

# What is a Meeting Centre?

## Helping to support people and families directly affected by dementia

A Meeting Centre is a local resource, operating out of ordinary community buildings, that offers on-going warm and friendly expert support to people and families affected by dementia.

At the heart of the Meeting Centre is a social club where people meet to have fun, talk to others and get help that focusses on what they need. Meeting Centres are based on sound research evidence on what helps people to cope well in adjusting to living with the symptoms and changes that dementia brings.

### Where did Meeting Centres start?

Meeting Centres were first developed in the Netherlands around 30 years ago. Currently, there are over 180 Dutch Meeting Centres with a national network that local groups can access. Research has demonstrated that Meeting Centres have positive outcomes for people with dementia and for family carers.

### What goes on in a Meeting Centre?

A team of staff and volunteers trained in the Meeting Centre ethos provide an enjoyable and flexible programme for both the person with dementia and their family carers. The social club meets regularly, usually 3 days per week for 15-20 members per day.

All activities are designed to help people adapt to the challenges that living with dementia can bring. This involves a chance to get together socially, to be creative, to get active and to share lunch.

Everyone brings their skills and talents to the Meeting Centre and the programme is driven by what people want to do. People attend as little or as often as they need.

*"It's the day to day activities that they do here. You know, having a cup of tea with people, having their lunch with people. All the normality of being with a group of people, which when you're isolated on your own, you don't take part in"*

Family carers get assistance with practical and emotional issues, as well as being able to contribute to social club activities. Some family members use the opportunity to have a break from their caring role. Social activities and excursions also help people to enjoy life together.

## Adjusting to Change

A diagnosis of dementia is a huge challenge to come to terms with. If people make good emotional, social and practical adjustments following diagnosis, it is likely that they will experience fewer distressing symptoms later and be able to live at home for longer with a better quality of life for them and their families. Help and support for families and people affected by dementia is often fragmented. People often feel overwhelmed and confused about where to get help. Meeting Centres are a way of providing accessible support on a local level to act against this.

A Meeting Centre supports people by helping them cope with the consequences of living with dementia and make the best possible lifestyle adjustments for them as individuals.

- Firstly, it helps people adjust to cognitive impairments by understanding their changing symptoms and how to deal with them.
- Secondly, it helps with emotional adjustment by supporting people to get back on an even keel, preserve a positive self-image, and prepare for and deal with the uncertainty that dementia brings.
- Thirdly, it helps people adapt socially by developing and maintaining good social contacts with family and friends, their local community, and professional services.

*“It’s being able to talk about these things with other people who are in exactly the same boat as you are, and they understand”*

## What’s the evidence that Meeting Centres help people?

There is good evidence both from Dutch and UK research that people attending Meeting Centres experience better self-esteem, greater feelings of happiness and sense of belonging than those who don’t attend. Those who attend most regularly show fewer of the more distressing symptoms of dementia and a greater feeling of support. Family carers also experience less burden and feel better able to cope. People with dementia and carers report high levels of satisfaction with the programme of activities offered by Meeting Centres, seeing it as an important way of keeping active and feeling supported.

## Community Engagement

Many towns have initiated Dementia Friendly Communities. Meeting Centres build on this. They generally start from a care organisation or group of people recognising that there is a need for more structured support for people affected by dementia in a local community. It is not really important who comes up with the idea to initiate a Meeting Centre, because collaboration with other organisations is essential to getting the initiative off the ground. There is a well-developed process for developing and implementing new Meeting Centres that engages all local stakeholders throughout.

## Find out more about Meeting Centres

- Please contact Meeting Centres UK at [meetingcentres@worc.ac.uk](mailto:meetingcentres@worc.ac.uk)
- Follow us on Twitter [@MeetingCentres](https://twitter.com/MeetingCentres)
- For further information and resources, please visit <https://www.worcester.ac.uk/discover/uk-meeting-centres-support-programme.html>