18-65 years) across nine sites, including four gardening projects. Approximately 700 adult users with physical and learning disabilities are supported. There are 45 third sector and private organisations providing day opportunity services in Birmingham or near to Birmingham. They support approximately 900 adults. Day opportunities are either directly commissioned by BCC or citizens manage their own care via a direct payment. Some citizens fund their own care.

Some third sector providers offer day opportunities to a further 16,000 individuals without an assessed care need via the Neighbourhood Network Schemes.

Information about participants

Forty-six percent of people who shared their experiences indicated that they are users of day opportunity services, whilst 42% indicated that they are a parent or carer of a service user. Twelve percent indicated that they are either a family member (daughter, parent); a patient in another part of the healthcare system looking for access to day opportunity services; or people with a disability who have been told that they cannot access as they do not meet the criteria. Seventy-five percent are currently attending day opportunity services and 25% are not. These consisted of individuals who had stopped using services due to the pandemic and those waiting to be reassessed or an initial assessment.

A majority (37%) attended day opportunity services 1-2 times a week; 27% 3-4 times a week; 24% 5 days a week and 12% once a week. Some people told us the number of times they access a service has reduced since the centres re-opened following the Covid-19 lockdown. For some, this has reduced to once a week with no clarity on when they will increase their attendance. Most people new to the service told us they are only offered one day at a day service following an assessment.

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| 59% are women | 38% are men |
| 77% indicated they have a disability | 23% do not have a disability |
| 84% have used day services for over 2 years | 4% started using day services in the past 2 years |
| 2% started using day services in the past year | 10% started using day services in the past 6 months |

¹ Public (collective) goods are nonexcludable—shared by everybody, whether they helped pay for the good or not—and nonrival—in that one person’s “enjoyment” of the good does not affect another’s. Collective (Public) Goods - Oliver - - Major Reference Works - Wiley Online Library

We also asked people to tell us more about their circumstances.

Q: Please tick if any of the following are true for you or the person you are sharing feedback about

| Answer Choices | Responses |
|---|-----------|
| Long-term health condition | 68% |
| Carer | 35% |
| Limited family or social networks | 29% |
| Digitally excluded (e.g. not confident using a computer or smartphone to access services) | 23% |
| Digitally excluded (e.g. no access to a computer, broadband or smartphone) | 13% |
| Experience with mental health | 13% |
| Living in poverty | 3% |
| Long-term unemployed | 3% |

See Appendix 2 for more detailed demographic information.

I would like to share our experience with you about the user of day centers for our mother who suffered a stroke in 2018 aged 74. The day centers have been a tremendous aid to her recovery. They allowed her to spend time away from the house independently. It helped her mobility and boosted her confidence and sociability. She has made many friends with the other attendees, employees and volunteers. The day centers have many activities, and many do stimulate the mind. The day centers have been instrumental to her progress. She started off by attending one day center 2 days per week, approximately 2 months after coming home from hospital (this was about 8 months after her stroke). The days were gradually increased, and she was attending three different day centers 5 days a week (on separate days) before COVID. This was great as she was getting a good variety with facilities, people and activities. During COVID we initially stopped all homecare and day centers (my sister stayed home and took care of our Mom). One day center closed permanently. One of the other day centers started a program where an employee came to visit Mom at home once every couple of weeks. Once the COVID restrictions were eased and the day centers opened up again Mom started attending 2 different centers 5 days per week - 1 center for 2 days and the other for 3 days. Each day center is different. Mom really loves it. She gets a hot 3 course lunch at each one, which is her main meal of the day. She has a lighter meal at home in the evening. My sister drops our Mom off in the morning before work and picks her up in the afternoon drops her home and goes back to work. The house, her work and the two day centers are all within about a 4 mile radius, so it works out well and she knows Mom is well looked after. We seriously believe her quality of life is made better by attending the day centers for many reasons. Also worth a mention. We weren't advised or informed about day centers. We had to figure it out and fight to get help with the funding. We even reached out to our local council representative for help. We are grateful that Mom is able to attend the day centers.

Findings

Our research indicates that users of day opportunity services and their carers/families value the role of day opportunity services in their life. People told us that:

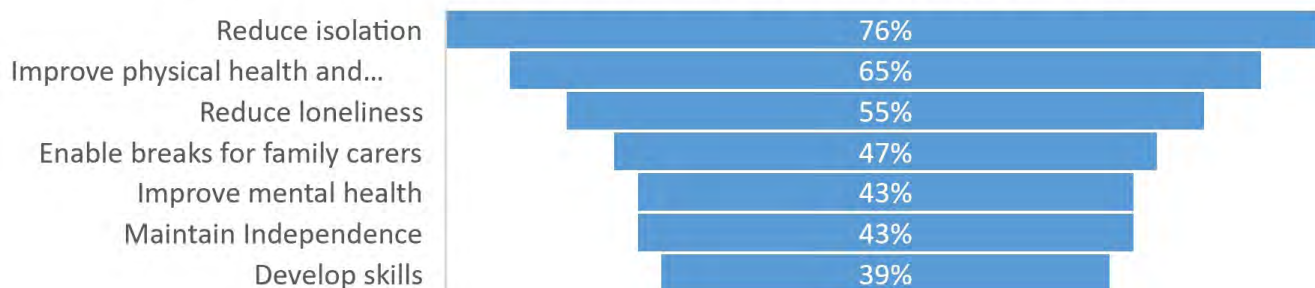
- The main reasons they use day opportunity services are due to personal loss, isolation, poor health and wellbeing, to maintain health and wellbeing and to support carers.
- Day opportunity services have an impact on social and preventive outcomes by supporting continued independence of service users, supporting their health and daily living needs, and enabling family carers to have a break and/or continue with employment.
- Attendance and participating in activities at day centres has a positive impact on people's mental health, social contacts, physical function and quality of life.
- The challenges faced by carers/families and service users during the pandemic, when day opportunity services were closed, further highlights the important role day opportunity services play in supporting emotional and physical health. The pandemic has left many carers/families exhausted and emotionally drained.
- It is important that people have the choice to access services they want, including day opportunity services.
- Use of personal budgets and direct payments might be useful for enabling people to access varied services but are not appropriate for everyone.
- There is a perception that personal budgets and direct payments are being used to mask cuts to day service provision.
- There are inadequate services in the community that day opportunity service users can choose from, meaning limited 'choice and flexibility'.
- There is inadequate information made available on the services which are accessible to day opportunity service users in the community.
- Day centres need to be better regulated for the quality of care they provide.



