The Day Care Opportunities Engagement Project

Contents

Executive Summary

The Day Care Opportunities Engagement Project, a collaboration between Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC), sets out to improve day care services for adults in Darlington by making them more personal, meaningful, and accessible. By engaging with service users, carers, and stakeholders through surveys and focus groups, the project gathered valuable feedback to inform future improvements. The findings highlight the strengths of current services while identifying significant gaps and opportunities for development.

Participants widely praised the social benefits of day opportunities, which foster connections and combat isolation. Structured activities such as arts and crafts, cooking, and exercise programs provide enjoyment, routine, and purpose, while supportive staff are seen as key to the services' success. However, feedback also revealed challenges. Services currently cater predominantly to individuals with learning disabilities, leaving gaps for underserved groups, such as those with dementia, neurodivergence, and mental health needs. Transport barriers, limited activity diversity, and affordability issues further restrict access for many, particularly those in rural areas or requiring specialised support. Additionally, a lack of information about available services creates confusion for carers and potential users.

The recommendations focus on addressing these gaps while building on the service's strengths. Expanding creative and physical activities, increasing group outings, and introducing tailored programs for underserved groups can make services more inclusive and engaging. Addressing transport challenges and affordability will help remove key barriers to participation. Enhanced communication efforts are needed to raise awareness of available options, particularly during periods of transition, such as when young adults move from education to adult services. Finally, offering greater flexibility through extended service hours, drop-in sessions, and holiday programming will better meet the needs of carers and participants.

By prioritising accessibility, inclusivity, and participant-centred planning, this project provides a clear pathway for evolving day care services to better support the diverse needs of Darlington's community.

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Introduction

The Day Care and Accommodation with Care and Support Engagement Project is a partnership between Healthwatch Darlington (HWD) and Darlington Borough Council (DBC) Adult Social Care Team. This project aims to improve day care services and accommodation with care and support for adults in Darlington. The focus was on making services more personal and meaningful to help improve the quality of life for people with different needs and at different stages of life.

The project involved talking to and working with people who use these services, their families, and other important groups, to make sure their opinions were heard and taken into account. By looking at both national trends and the specific needs in Darlington, the project aims to help create better services that work for everyone.

Engagement Method

The project used a step-by-step approach to gather feedback and ensure that people's views helped shape the final recommendations:

Preparation:
Healthwatch Darlington, working with DBC, reviewed national policies and best practices, and collected data about local services and users' needs.

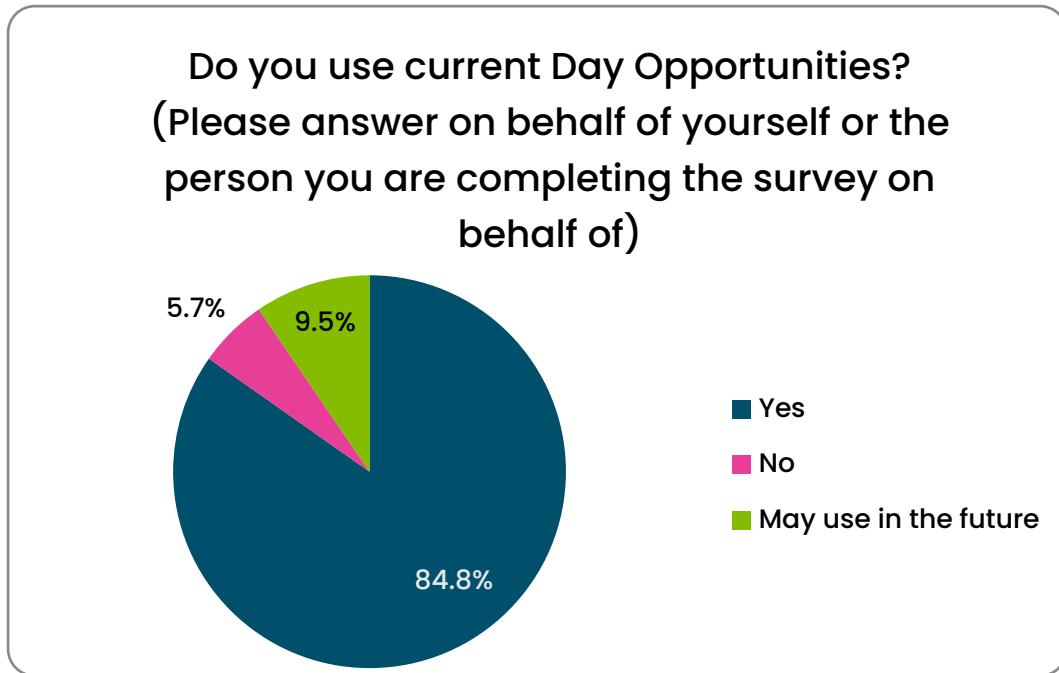### Engagement on Day Opportunities:
- **Surveys online:** Simple and clear surveys were created for people who currently use day services, as well as for those who may need them in the future, and their carers.
- **Surveys in person:** Surveys were completed with people who currently use day services, whilst attending their day services in person.
- **Focus Groups:** Group discussions were held to hear people's thoughts on what works well with services and what needs to be improved.
- **Verbal discussion:** Healthwatch staff members chatted with Day Opportunities staff members about current services, asking about what is working well and what might help make things even better for those accessing current day opportunities.

