

A Costa in the care home

Sue McLean reports on the many gains of having a Costa café within a care home. The first Costa in a dementia care service, the café has become a genuine community hub that brings together people of all ages and backgrounds



In June 2012, Community Integrated Care launched EachStep Blackley, a £5 million specialist dementia care service that provides a holistic range of community and care home based support from one location, to provide care and support to people from diagnosis until the end of their lives.

When we planned EachStep, we wanted to create something that would be genuinely specialist – we looked at living environments, advances in training and ways to provide flexible, joined-up care. But we were clear that this wasn't enough; fundamentally, great dementia care involves great relationships, promotion of full and happy lives and being part of the community. This required us to think big and differently.

We'd planned for EachStep Blackley to include a community café, as well as other communal facilities (such as bookable meeting rooms), which would equally benefit the people we support and open the service up to the local community. We'd joked in our planning meetings that the café would be like our own Costa, but the more we talked about it, the idea of having this familiar brand in our service really began to make sense.

As planning progressed, our project team for the EachStep

development was increasing drawn to the Costa brand. We felt that the Costa brand reflected what we were trying to achieve in EachStep – it strikes the rare balance of being both aspirational and accessible, and is trusted by consumers, and these are all goals that we share.

Behind the scenes

We worked closely with our catering supplier for the Manchester area, Compass Group, to sign up to Costa's 'Proud to Serve' franchise model. This allowed the café to utilise Costa's branding, serve the café chain's drinks and snacks, and give café staff – employed by Compass – Costa's Barista training. In return, we purchased Costa's drinks machines and agreed to exclusively stock their goods and carry the chain's branding.

When agreeing the franchise, we were keen to ensure that the café would be accessible to all community members. Blackley isn't an affluent area, so we wanted to ensure that local people wouldn't be priced out of using the café. In our franchise agreement, we decided to serve drinks at Costa's lowest possible pricing tariff – we weren't looking to make a big surplus from the café, just for it to be sustainable and well used.

There are no big café chains in the local area, presumably because Blackley doesn't represent a great prospect for large corporate businesses that want to make significant profits. As a charity, Community Integrated Care has an entirely different objective. We believed that introducing the café would feel like an investment in the local community and that local people would be proud to have

a Costa on their doorstep – it was another way for us to give back.

The café as a hub

With the agreement with Costa in place, our team had a clear vision that the café must contribute to Manchester's dementia-friendly community aspirations, by creating a space that would be equally well used by people who access the service and the local community. In doing so, we aimed to break down the stigma and stereotypes associated with dementia and build meaningful relationships between people supported and the public.

Naturally, a primary objective was to ensure that the café would itself be dementia friendly. We worked with academics and the architects of our service, Pozzoni, to create a therapeutic environment at EachStep Blackley, and the café applied these same high environmental standards (see inset box right).

We also focused on the training of café staff too – with each staff member receiving a dementia awareness induction, devised by Alan Howells, clinical specialist for our charity.

When the service opened in June 2012, it was immediately apparent that the initial vision we held for the Costa branded café would be realised, as it attracted great interest from both people supported by EachStep and the local community. Our open event for the service, held at the café, attracted hundreds of local people, professionals and people who would be part of the service at EachStep.

The café has become a vital part of everyday life for residents. As one example,

EachStep promotes a policy of protected mealtimes, where visits and other disturbances are minimised during mealtimes so that residents can focus fully on eating without distractions. Having the Costa offers another location for meals: family and friends can continue to visit during mealtimes and share a meal with their loved ones without causing disturbance to other residents during protected mealtimes.

One key observation made by residents and their loved ones is that visiting the café feels like a special experience. Elaine Young, whose dad lives at EachStep, explained to me, "The café plays a massive role in the social interaction that my family and I have with dad. Going to a café with family is something that happens in the 'real world' – families go out together, so the Costa is a way of retaining a sense of normality."