Reasons for using day opportunity services

People told us that they attend day opportunity services to reduce isolation, improve physical health and wellbeing, reduce loneliness, enable breaks for family carers, maintain independence, improve mental health and develop skills. Figure 1 shows the reasons people attended day opportunity services in order of importance.

Figure 1: Why did you start using day opportunity services or day centres in Birmingham?



The reasons people begin to use day opportunity services are varied and ranged from personal loss and needing a sense of purpose, to deteriorating health. People told us they started using day opportunity services after:

Experiencing poor mental and physical health

I was in a mental health hospital and wanted something to do, I saw something on a poster, visited the place and liked it. There are lots of activities that I do here like greasing tubes which is helping me to learn some skills.

I have depression and anxiety. The social worker sent me here

I was depressed from bad health so the social worker brought me to a day centre. I used to go to X service [name redacted], it closed down then I went to X service [name redacted], that closed down too and then from there I came to X service [name redacted].

I have been coming to the centre for 8 years. I was really ill and going through a depression so my daughter sent me here. Now I have people to talk to and all of them are very nice.

To be honest, I was losing it a bit. I couldn't remember things. Since coming here its made me sharper. There are so many activities that keep my mind active - singing, games that keep you sharp, Art, keep fit, history quizzes.

Losing a loved one

My dad died and [my mom] was lonely, her mobility is also not good. She started off going to a place where she met other people, made cards and various other activities. But her sight is not that good anymore.

My mother moved from Essex when her husband died, so to keep her occupied and help her make new friends, she started attending the day service. Coming to the centre has helped her be independent - there are a lot of things she does at the centre that I haven't done for her. She comes on the bus by herself and is now more mobile. Before, she was just at home.

Loneliness and needing to socialise

I have been coming here for 15 years. My group is very nice. There are 5-6 ladies. This day centre makes me happy - the people who work here are very nice, look after me very nicely. When am here I do knitting, we work together to make things. So if we are making a sweater, one person will sew the arm, another the back until we finish. Very good ladies.

[I started coming to] socialise with friends. I am happy coming here. We do many activities, Easter activities, we did mothers day activity last week, gardening (plants and flowers).. I want a healthy diet and the centre supports me with that.

Needing something to do and a sense of purpose

I don't like to sit at home, I like to come back, I like to come here. I don't like to be excluded. If I don't come here I would feel excluded from life. I like to see my friends that I have met here. I don't like it when its loud, it affects my fits/seizures. It will be more difficult for me to go into the community to use services there. I would need someone to come with me and support me.

My son has been coming to this centre for ten years. My son would not be able to work because of his condition and developmental growth. He came to the centre straight from school. He knew a lot of people here because the manager for this place runs a social club on Mondays. I was concerned about his transition from school. He wants to come here all the time. This place is his life and gives him a sense of purpose in life.

When covid hit in March 2020 my son was in the last year of a college course. He was a part time residential student (came home weekends and holidays). We requested a fourth year at college (several times) because X [name redacted] had missed a lot of time due to an accident he had and seizures and he had not met all his EHCP outcomes but college would not agree to an additional year and told us there was not any other course appropriate for him. This was not true but we didn't find out until November 2020 that there was a course he could have started. We decided that the next best option would be for him to attend a day centre and after looking at some I realised The X day centre [name redacted] would be ideal for him. I work from home so this means X [name redacted] is doing things he enjoys while I am busy.



Benefits of using day opportunity services

Day opportunity services in Birmingham offer varied activities and cater for a range of people with different needs and dependencies. Activities can range from art therapy, cooking, card making, entertainment, physical exercises, BEAT (percussion for the brain) and quizzes to skills development and support to access other activities in the community.

Some of the day opportunity services Healthwatch Birmingham visited monitor medication, weight, colostomy bags and provide personal care needs. In others supporting people with dementia, service users are offered opportunities to interact with the younger generation, whilst others have developed dementia focused programs.

The benefits of using day opportunity services include:

Social contact

It keeps me occupied very much and its good to see and interact with people. the staff are good.

Day centre has a great benefit. During the lockdown I was very depressed being at home. My husband is sick (peg feeds and has cancer) sitting at home all the time looking at him was very depressing. It does make a difference to come to a day centre. When I have been to a day centre, even my children ask me because am different. Talking to friends makes a big difference.

I wanted to get out of my house to meet with people. I have been able to do this by coming here.

I talk to friends - there are lots of different people and groups here.

The day centre gives me a chance to go out, meet people and see people.

Gives him opportunities to make friends and do activities he might not otherwise be able to do. Keeps him occupied

Giving carers/families a break and enabling them to do other things (e.g. work, medical appointments)

The benefits for me are socialising, less isolating, gives my son a break from looking after my needs. I get fresh air and I love to talk to small groups of people & meeting new people. I often feel better in myself when I've been there. Sometimes there's also day trips when the weather's nice.

People spend a full day at the centre. Main benefit is that having this day service gives carers a longer time to let go of being a carer - have a break. Activities in the community are short term so does not give enough time to carers.

I think if I didn't come here I would sit at home all day. Maybe I would read a book. But before I started coming here I had lost the ability to read now I have regained some of that. Coming here also gives my wife a break. That's really important for both of us.

It has been great for my father who has dementia, socialising more. And it's giving my mother a break as his carer.

Enables me to work and my daughter to socialise.

Allows parents to work, have a break whilst the service user can meet others and hopefully access activities.

They are friendly, make you feel comfortable. I know mom is happy here. They do need day opportunity services, It gives the family a break. I fit in my Drs appointments at times that she is here. I would be lost without it really.

Prevention of decline

Interacting and meeting different people. Allows her to be active, otherwise she just sleeps at home. We have to try waking her up all the time if she is at home but here she is engaged and active.

Gives him something to look forward to in life. It gets his mind working. Its nice to see him happy - he has never been a sad man and having nothing to do was bringing down.

Supporting independence

I think for me the benefits have been maintaining her independence, keeping herself busy, happiness, being able to interact with people within her own peers, involvement in the community and she gets to see Birmingham (they have trips out to places like Sandwell Valley and so on).

The day centers enable her to spend time away from the house independently. It helps her mobile but getting her moving. The day center does exercising. She is able to gain more confidence and sociability. She has made many friends. The day centers have activities, crafts, arts and entertainment. They also provide a hot 3 course meal.

The day centers have been a tremendous aid to her recovery. They allowed her to spend time away from the house independently. It helped her mobility and boosted her confidence and sociability. She has made many friends with the other attendees, employees and volunteers. The day centers have many activities and many do stimulate the mind. The day centers have been instrumental to her progress.