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Feedback on services

Question 1:

105 people answered and **2** people skipped this question.

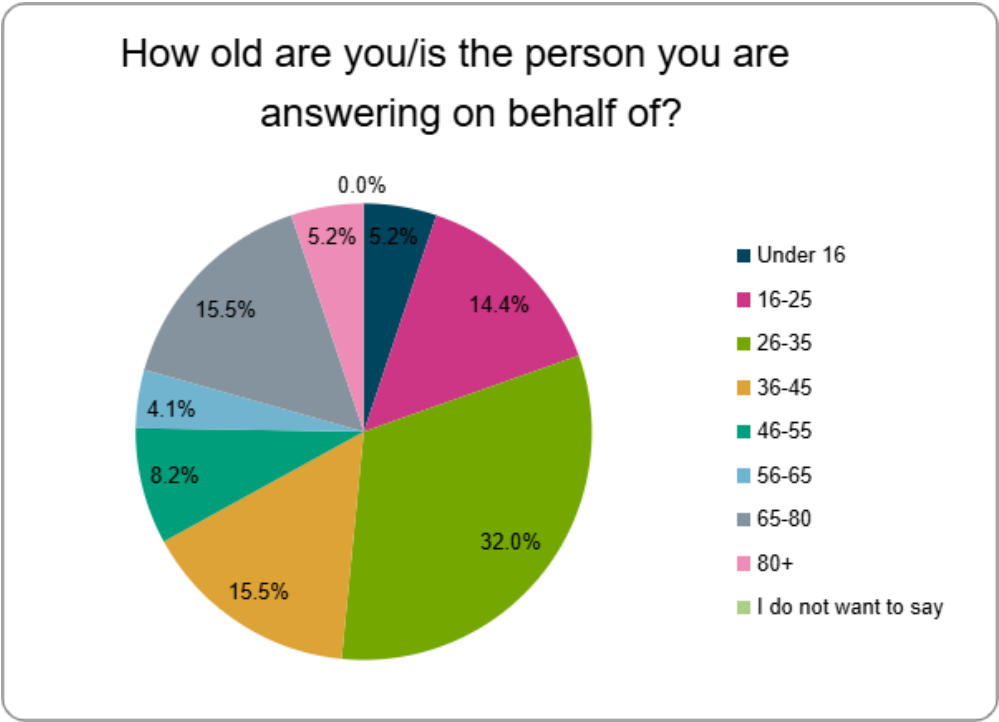Do you use current Day Opportunities?
(Please answer on behalf of yourself or the person you are completing the survey on behalf of)

- 84.8% Yes
- 5.7% No
- 9.5% May use in the future

Question 2:

103 people answered and **4** people skipped this question

Who are you?

- 83.5% I am a person who uses, or may use, Day Opportunities
- 13.6% I am a family member or friend, or UNPAID carer for someone who uses, or may use Day Opportunities
- 1.9%
- 1.0%
- 1.9%