She continued, "I can visibly see the sense of well-being that he gets when he visits the café. He'll see café workers visiting his household and will say, 'Look – it's that lovely lady from the café'. The fact that he remembers its staff shows how much it means to him."

Engaging the community

The Costa has genuinely become a community hub in its truest sense. When the service





Clockwise from top left: Sue McLean; local neighbours at the launch event; a barista at EachStep; Jean Oxley, resident at EachStep Blackley; Agnes Cunningham, resident at EachStep Blackley.



opened, our management team at EachStep reached out to local community figureheads, letting them know about the availability of the café as a venue. Many immediately saw the potential of having a Costa as an attractive base to engage with the public. It is now used by local politicians for surgeries, as a venue by religious leaders and as a meeting space for police consultation with the community.

But more importantly, the Costa consistently attracts a genuinely diverse mix of the Blackley public to the home, in a very natural way. The Costa brand has acted as a real beacon to the local community. At any time, we might see mothers of young children, business people, members of a local learning disabilities day service and school children, as well as residents of other local care homes, all popping in for coffee and snacks. They sit and drink alongside the people we support – the café has become a genuine microcosm of a dementia-friendly community in practice.

By osmosis, the café has helped transform perceptions of dementia. When we first announced EachStep, some local people were anxious, having extreme or distorted perceptions of what dementia is and how it might affect

them personally. We now see these same people coming by for a coffee and in fact many are now powerful advocates for the service.

Part of this change can be attributed to our efforts to proactively engage and educate the community, but the Costa has also helped no end too. The same people who were initially fearful have since come in to EachStep just to get a coffee and met the people we support enjoying themselves, in the same environment that they enjoy too. This has shown them, in a very normal, non-challenging way, that their concerns were completely misplaced and that we all share a common humanity.

We have also used the café as a springboard to proactively educate the community, holding public events – such as during Dementia Awareness Week – at the café, as well as open training sessions. One successful way that we have informed the community can be seen in the free dementia training we offer regularly in the café.

Our clinical specialist Alan Howells created ‘Espresso Training’ – short sessions of dementia training that, just

The café’s design

The café is an open plan space, so it’s accessible and inviting. There is no barrier to people walking in – for example you don’t actually need to open a door to get to the café (it has concertina-style doors but these are always open when the café is open). It is also a very large space, so even when it is busy it feels peaceful and uncrowded.

The entire EachStep service has lots of windows, and the café in particular has a large window expanse, running right across the front of the café. This has two benefits: it has natural light and views, but it is equally inviting to the passing public.

The serving area is very accessible – it’s not very high and is easy to walk up to. This means that people can collect their own food and drink independently without any barriers.

The café uses very simple patterns and colour choices in its interior design, which helps people who experience visual disorientation.

It has accessible toilets close by, and these have the same accessible signage as the rest of the service.

While the café is Costa branded, it feels very much like it is part of the home, by sharing some consistent furniture and decoration. This really helps to strike the balance of a visit to the café feeling like a ‘day out’ for residents, but also being a space that is familiar and comfortable.

like a shot of espresso, are aimed at stimulating people in a quick burst. These sessions are open to staff, the people we support and the public. The opportunity to build dementia awareness and enjoy social time with other people, while enjoying a brew or a frothy coffee, is something that has been incredibly popular.

Advice for others

So, what advice do we, at Community Integrated Care, have for other services looking to replicate this idea? We had various things in our favour in agreeing the partnership with Costa. We were creating a new service, we are a long-established national charity and we were backed by a catering giant who could lead on discussions on our behalf. All of this made us an attractive proposition to Costa and establishing the partnership a relatively stress-free task.

Older and new dementia care services alike all have space, knowledge or resources that they can share with the wider community. The Costa brand has certainly helped to



engage the local community in a very natural way, but it is just one, relatively small, contribution to our efforts to promote a dementia-friendly community.

The success of EachStep can be attributed to us not being constrained by conventional expectations, proactively engaging with the public and holding a belief that successful care services have a symbiotic relationship with their wider community. ⁿ

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