It gives me something to do. I don't like living inside my house all the time. It gives me more independence.

Empowerment/Learn new skills

It gives me confidence, socializing, experience jobwise coz am learning a lot of skills - getting a job is difficult so this gives me experience and something to do.

I like the activities, staff are really helpful. When I first started coming to the centre they did a lot for me - I liked that I cook in the kitchen. I am very satisfied with what they offer. It meets my needs. When I first started I could walk without a walker. My health has deteriorated so have a walker which limits my working in the kitchen. But they support me with this.

My son has made friends, he is able to participate in group activities and work on skill development.

I used to live at home with my mom and I moved to supported living where I have made friends and there are people who look after me. But I also love coming to the centre. I have been coming for over 3 years. I am usually bored and this helps me reduce boredom, meet people and I help with doing timesheets and we also learn how to make hanging baskets. I like the centre, I have made friends, it helps me be calmer. I am more calmer now and the people here understand me. I learn things here, I do office work, I shred paperwork.

Improving and maintaining health

If I stay at home am only in front of the tv. Here is very nice, with the other ladies, makes my health good.

My old day centre wasn't adult enough, the staff here know how to deal with me and support me. I haven't had a meltdown.

We definitely improved our well being mentally and physically.

Helped with his mental health especially during lockdown.

Introducing structure to lives

Routine of going to a base each day like employed people go out to work, rhythm to the week, familiar staff, peers and a mixture of individual and group activities.

I am making memories here otherwise I would be sitting at home. The day centre is something to look forward to. The people that run this place are great.

I actually get ready for day centre on Tuesday for Wednesday, plan my clothes, cardigan and its like am coming to school - very nice. They provide Asian food -its very nice. People need to understand - am happy here.

It's still like school hours, mixing with other clients that are similar to him. Its like an extension of school because he learns about money skills and other things.

Supporting healthy and daily living needs

Company of friends, meals also provided, extra support for all issues, quick response times.

I have rheumatoid arthritis lupus degenerative bone disease depression & lymphoedema. The service accommodates my needs greatly, since lockdown the groups are split in half meaning instead of weekly visits it's fortnightly as they can only fit up to five per room.

Initially, after leaving special school, it was clear that our daughter could not work and needed somewhere to go to be looked after and meet friends and experience activities. As the years went by, the Day Centre became the main portion of her life outside the family.

Providing a sense of belonging

To meet people who has the disability's and they help her to mix with other people and interact with doing painting, cooking, foot spa etc.

When I come to this centre someone can speak Mandarin, it makes me happy. I am able to keep company and make friends.

This is their space, its a place for them. There is no place for people with disabilities in the community. Even though we think things have improved but they have not improved much for people with disabilities. During the pandemic, i had to go to work and the centres were closed. There was no real understanding by some employers that you have a 40 year old child you have to care for.

There are not many safe environments for people with special needs/disabilities available after the school/college setting so this is an excellent service that is available and should continue to be funded and supported by the council to provide opportunities for people who need them.

Outcomes from using day opportunity services

Carers/families and service users highlighted the benefits of using day opportunity services and the outcomes they experienced.

- Feelings of happiness and confidence from attending day opportunity services.
- Feeling stimulated from the activities they participated in and improved feelings of satisfaction, purpose and self-esteem.
- Improved health and wellbeing through activities such as exercises, skills development – service users reported that being part of a group and working together on activities and projects was positive for their health and wellbeing.
- Reduced depression and anxiety, and improved general mental health.
- Connections – people referred to other service users as friends and family and for some these new connections substituted for limited family and/or social networks.
- Quality of life – some carers/families say that the use of day opportunity services has improved the quality of life and slowed down a decline in health. For instance, interventions for adults with dementia have improved alertness and weight related interventions are helping service users learn healthy eating habits.
- Feeling a sense of purpose by supporting activities at the centre – working in the kitchen, shredding papers and working on timesheets meant they had something different to talk about when they got home.
- Day opportunity services helped them remain independent for longer – having to travel to the centre helped them to be active and improved independence for those using public transport to get to the centre. Carers/families reported an increase in the things that people could do independently without their support. Independence also referred to the day service user's ability to remain in their own home for longer.
- Building long-lasting relationships that continue outside of the service environment thereby helping users to increase their social networks.
- Improved quality of life for carers/families of service users which helped some users feel less of a burden.
- Relationships with staff of day opportunity services – the quality of service they provide and their behaviour contribute to feelings of satisfaction.

When he is at home, he is not like this – the way you see him, smiling actually talking. He knows what day to come to the day centre that's how much he looks forward to him. Otherwise most days he just sits there but he is so happy when he has been here. He is talking, a completely different person. He comes out of the ring and ride with a big smile and says he has had a great day. If the day centre was not there, he would be more depressed. It would be a cruel world. I don't want people to think he comes here because I want to get rid of him – no- this is for him.

All the time am staying at home. I am living alone because my husband is working. I have improved alot since I started coming. People need to come out of their house to feel better.

I feel a lot better coming here rather than being on my own.

Makes me happy, play games, do exercises, playing with others. I cannot stay without this.

Improved development for our young person. More comfort and adjustment to being outdoors and around crowds.

Responsiveness, learning, friendships, activities, social interaction, entertainment, fulfilment.

Improved confidence, mobility, sociability. Mental alertness. Nutrition.

If I ask for anything they do it for me. It helped with my depression.

I love coming here. I love the people here. Its wonderful for old people like me to meet other people. They have become like my family. I am 80 plus and my child lives away so don't see her often.

Calms me down, I am doing alot of things here. I have learned skills (florist and woodwork). I actually did all the flowers for a friends moms funeral and people thought they were store.