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4
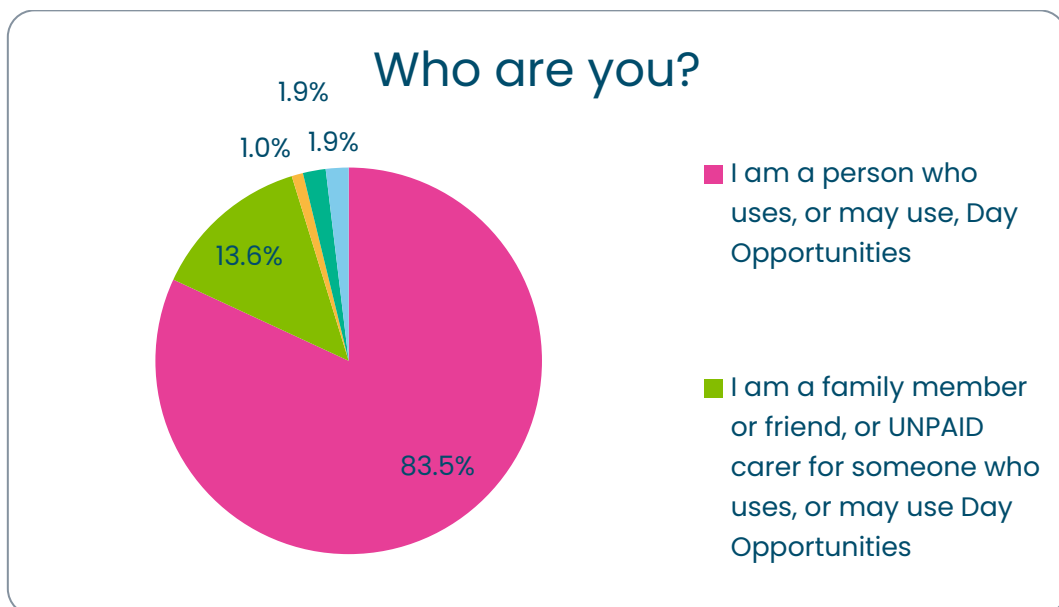
Question 3:

97 people answered and 10 people skipped this question

How old are you/is the person you are answering on behalf of?

- Under 16 — 5.2%
- 16-25 — 14.4%
- 26-35 — 32.0%
- 36-45 — 15.5%
- 46-55 — 8.2%
- 56-65 — 4.1%
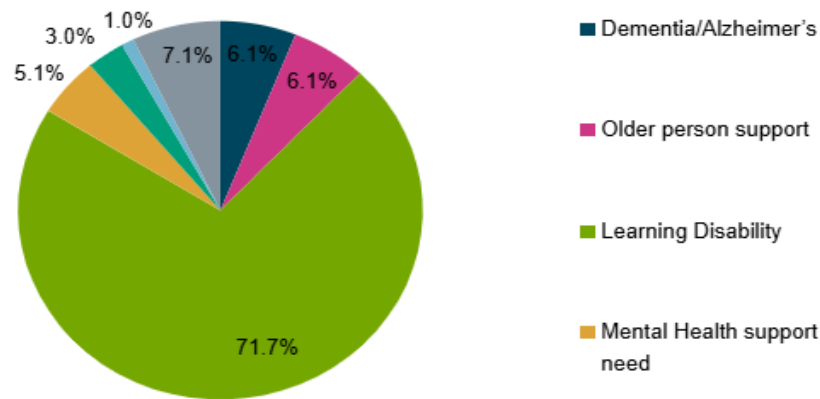- 65-80 — 15.5%
- 80+ — 5.2%
- I do not want to say — 0.0%

Question 4

99 people answered and 8 people skipped this question

What is the main need of the person using Day Opportunities, or who may use them in the future? - (Choose one)

- Dementia/Alzheimer's
- Older person support
- Learning Disability
- Mental Health support need

This question asked respondents to identify the primary need of the person using or potentially using Day Opportunities. The results show a significant skew towards certain needs:

1. Learning Disability: 71.7% (71 responses) – This was the overwhelming majority, indicating that services for individuals with learning disabilities are the most in demand.
2. Dementia/Alzheimer's: 6.1% (6 responses) – A small but notable portion of respondents identified this as the main need.
3. Older Person Support: 6.1% (6 responses) – Equal in proportion to dementia-related needs, highlighting an aging population in need of support.
4. Mental Health Support Need: 5.1% (5 responses) – This group is smaller but indicates an essential area for consideration.
5. Physical Disabilities: 3.0% (3 responses) – Representing a small yet important category.
6. Sensory Impairment: 1.0% (1 response) – A minimal proportion of respondents identified this need.
7. Other Needs: 7.1% (7 responses) – Additional needs were outlined, highlighting the diverse challenges faced by some participants.
   a) Autism and Neurodiversity: Multiple entries, including mentions of Autism, ADHD, and DCD (Developmental Coordination Disorder), reflect the need for tailored services for neurodivergent individuals.
   b) Emotional and Social Isolation: One respondent highlighted the impact of loneliness and a lack of a local support network.

