Supporting Isolated Older People in Dorset. U.K.

PramaLife currently manages over 45 clubs, groups and activities across Poole and East Dorset including Memory Lane Groups (for those living with dementia), Sporting Memories (dementia and reminiscence friendship clubs – there are more gentlemen than ladies attending these clubs), Museum Memories (dementia and reminiscence friendship clubs), Carers Support Groups, Befriending services, Community Connectors (this is a buddying/ befriending scheme to re-integrate people back into community-based activities), Lunch Clubs, Coffee Mornings, Knit and Natter Groups, Art and Craft Activities and Exercise Clubs, such as Arm Chair Keep Fit.

We work with over 2,078 people who attend these activities each month, the majority of whom would otherwise be lonely, isolated or facing social exclusion.

We have also started working with local Care Homes to utilise their resources to engage people in lunches and supported activities for cared-for people. Our latest initiative in this field being our 'Don't Dine Alone' Project where we engage otherwise lonely and isolated people to access a free meal in a friendly environment and pleasant surroundings in the company of others.

We also want to create opportunities to make people (who wouldn't normally be able to access these experiences) feel pampered or ‘treated’ (such as health, beauty and nail bars and film clubs). The Care Homes can help us to offer support for the cared-for person through their Activities Coordinators whilst the Carer gets some attention focussed on them.

Many of these activities have seen people make their own new friendships and keep in touch with others outside of the group activity. Some of these activities have enabled people to take a volunteering role, thereby helping to reduce their own loneliness and that of others.

All of the groups are supervised by staff or volunteers with two overarching managers, one in Poole and one in East Dorset, and ensures that there is communication and connection between all of the groups and provides those attending with multiple opportunities to be engaged across a range of different activities. It also ensures that we grow to know those clients and recognise when something is amiss.

All these activities enable those attending to access information, signposting and support to other services.

We undertake an impact assessment each year that identifies that this has a positive impact upon people’s health and wellbeing. Prama gathers these and outcome stories and testimonies from people who attend our activities. It is obvious from the behaviour and reactions of those attending what a difference these services make to their lives. We are therefore able to demonstrate the positive impact that these activities have on people’s lives. A recent testimony from an attendee to a Memory Lane Group (for those living with dementia) is below:

"As Official Carer for Mary, my Mother-in-Law, I cannot praise or thank PramaLife enough for their thoughtfulness, professionalism and kindness. Mary loves her Memory Lanes and other functions organised by PramaLife. She has made many new friends, enjoys their company, the relaxed atmosphere and laughter which, without PramaLife she would have little.
She finds the memory stimuli a welcome challenge, they help her think and thereby she is also given the opportunity to be involved, express her thoughts and feelings, join in with the interchanges and reminisce.
She loves the music, singing and party games, always leaves happier than when she arrives and talks about it enthusiastically all the way home."
Mr T, Poole, June 2018.

In 2017/2018, Prama delivered 326 club sessions in Poole and East Dorset. These consist of 122 drop in/ friendship clubs, 80 dementia clubs, 19 fitness clubs, 92 clubs for carers. This equates to 22,622 hours of support delivered through clubs.

2,078 individuals currently take part in our community clubs, groups and activities each month within Poole and East Dorset. We are identifying a consistent increase in attendance of 5% each month.

We know that our approach is working because of the above statistics, the steadily increasing attendance figures at our clubs and because of the positive outcome stories and impact assessments. In addition, partner agencies are approaching us to lead and provide best practice in establishing new activities in partnership with them. These partners include most recently Care Homes and GP Practices working towards Altogether Better and Social Prescribing models.

Prama was established in 1982 and has a wealth of experience in working with older people, people who are lonely and people who are experiencing vulnerability. We have worked closely with both social care and health services. In 2017, PramaLife was established in response to an increasing need for early help and preventative services in the local community, specifically with a view to combatting loneliness and isolation and building real, tangible community connections.

All staff and volunteers are DBS checked where appropriate, many are Dementia Friends and some hold professional qualifications in Health and Social Care and related fields. All staff and volunteers possess excellent communication skills and, in many instances, have worked in a caring profession for a number of years. For example, the PramaLife Poole Manager has worked for Prama as a Care Support Worker for over 25 years and the PramaLife East Dorset Manager was previously a qualified Nurse of long standing. The PramaLife Pathways Manager, responsible for the two PramaLife Manager posts, has over 15 years’ experience in working in the Neighbourhood Management Programme and latterly 12 years’ experience of leading the Dorset Partnership for Older People Programme (POPP) and also the Safe And Independent Living (SAIL) Programme for Dorset including the robust evaluation of each of these initiatives.

Prama is currently leading on drawing together all partners needed to provide a coordinated transport opportunity for Dorset (similar to a model already operational in Devon). This will ensure that the Local Authority Fleet vehicles, neighbourcar schemes, accessible transport, Dial a Ride, and community transport, are all working together to support journeys across the conurbation for social, educational or employment purposes, as well as to medical and other appointments.