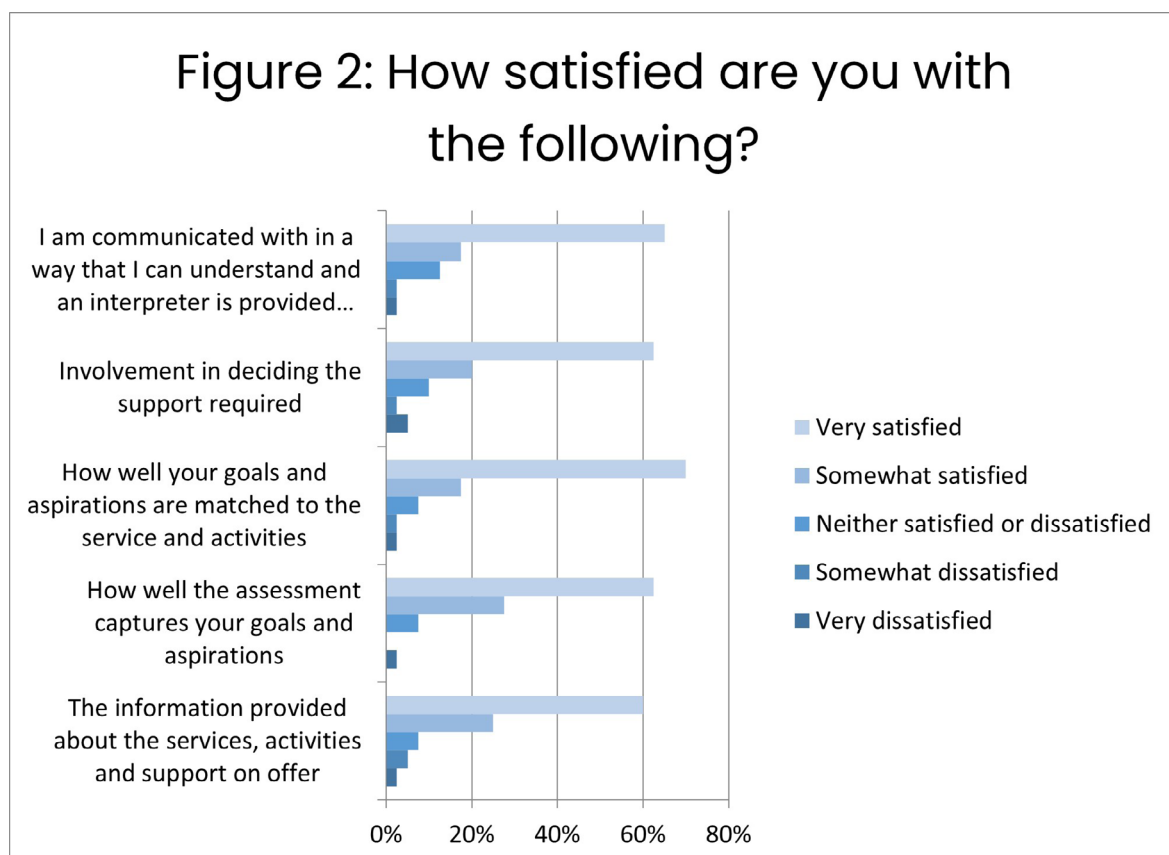
Consistency for young person, routine like in education, a base, familiar staff, and peers.

He is happy with the routine and the social and the social aspect of the centre. It was his birthday.

Process of care and outcomes

The process of care can play an important part in people's lives. People's overall satisfaction with day opportunity services, being involved, being offered choice and how well the service meets their needs, lead to positive outcomes. When we asked carers/families and day opportunity service users to rate their level of satisfaction with services they used, a majority indicated that they are very satisfied (68%). Twenty-one percent said they are satisfied, 4% are neither satisfied or dissatisfied, 4% are dissatisfied, and 2% are very dissatisfied.

Participants were asked how satisfied they are in five key areas that can lead to positive outcomes such as improved self-esteem, feeling involved and valued, and increase in confidence and independence. Over three-fifths of the participants expressed satisfaction across all five areas (see Figure 2 below).



People who are satisfied spoke about varied activities on offer but more relevant to the process of care and outcomes is the staff. People spoke about staff being understanding, caring, trained, genuine, supportive, and friendly. Those that are dissatisfied expressed concerns about a reduction in access, some day opportunity services needing improvements, inadequate support from social services and worry about potential service closures.

The day centers have been a tremendous aid to her recovery. They allowed her to spend time away from the house independently. It helped her mobility and boosted her confidence and sociability. She has made many friends with the other attendees, employees and volunteers. The day centers have many activities and many do stimulate the mind. The day centers have been instrumental to her progress.

I love the provision and the activities but am disappointed that the hours have been reduced to 5 from 6. My son was doing 1 1/2 days pre Covid now he does 1 day. Now we are told that weeks are being reduced from 49 to 41 per year - this will have a detrimental impact.

Services have been cut in terms of hours and number of participants, so we will not be satisfied until the service is back to pre-pandemic levels. However we are grateful for the reinstatement of a partial service.

They need to do more things like have a physio like they did when my son first started have a singer come in say once a week have a yoga session or something like that do more things than a jigsaw or a kids film on for 28 year old plus people.

Birmingham city council have been trying to close the centre.

Support from social care poor - very last minute, lots of uncertainty. Stressful for young adult who has autism and for parent/carer who holds down a job.

We also asked participants whether day opportunity services meet their expectations. Seventy-eight percent of people said they do, 6% said they do not and 16% said day opportunity services partly met their expectations. When asked what they would change about day service provision to ensure that it met their goals and aspirations, 64% said there is nothing they would change, 28% said there are things they would like to change and 8% indicated that they did not know what could be changed. The changes people would like to see relate to provision of varied activities, tailoring provision to individual requirements, communicating in a way service users understand, availability of day opportunity services and improving the skills of staff.



Experiences of using other community services

For most people we spoke to, day opportunity services are the only service they used. Sixty-seven percent said there are no services in the community that they felt could meet their needs and are able to access. Twelve percent said there are some services in the community they would like to access, whilst 21% said they did not know. Reasons for exclusively using day opportunity services range from mobility issues, being satisfied with the service provision, accessibility of the service and suitability of day opportunity service provision in comparison to services in the community. Others told us it was the lack of availability of services in the community that would accommodate their needs, including cultural and religious needs.

I don't attend other activities. This is my life now. I can't drive and my daughter lives far away so this is the only place I can come to. This is a social thing - I used to say that I could never go to an older people's club, look at me now. I can't praise them enough.

I am not very comfortable using my local gym, it's always busy & I have anxiety & the GP says it's good if I go. If the gym had times set aside for disability users it would be so much better for everyone. I don't know why it's never been done before, to go after peak times it's very expensive & unfair to a service user.

Sadly there are limited swimming sessions available for people with disabilities. Also, the times can sometimes be at awkward time slots like when working carers are unable to take the person they care for.

I only come here, nowhere else. There was a Korean Centre that provided services like this one. I used to go there. that's closed. I would find it difficult to find another centre like this.

He does no other activities. There is nothing by where we live. This place is only twenty minutes from my house but it is still two buses so it would be hard to go elsewhere. Normally am at work. Its only my daughter who makes sure he is ready for ring and ride.