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"Bit lonely; family live abroad. Lost lots of friends."

c) **Complex Health Conditions:** A detailed entry outlined an individual with multiple physical and mental health challenges, including learning disabilities, chronic conditions, and mental health needs.

"Diagnosed with chromosome 12 deletion... ADHD, behaviour problem, emotional problems, type two diabetes... dissociative seizures due to trauma."

d) **Developmental Disabilities:** Down Syndrome and related needs were noted by respondents.

Question 5

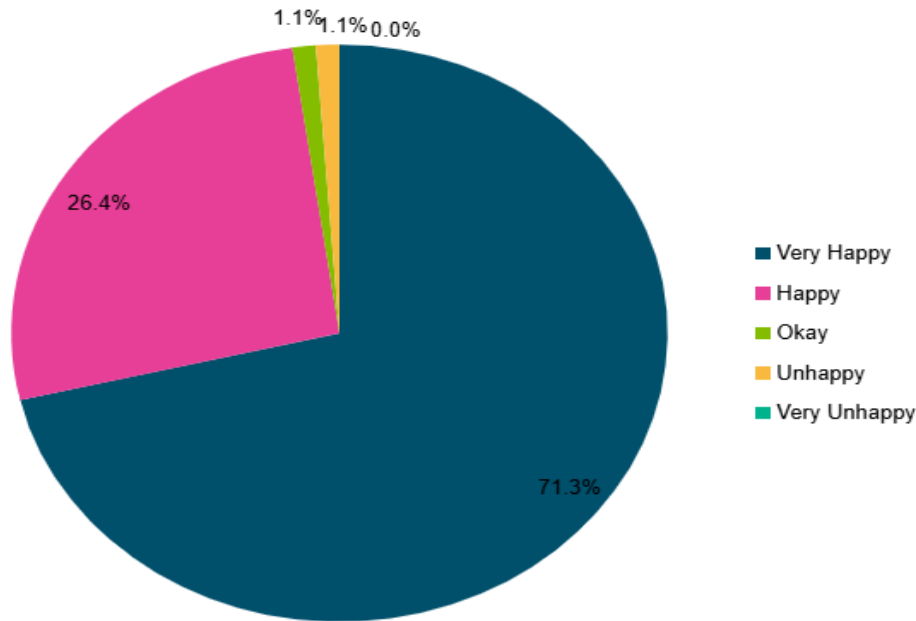89 people answered and 18 people skipped this question.

When do you/they currently use Day Opportunities?
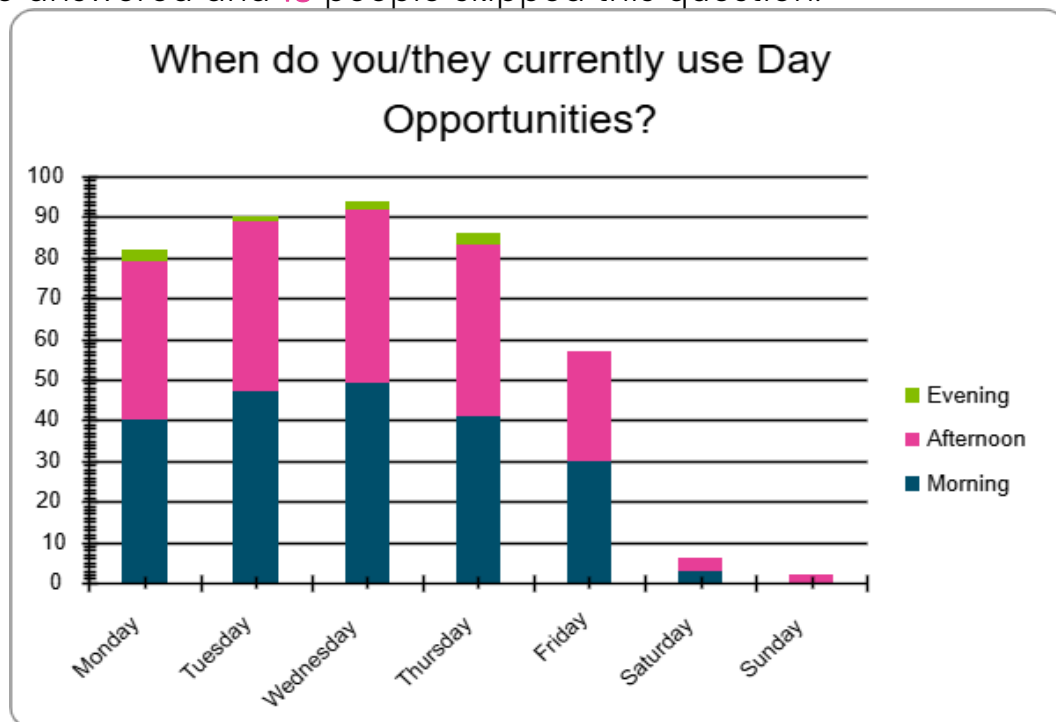
Question 6

