



**THE ALZHEIMER
SOCIETY of IRELAND**

Social Space: Equal Place

The Social Club Model of Dementia Care Research Report

This research report highlights in detail the development and workings of the social clubs.

Available from the Alzheimer Society of Ireland at

Alzheimer Society of Ireland National Office

Temple Road

Blackrock

Co. Dublin

or at www.alzheimer.ie



Guidelines to Setting up a Social Club

The Social Club Model of Dementia Care

Your comments/feedback on these guidelines are welcome. You can give your feedback or get more information on Social Clubs by contacting Catherine Keogh, Care Practice Coordinator on 01-2846616 or 086-3826395. You can also e-mail ckeogh@alzheimer.ie



Introduction

The following guidelines have been developed to assist the staff of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI) in setting up a social club. They are based on the current experience of staff that run the social clubs, the experience of members who have participated in them and ASI research on their development. These guidelines are intended as an initial attempt to support the development of social clubs regionally and will be reviewed as the ASI learns more about the model in practice.

What ultimately makes a successful club is that it is flexible to meet the needs of the members, it is social in nature and it nurtures and supports the 'couple' and their relationship. We know from research that the following are key to the success of social clubs:

- The relaxed, informal nature of the clubs
- The members' active involvement in the running of their own club
- Outings and social occasions



Format of the Club:

Each club differs and the format for the club varies. What goes on in the club is led by the members. Checking in with the members is essential. Some of the following elements may happen:

- Small group discussion/general conversation
- Large group discussion/general conversation
- Activities (e.g. exercise, music)
- Cup of tea/coffee
- Outings to local places of interest



Sustaining the Group:

The needs of the group will evolve over time and members will leave and new members will join. The need to continually build relationships among club members will be on-going within the group. It is a good idea to regularly review how the group is working. Consider checking in with the members that they are happy with the venue, day and time of the meetings; that they feel welcome and that they have an opportunity to say what they wish; how the club can be improved; topics for discussion; ideas for activities.



The Members:

Membership is drawn from the local community. The practice to date indicates that the Home Care Co-ordinator in the area is well placed to identify and make contact with potential members. Word of mouth through the support groups and other ASI services is also a good place to start to identify members.

Membership is open with the only entry criterion being that one person in the couple has a diagnosis of dementia. Typically, it is a very suitable activity for people in the early stages of their dementia. There are no exit criteria for members. Those who have left the existing clubs have moved on to other services, left voluntarily or passed away.

It is important that there are core members in the group to enable a rapport/relationship to be built between the members themselves and the members and the staff.

Membership is entirely voluntary and no-one should feel compelled or obliged to attend.

Basic Rules:

If there are rules to be set, then these are negotiated and agreed by the group. The rules should include that each member is respected and made to feel an equal part of the group and that each member has a chance to speak if they wish.



What is a Social Club

The social club is a gathering of people with dementia and their carers (usually the spouse but not exclusively) who come together in a social setting to support each other, share experiences and enjoy each other's company. The club is facilitated by staff that have the necessary range of skills and empathy to support the members.

The social club does not use any formal therapeutic, counselling or rehabilitative model. It is not a service (in the classic sense) and its structure is not hierarchical. It is 'owned' by the members, who in turn have a full say in what membership entails.

The club is a safe and secure place for the members to attend. It is an opportunity for members to share information, coping strategies as well as build friendships with each other. The emphasis is on the social and fun elements in a fully supported, safe environment.

Getting Started

Venue:

There are a few basic elements that need to be in place to enable the establishment of a social club. These include

- An accessible location, with parking preferably in the local community
- A dedicated comfortable room
- Tea and coffee facilities available
- Community venue—local centre etc (not linked with medical site)

Timing of the Club:

Generally the clubs meet once a week on a weekday. The club meets for about two hours, mornings or afternoons. When the group goes on an outing, there is more time involved. Keeping to the same venue and time is important to provide regularity for the members. It is important to be mindful of the timing of other ASI or non-ASI day care services in the locality, as these may impact on the numbers attending the group.

Transport:

Transport is essential if the club is planning an outing. The local ASI day centre buses may be in a position to support the club with their transport requirements. However this can be limited by time and availability.

Funding:

You will need resources to pay for the room rental and the provision of refreshments.

Size of the Group:

A minimum of four is needed to set up the group, but a larger number required to maintain it. There are no strict criteria as to how many can attend but bear in mind that the social skills of the person with dementia will be better facilitated in smaller groups.

The Staff:

The clubs require staff member(s) to act as facilitators. Staff play several roles in the club - welcoming members, helping with tea/coffee, providing information, cultivating friendships, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere, helping with personal care and organising activities/outings.

Apart from basic care and facilitation skills, staff need to

- Have listening and empathy skills
- Offer friendliness and warmth
- Show respect and dignity
- Understand the philosophy of the club
- Facilitate decision-making in the group
- Commit to working with the group for an extended period of time