Many of the centres are too far but this one is close to home. So very useful, better for my daughter to drop me.

He used to go to a social club on Mondays, goes dancing in the community which has got him out of his shell. There should be more like this. The disco is for people with a disability.

Although he goes dancing thats a social thing. This is different to something like a day centre. A day centre gives you purpose, a reason to wake up each morning like our jobs.

The people who told us they used other services in the community spoke about going to the cinema, swimming, gym, clubs (specific to needs – learning disability), disco, bingo, respite centre, riding and Snowsport for people with a disability. They pointed out that these activities should be seen as complementing day opportunity service access.

We also asked if direct payments and the use of personal budgets might help them to access services in the community. Twenty percent said yes, 25% said no and 55% said they did not know. Some noted that people should have a choice dependent on their needs.

It would if I wanted it but no. He has a managed direct payment, and he used his DP on various things but we choose to also pay the centre from his DP.

There should be a choice - attending a base, going out with a PA or a combination of both. No person' support needs are the same and should be personalized.

It is important to have a choice and not be forced into one option with services being forced to close and choice resulting in being limited.

The day centre currently offers a safe secure environment with trained staff, a service we are happy with and will continue to use. Everyone is an individual and they have to make a choice for their needs. Individual that might need more support and guidance than someone with our additional needs or disabilities. Some ppl might benefit from direct payments and some might not.

Some argued that the offer of direct payments and/or personal budgets is a way of masking cuts to day opportunity services. For others, it was that managing personal budgets or direct payments causes more work for parents/carers.

I feel personal budgets are ok if your mobile and have the mental capacity to cope independently in the outside world its not one size fits all an i do feel that all this offering people budgets is just a good excuse for the council to close More of these vital services instead of investing in decent services for our kids to use.

NO, no, no, no,no - Personal budgets do not work, they just save money for local authorities.

I could find things for him to do but it wouldn't be the same as for him coming here. Here he mixes with other people and he is just not stuck seeing my face and his fathers face. I wouldn't even consider taking him to another activity - it might be okay for him for a short while but not in the long term. My son has been here for a long time (22 years) and clients like my son don't like change. Throwing him into the community would be difficult. Some clients have access to parents with the know how and can take them out but this would be difficult for those with no vehicle, elderly and for those without the knowledge of the community and what's available. In some of the community activities the numbers are too large and causes anxiety for some patients. At this day centre he has been supported to go to college, cookery courses, flower arranging, Maths, English, and digital photography. He has always been in a smaller school so familiarity is important and it takes a while to know the clients. I am a bit dubious about accessing other community services because sitting in a cafe comes with risks for my son.

Giving people choice and the opportunity to access services in the community has been a big driver for government policy in modernising day opportunity services¹. When we asked how easy it is to find services and activities in the community, a majority said it was difficult or very difficult (55%), 26% said it was neither easy nor difficult, whilst only 19% said it would be easy or very easy to find services and new activities in the community.

The main reasons people gave for why they believed it was difficult to find services and activities in the community were:

Lack of services and activities in the community

There is not much in the community out there that caters to people like me.

It is difficult to find services in the community. When we did our homework to find services, there is not alot of services you can access to meet his needs. His needs are quite high, so he needs people who know him. We have to be their voice as a parent and communicate with the centre. Here at this centre, its like a big family, I have come in here sometimes quite miserable. There is no judgement here. Most of the users like my son went to mainstream school and felt they didn't fit in. It must be awful to be somewhere where you don't feel accepted.

It is hard to find any provision for the disabled. Try googling it.

Lack of information on what is available

It is 50/50, some activities are not appropriate, sometimes you don't have information about activities and some closed. I go to a youth club when I will start volunteering. I used to go to another day centre and it just shut. If this centre closed down it would be hard for me. I would like a variety of services like this centre, youth club.

¹ Stuck at home - the impact of day service cuts on people with a learning disability FINAL.doc (mencap.org.uk)

Where is the first point of call for information? Is there a web page?

Very sketchy information on council marketplace. Many don't have websites. Leaflets contain very little information. Quality of provision very poor at some services.

Services are not easy to find out about especially in south Birmingham. When taking part in co-production meetings over several months, we discovered many places offering services that we had never been aware of previously. It's difficult to find out what is available or even where to look.

Services are inaccessible and inappropriate

It is difficult to find activities in the community. Some of the things I want to access I have no transport for.

It was a very frustrating process finding a centre, especially during Covid and they were all shut due to the pandemic. The place where I tried to take him was a café in Harborne where they meet every Monday. But I have to stay with him because its only one hour. There was also a church for 2 hours. Nothing like this place. I wouldn't be able to take him to an hours activity. If this place didn't exist he would be in a wheelchair at home staring at the floor.



Day opportunity services during the pandemic

Eighty-three percent of people we spoke to had not used day opportunity services during the pandemic compared to 17% who had. Those who had used day opportunity services did so over the phone or online (through Zoom or video call). They also received activity packs, food parcels and welfare checks from day opportunity service staff.

My brother use to attend a day centre prior to the pandemic. At that point I fully understood the reason for day centres just like any other establishments having to closed down. It's been two years since my brother last attended his day centre even though I was aware they had reopened and I was informed that they had not so I drove down to the day centre and saw clients/ service users attending the day centre. I have a phone call once a week to check up how my brother is doing which is kind of them to do even though we know they are told to do this in there job role. This does not help or assist me or my family in any ways at all. My mother as Alzheimer's my father is blind both in there eighties my brother as severe learning disabilities and is autistic. I am the main carer for all three and I suffer from Rheumatoid arthritis, and anaemia. These day centre are a life line and to be kept away for such a long length of time have had psychological impact on the family. My brother needs to get back into a routine and some form of normality. Him being absent for two years when the day centre as reopened as had a detrimental affect on my brothers well being and health. So it's all well receiving a phone call once a week but it has no relevance to the situations or help.

The centre was closed but they did call up to check on her and they sent out activities for her. I moved in with her to look after her otherwise she would have been alone.

We did activities through Zoom. During Covid the centre was closed for personal contact so the officer here helped me buy a computer to join zoom activities. they trained me to use zoom and I joined activities through zoom.

They sent us some activity packs to be working on during the lockdown. Had zoom calls where we did some activities. That kept us going.

The outreach team called and visited to check on me and brought food.

People told us about their mental health suffering during the lockdown as they could not attend day opportunity services.

During Covid, I hated the lockdown it was hard for me because I don't like being at home. I want BCC to keep this place open. I come to the centre the whole week.