87 people answered and 20 people skipped this question.

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How happy are you/they with the Day Opportunities?

- Very Happy
- Happy
- Okay
- Unhappy
- Very Unhappy

1.1% 1.1% 0.0%

26.4%

71.3%

Overview

The responses provide a mix of feedback reflecting the positive aspects of Day Opportunities services, areas for improvement, and unique individual experiences. While many comments express satisfaction, there are mentions of unmet needs and logistical barriers.

Key Themes

1. High Satisfaction with Services

Many respondents expressed happiness and appreciation for Day Opportunities services, highlighting specific aspects they enjoy:

"Carers are so lovely."
"Staff are amazing."
"Growing things, art."
"Cooking sweet stuff cakes."
"Washing up, serving tea and coffee."
"I have said this because in these Day Opportunities I can do lots of activities and see my friends."
"Love it."

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> *"Very happy."*
> *"I get on very well here."*
> *"Happier here than not being here."*

These comments indicate that many users find the services enriching, supportive, and enjoyable, with meaningful activities and social interaction being highly valued.

2. Recognition of Practical Benefits

Some comments emphasised the use of Day Opportunities for carers and service users:

> *"Excellent service at Age UK."*
> *"The flexibility of Direct Payments allowed me to look at a wide range of services over a wide area."*
> *"Has no option about it to give carer a break - Dad."*

This feedback reflects how Day Opportunities provide essential relief for carers and enable service users to engage in structured activities.

3. Concerns and Suggestions for Improvement

While overall sentiment is positive, some respondents identified areas needing attention:

> *"Not much variety that I know of."*
> *"Like to come more often but can't afford it. I'm just sat in on my own."*
> *"I'm unsure what the current Day Opportunities are. My youngest children will require day services post-education and full adult support."*

These comments suggest the need for:
- Expanded activity options to ensure diversity and inclusivity.
- Financial support or affordability programs to make services more accessible.
- Improved communication about available services to increase awareness among potential users.

4. Anticipation of Future Needs

Some responses reflect individuals planning for future engagement with Day Opportunities:

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"At present not using Day Opportunities; however, I can see that in the very near future, I will need to do so for a family member."
*"Currently, my husband and I are unpaid parent carers. We hope to seek employment in the future, with the knowledge that our children will have opportunities as they become adults."*

This emphasises the importance of strategic planning to ensure services are ready to meet the future needs of diverse populations.

Question 7 - What do you/they like best about Day Opportunities?

78 people answered and 29 people skipped this question

The following word cloud provides a visual representation of the most common themes and words mentioned in responses about Day Opportunities services:

Day Opportunities
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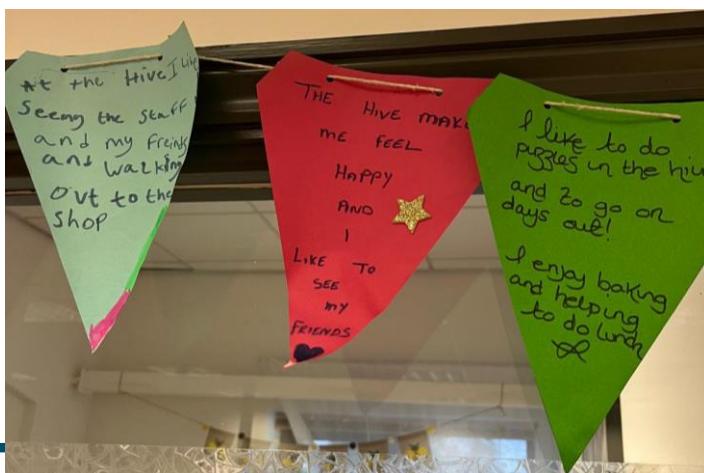
1. Social Interaction and Friendships

- Words like *"friends," "Seeing," "people," "Meeting," "others,"* and *"socialising"* dominate the cloud.
- **Insight:** Social interaction is a critical benefit of Day Opportunities, with many participants emphasising the importance of building and maintaining friendships and spending time with others.