The centre was closed so I read and watched films. I missed coming here. If I couldn't come here anymore I would be quite upset.

It's taken her a while to get back into the swing of things. It was very difficult during the lockdown - she deteriorated.

For a year and a half I didn't come to the centre, just sat at home all day. I was isolated two times as I had Covid-19. I was a bit depressed during the lockdown because I could not come to the centre. I have enjoyed coming back to the centre. I met everyone again

I dont know what I would do without this service, it would be very difficult. During Covid, I could not come here and I found it really hard because I could not use the service. Was very happy when the centre reopened.

During lockdown, carers/families felt under increased pressure as they were caring full time without breaks in addition to other responsibilities e.g. caring for other family members.

I feel I've been totally forgotten during covid. I'm a full time carer for dad, without a break for over a year. Living on pittance. We have no priority on vaccines, not one bit of PPE offered to us. No call to see how we are doing, nothing we do not matter and we do not exist. My mental health is at an all-time low.

I am a carer. Due to day opportunity services, clubs, 1 to 1 support not happening I am now caring for an adult with autism and a learning disability (who is naturally anxious due to so much change about uncertainty without help - 28 hours a day, 7 days a week. I am exhausted.

Birmingham City Council completely ignored the disabled throughout this pandemic and the parents / carers suffered terribly mentally and physically.

Access to day opportunity services during the pandemic was particularly difficult for people with long term conditions.

Not being able to come to the centre during lockdown was difficult. He was stressed during lockdown, it was like climbing walls with him. For autistic people life is a ritual. Telling him people are dying and you can't go to the centre didn't mean anything to him.

My daughter should of been in day care 2 years ago when she was 19 because of Covid 19 the centres was close schools was close. So we was in isolation for 2 years didn't see her nan for 6 to 9 months and family there was no clubs open only on zoom so how do u tell a child who's got cerebral palsy child who's in a wheelchair having no balance and all she done for 24 hour watch tv and sleep been in day care she got people who are in the same boat as grace.

X day centre [name redacted] were appalling. No safe and well checks only 5 throughout 18 months. Only offered zoom which is completely inaccessible for someone deaf and blind yet full payment was made to X day centre [name redacted] for the full 18 months.

Although some people were offered access to day opportunity services online, they found access difficult as they either did not have access to the equipment needed (computer/smartphone) or internet/broadband.

Had some facebook outreach but this was not inclusive and not everyone could access it.

I stayed at home but got home visits, they telephoned to check on me. I couldn't use a smartphone to attend the zoom classes.

Online and telephone services not inclusive and accessible to everyone.

Participants expressed other concerns such as having to pay for the day opportunity service provision when they were not accessing it and difficulties getting social workers back to the day centres once they reopened.

During the lockdown we still had to pay for the service yet we as parents were the ones spending more money on upkeep for our son. For two years I paid £140 a month (pay for care and fairer charging) for a service I was not accessing.

Day centres were closed due to covid then when they opened it was difficult to get a social worker assigned to him.

Improvements to day opportunity services

People told us that they would like to see the following changes:

Provide varied activities

He loves writing so I would like to do more of that.

Availability of overnight respite care.

Offer more days out - help service users have new experiences.

Put more activity's on do more things with them.

Support to do voluntary work young person is interested in and opportunities to try new activities.

I want to do some courses involving music and singing. I would like to be able to get help going to the gym and staff like that. Coming here to help with job searching and skills development.

I would like to access ESOL so that I can learn English and communicate by myself.

Improve availability and ensure continuity of services

People noted that day opportunity services have been closing, including during the pre-Covid period, and that the reduction in services has resulted in mixing of needs. In addition, there has been an increase in costs.

Access and continuity of day opportunity services is imperative. The numbers of people in day centres need to reduce so we need more day centres to ensure that needs are met and that people with similar needs are in a centre.

Make sure the service continues to be available- this is a lifeline for many service users. It is the only or one of very few opportunities for them to be social and make friends in a safe environment with trained staff.

Keep current services stable and do not build cuts into the budgets year after year. Inform social workers about Day Centres and keep referrals going so there is a constant inflow of new blood.

It is good to have day centres. I used to go to one in Weoley Castle which closed down then I came here. It is important to have friends and get used to people.

Don't close the centre, there was one I used to go to and it closed. Am happy if its open everyday.

More widespread day centres for disabled between 25 to 65 middle aged disabled people seem to have been forgotten.

There was the constant threat of closures, indeed the number of Day Centres dwindled as the years went by. We were also expected to pay for "extra" services and the costs increased continuously.

Increase the number of sessions that people can attend

We heard concerns that people are being offered less days or hours following an assessment.

They can give us more days to come here. I used to get funded for 3 days but they have reduced to one day. They asked me to pay something towards more days but I couldn't. There are problems for new clients because they are limiting to one day.

Offer 5 days a week like it was.

The council should look at ways to increase funding and support people with needs/ disabilities instead of cutting funding. The vulnerable service users need to be safe and not forced into new environments to save money.

Improve involvement of patients and carers/families

Listen to family re support needs.

Being listened to and actually being offered help according to the young person's needs instead of generic advice that isn't relevant to the needs of the individual.

More involvement of carers. Politicians have little clue of what people with learning disabilities need and want. Carers are the experts.

Better communication from Birmingham City Council - updates about changes (i.e. charges). They didn't have to start paying until April but this was not communicated which leaves people distressed, especially more elderly people.

Improve the skills of staff

Some organisational skills were lacking, resulting in service users sitting around doing nothing for long periods.

Upskill the staff so they can offer more activities and keep things in-house. To save costs - day centres can share staff for different courses activities.

In-house Staff trained to move around day centres would help open up more services to more people. People with disabilities are all individuals. Not everyone is or wants to be a Stephen Hawking. It is important to recognise goals and aspirations might be baby steps to some people but big steps for others. Some people might need help with managing goals and aspirations to be realistic and safe.

Highly skilled support staff who are experienced, supervised and properly trained (not just online training). Paying staff a wage that recognises the skill required to support people with complex needs.

Keep staff trained regularly, up to date qualifications - offer more in-house options of different experiences. Day centres can share sites and services for users. Use in-house staff to deliver courses/ activities.

The front line staff would benefit from customer service training course. To greet service users with smile doesn't cost anything it's free.

Improve access to social workers at day opportunity services

[we need] an allocated social worker.

Sitting at home is pathetic. Social workers need to start coming to the centre again to speak to me and tell me what's going on. I want support to get respite and I need someone to train me on independent travel.

Am satisfied with this day service but I think social workers should visit the centres. We have lost contact with them.

Now you do not have the contact you had with the social worker - you have to call and wait for a call back. It takes abit long but they do call back.

Tailor service provision to individual needs and aspirations

Day opportunity services need to be tailored to the individual requirements of the service users. The day centre [name redacted] seem to do this.

We were being given options that were clearly highly unsuitable for our complex young person.

Improve communication with service users

I think regular communication that she understands. There is a list of activities and other information in English, but she can't read or use a mobile phone to access.

I have tried numerous different contacts and numbers. I managed to get my moms name down in a waiting list for once they get started up again. I've not heard a thing, rang one the other day & been passed a telephone number of a lady who wasn't available so I rang an office number. A message was taken but no call back as of yet!!

It's difficult to find out what is available or even where to look.

Nobody bothers to advise how things are going, you don't get called back, you get forgotten. A social worker last November was supposed to send through information- nothing at all. Tried emailing - nothing at all.

Introduce day opportunity services for young people

There should be services made available for disabled children as well as adults.

There is currently no support for young disabled children.

Improve quality monitoring of services

Very low expectations by social care of what is an acceptable service.

Raise Birmingham City Council's standards because they are pretty low.

I can compare now that she has accessed a couple. X service [name redacted] are fantastic but X service [name redacted] have declined to an unacceptable standard.

Provide reliable transport to services

The main issue is unreliability of the ring and ride. Sometimes they just don't turn up. A reliable transport service would help improve things.

Transport to and from a respite to day service thats if you can find one of them of course.

He has to take two buses, not very convenient.

Improve transition from school/college to services

Staff getting to know the people they are looking after as there's no real Transition from college to day centre.



Conclusion and recommendations

This report reveals how users of day opportunity services and their carers/families view the benefits and outcomes they derive from using day opportunity services. Indeed, during the research, our observation at the day centres we visited, was of people that seemed to know each other well, that were involved in various activities and had good relationships with the staff. However, we only visited a small number of services who were happy for us speak to their service users for this report, so our observations may not be applicable to other services.

People told us of accessing various day opportunity services and the difference in quality between them. However, day opportunity services are not regulated, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) does not include day opportunity services in its care quality reports. It is therefore important that local mechanisms are put in place to ensure the ongoing quality provision of day opportunity services.

Our recommendations

Through our discussions with council staff, we agreed that the findings will inform any reviews into day opportunity services. We would like to see the experiences shared in this report, the findings and the improvements service users would like to see inform reports to cabinet etc.

Healthwatch Birmingham believes that it is important for BCC to:

- Reinstatement of the quality monitoring system for day opportunity services to gain assurance that delivery of outcomes is central to service provision.
- Work with providers to ensure that feedback about services is actively sought and used to make improvements, including engaging with local Healthwatch to provide an independent voice for service users and carers/families.
- Continue to offer services that accommodate personal preferences, cultural and lifestyle needs.
- Reinstatement of monitoring visits to day opportunity services to ensure that service users are being supported to access varied activities.
- Ensure that there is improvement in communication and that information on services is available.
- Ensure that discussions with service users and carers/families about choice, flexibility and the use of personal budgets is clear (e.g., how does the use of personal budgets reflect a move towards wider access rather than cuts to services).
- Engage with service users, and carer/families to gain insight on quality, continued provision of services and identify areas of potential savings.

Appendix 1: About Healthwatch Birmingham

Local Healthwatch were established in every local authority area across England following the Health and Social Care Act 2012. Our key role is to ensure those who commission, design and deliver health and social care services hear, and take into account, the public voice. Healthwatch Birmingham listens to and gathers public and patient experiences of using local health and social care services such as general practices, pharmacists, hospitals, dentists, opticians, care homes and community-based care. We hear these experiences via our Information and Signposting Line, our online Feedback Centre, and through our community engagement activity led by staff and volunteers. You can read more about the work of Healthwatch Birmingham here: <https://healthwatchbirmingham.co.uk/about-us/>

How do we select the issues we collect evidence about?

Some of the issues we hear about from patients and the public may require deeper exploration in order to present a comprehensive report to those who commission, design and deliver health and social care services in Birmingham. Members of the public select these issues as part of our Topic Identification and Prioritisation System. By involving members of the public in decisions about our future activities, we ensure we are operating in an open and transparent way. It also ensures that we understand the public's priorities.

Who contributes to our evidence collection?

We explore selected issues with the help of our volunteers, Healthwatch Birmingham board members, patients, members of the public, service users and carers. They share relevant experiences, knowledge, skills and support. Healthwatch Birmingham also talks to key professionals providing or commissioning the service we are investigating. This helps us to form a deeper understanding of the issue from the perspective of these professionals, and encourages them to take prompt action to implement positive changes for patients and the public.

What difference do our reports make?

We follow up our reports to see if our findings have made services better for patients and service users. We hold service providers and/or commissioners to account for changes they stated they would make in response to the report. If Healthwatch Birmingham finds no improvement, we may decide to escalate the issue to Healthwatch England and local regulators. We also monitor the changes to see if people experience sustained improvements.