2. Engaging Activities

- Prominent mentions of *"activities," "art," "crafts," "maths," "drawing," "colouring,"* and *"music."*
- **Insight:** Creative and stimulating activities are highly valued, suggesting these programs help participants stay engaged and develop skills or hobbies.

3. Enjoyment and Positivity

- Words like *"fun," "amazing," "like," "enjoy," "nice,"* and *"happy"* highlight the joy and satisfaction participants derive from these services.
- **Insight:** Participants perceive the services as positive and enriching experiences.

4. Staff Support

- The word *"staff"* appears prominently, often associated with words like *"amazing"* and *"kind."*
- **Insight:** Staff members are seen as a cornerstone of these services, providing essential support and contributing to the overall happiness of participants.

5. Opportunities for Growth

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- Words such as *"learning," "skills," "develop,"* and *"opportunities"* emphasise personal development and acquiring new skills.
- **Insight:** Participants value the chance to grow and engage in meaningful activities that enhance their lives.

6. Daily Routine and Structure

- Terms like *"day," "busy,"* and *"working"* suggest the importance of structure in participants' daily lives.
- **Insight:** Day Opportunities provide a sense of purpose and routine, which may be particularly beneficial for individuals who thrive on stability.

Question 8: What activities do you/they like to do during Day Opportunities?

83 people answered and 24 people skipped this question

The responses reveal a wide range of activities enjoyed by individuals accessing Day Opportunities provided by the local authority:

Key Themes and Insights

1. Social Activities

- Frequent Mentions: *Chatting, socialising, working with friends, helping others, and waitering.*
- Insight: Social interaction is a major appeal of Day Opportunities, with participants enjoying both structured and informal opportunities to connect with peers.

2. Creative Activities

- Frequent Mentions: *Arts and crafts, drawing, painting, colouring, knitting, and poetry.*
- Insight: Creative outlets are highly valued, providing participants with ways to express themselves and develop artistic skills.

3. Music and Performing Arts

- Frequent Mentions: *Guitar playing, singing, dancing, karaoke, and drumming.*
- Insight: Music and performing arts are popular choices that provide joy and entertainment, while also supporting confidence-building and social bonding.

4. Cooking and Food Preparation

- Frequent Mentions: *Baking, cooking, making sandwiches, serving food and drinks, waitering, and learning recipes.*
- Insight: Activities related to food are both enjoyable and practical, offering opportunities to learn life skills while engaging in fun and rewarding tasks.

5. Physical and Outdoor Activities

- Frequent Mentions: *Swimming, bowling, gardening, walking, trampolining, basketball, and gym activities.*

- **Insight:** Physical activities are important for both health and enjoyment. Gardening and animal care were also highlighted as fulfilling outdoor pursuits.

6. Skill Development and Independence

- **Frequent Mentions:** *Life skills (ironing, shopping, communication), computing, learning BSL, practicing independence,* and *helping others.*
- **Insight:** Many participants value opportunities to develop practical skills that contribute to their personal growth and independence.

7. Mental and Emotional Wellbeing

- **Frequent Mentions:** *Meditation, mental health support, relaxing activities, inspirational quotes,* and *sensory stories.*
- **Insight:** Activities that promote mental and emotional wellbeing are important to participants, highlighting the need for spaces to relax and focus on self-care.

8. Hobbies and Recreation

- **Frequent Mentions:** *Quizzes, jigsaws, games, word searches,* and *sports.*
- **Insight:** Recreational activities provide entertainment and help participants unwind while engaging in stimulating tasks.

Activity Categories Breakdown

Category	Example Activities	Frequency
Creative	Arts and crafts, painting, poetry, drawing, knitting	Very Common
Social	Chatting, socialising, working with friends, waitering	Very Common
Music and Performance	Singing, dancing, music sessions, karaoke, drumming	Common
Cooking and Food	Baking, cooking, serving, shopping, food preparation	Common
Physical and Outdoor	Swimming, bowling, gardening, walking, sports	Common
Skill Development	Life skills, computing, BSL, communication, independence	Fairly Common
Mental Wellbeing	Meditation, mental health support, relaxing activities	Moderate
Hobbies and Recreation	Games, quizzes, jigsaws, word searches, sports	Moderate

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Question 9: Is there anything we can do to make the current Day Opportunities better for you/them?

48 people answered and 59 people skipped this question

Key Themes and Insights

1. Overall Satisfaction

- Frequent Mentions: *No issues, happy as it is, satisfied with the service, 10/10 service.*
- Insight: A significant number of participants and caregivers are content with the current Day Opportunities, appreciating the friendliness of staff and quality of activities.

2. Flexibility in Services

- Frequent Mentions: *Drop-in opportunities for those with anxiety, flexibility in attendance requirements, one-to-one support.*
- Insight: A more flexible approach to attendance, scheduling, and support could better accommodate individuals with specific needs, such as anxiety or varying abilities to commit to sessions.

3. Support for Independence

- Frequent Mentions: *More independence, personal care skills, ongoing learning opportunities equivalent to employment hours.*
- Insight: There's a desire for structured programs that support skill development for independence and personal care, especially for young adults transitioning to adulthood.

4. Enhanced Activities

- Frequent Mentions: *More gardening, singing and dancing, toy making, baking, woodwork, overnight trips.*
- Insight: Participants would like to see an expansion of current activities to include more creative, physical, and experiential options, including full-day trips and overnight stays.

5. Improved Resources and Funding

- Frequent Mentions: *More funding, access to equipment, transport support.*
- Insight: Resource limitations are recognised as a barrier to further improving services, with calls for better funding, access to specialised equipment, and assistance with transport to activities.

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6. Specialised Support

- **Frequent Mentions:** *Peer support for people with dementia, availability of vetted carers, properly trained staff, and professional chats.*
- **Insight:** There's a need for targeted support for specific groups, such as dementia patients, caregivers, and those requiring professional emotional support or counselling.

7. Physical and Facility Improvements

- **Frequent Mentions:** *Better Wi-Fi, bigger kitchen, more computers, finishing projects.*
- **Insight:** Improvements in physical infrastructure and technology could enhance the quality of activities and services offered.

8. Transport and Accessibility

- **Frequent Mentions:** *Help with transport to activities.*
- **Insight:** Transport remains a key issue for participants, with many requiring support to access Day Opportunities.

Activity Categories Breakdown

Category	Suggestions	Frequency
Flexibility	Drop-in sessions, reduced attendance commitments	Fairly Common
Skill Development	Life skills, independence training, personal care skills	Common
Expanded Activities	Gardening, woodwork, baking, overnight trips	Common
Resources	More funding, equipment, transport	Common
Specialised Support	Dementia peer support, vetted carers, professional chats	Moderate
Facility Improvements	Wi-Fi, larger kitchen, more computers	Moderate
Transport	Assistance to attend activities	Moderate

Question 10

55 people answered and 52 people skipped this question

What would make Day Opportunities even better?
- more awareness better understanding of what day services are
- understanding what you are paying
- Fitting around the support already in place
- Person Centered

Are there any problems with Day Opportunities now?

You don't know what you are paying for

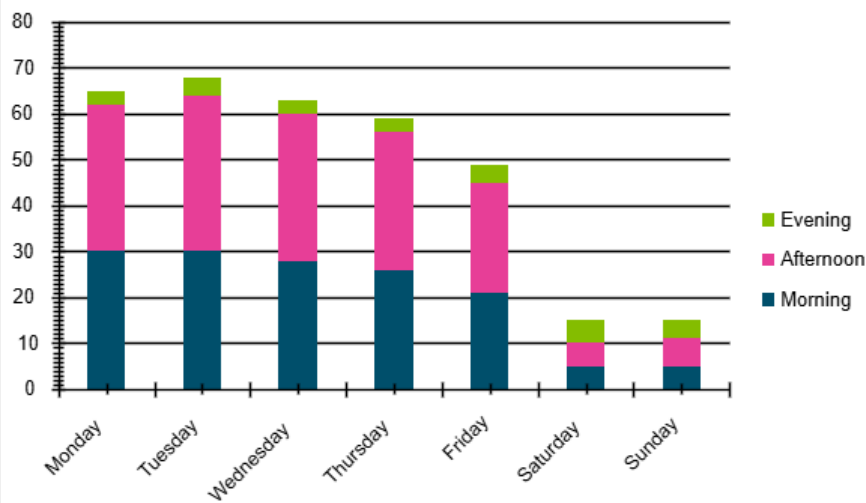What things do you most enjoy doing?
Keeping fit.
Seeing friends
Get out of Darlington
pet care
Day trips
Holidays