How to share your feedback about the issues heard in this study

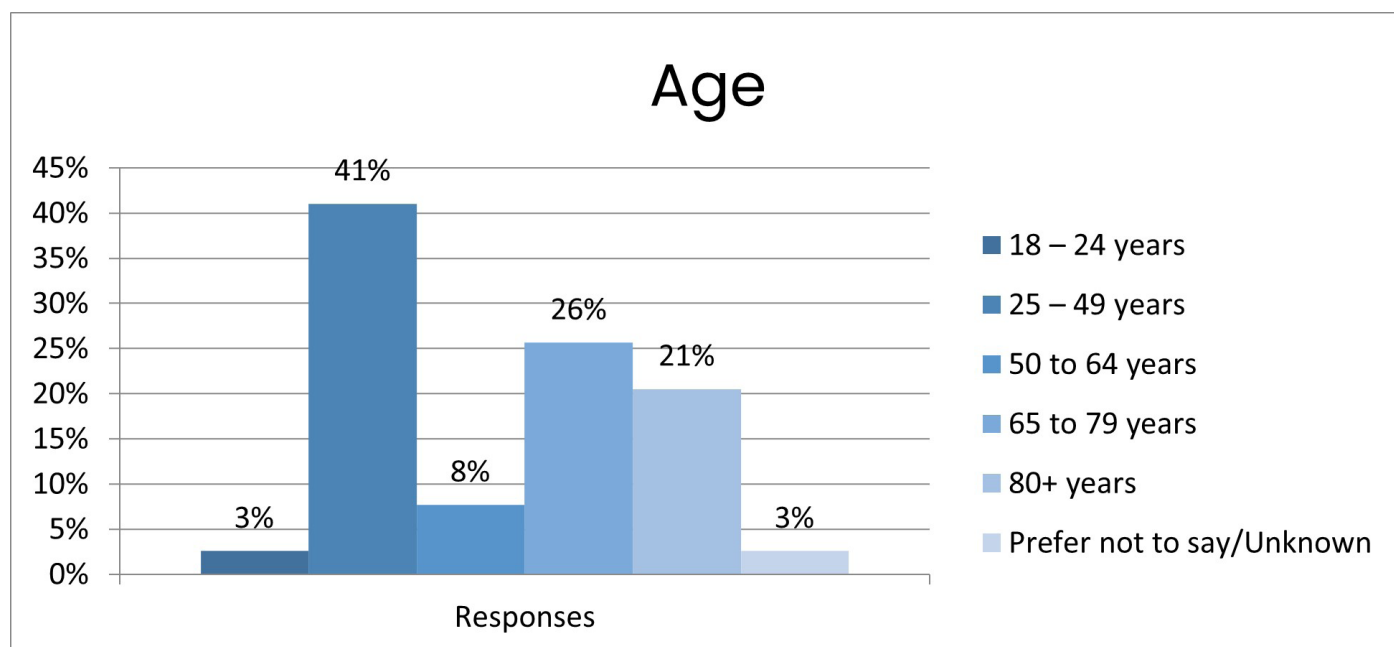
If you are a service user, patient or carer, please do share your experiences with us via our:

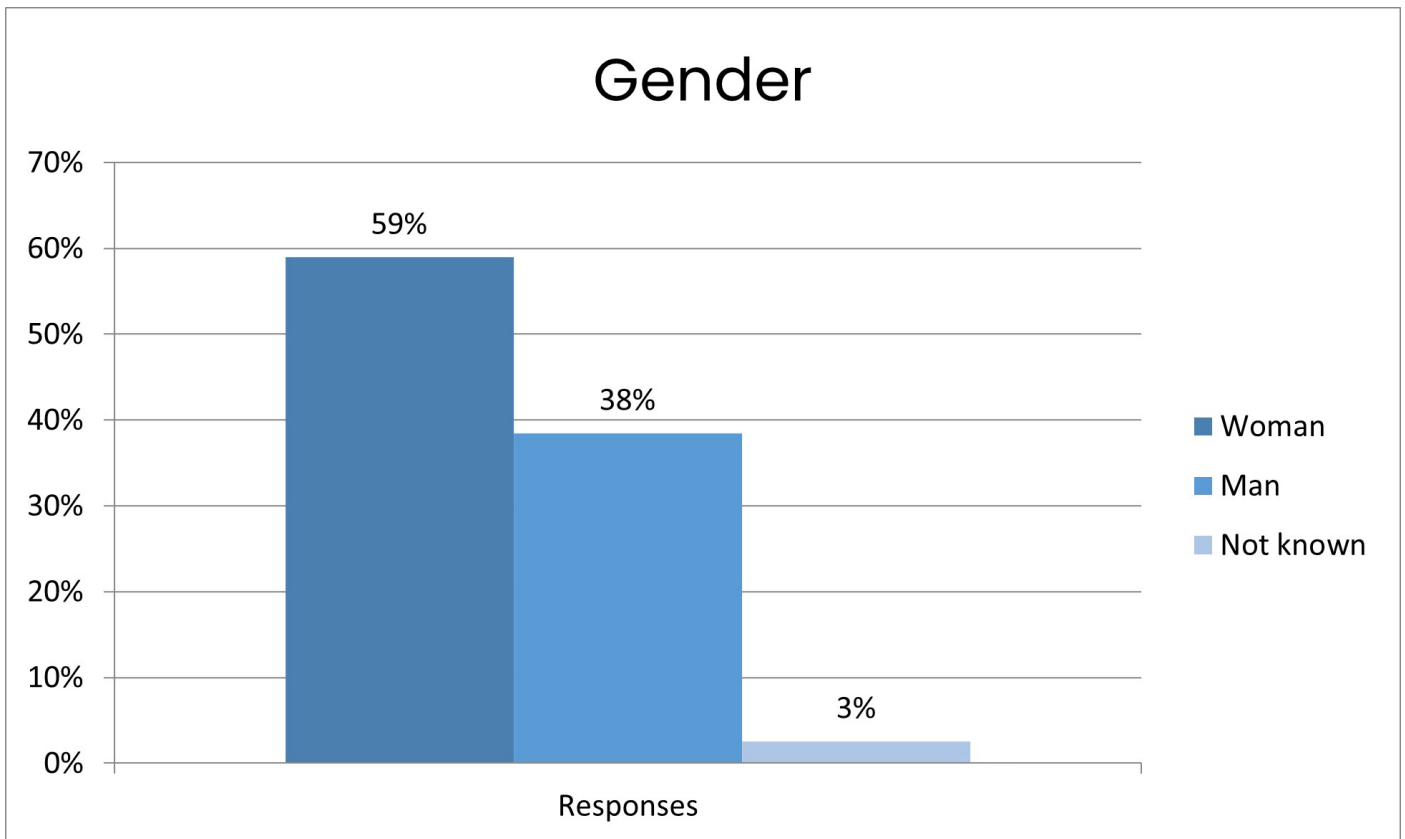
- Online [Feedback Centre here](#).
- Information and Signposting line on 0800 652 5278 or by [emailing us](#).

Appendix 2: Demographics

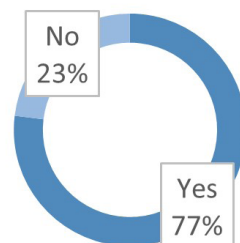
| ETHNICITY | RESPONSES |
|--|-----------|
| Asian / Asian British: Chinese | 16% |
| Asian / Asian British: Indian | 11% |
| Asian / Asian British: Pakistani | 3% |
| Black / Black British: Caribbean | 3% |
| Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White | 3% |
| Prefer not to say | 3% |
| White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh | 62% |

| RELIGION OR BELIEF | RESPONSES |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Buddhist | 8% |
| Christian | 54% |
| Hindu | 5% |
| Muslim | 3% |
| None | 19% |
| Prefer not to say | 3% |
| Sikh | 5% |





Do you consider yourself or the person you are talking about to have a disability?



healthwatch Birmingham

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