Are there any new things you would like to do or learn?
Drive
College
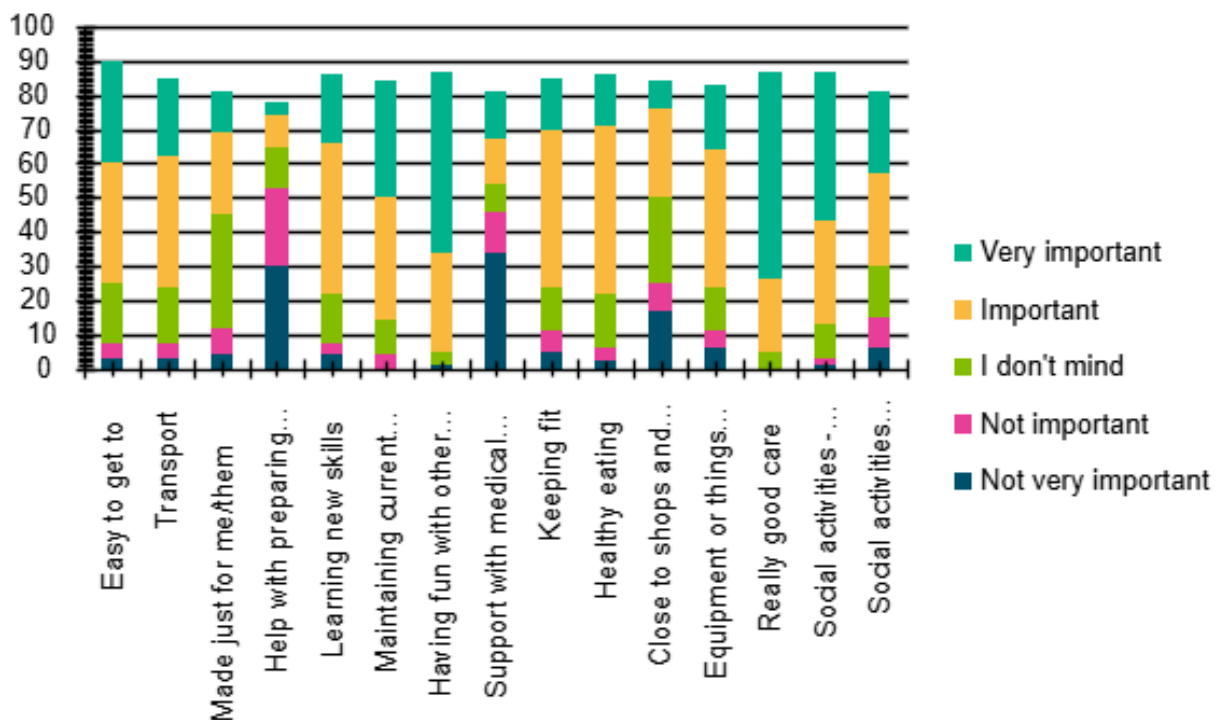Catering course for everyone
Fly in an airplane

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When would you/they like to use Day Opportunities in the future?

Question 11

95 people answered and 12 people skipped this question

How important are these things for the Day Opportunity you/they use?

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Top Priorities

A. Social Connection and Fun

Many participants value social opportunities such as *pub outings, cinemas, football matches*, and group activities (e.g., acting, dancing, Gateway club). Specific interests include *Gary Barlow, Take That, horror films*, and *playing football*. Social settings like *cafés and restaurants* are frequently mentioned, highlighting the importance of casual and accessible group environments.

Implication: Social interaction is not only about group activities but also about creating opportunities for shared interests, tailored to individual and group preferences.

B. Accessibility

Accessibility is achieved through *mobility cars, buses, taxis, and personal vehicles*.

The need for *proximity to shops* for specific dietary requirements (e.g., gluten-free) and food availability during activities was highlighted. Some participants rely on family members, support workers, or their own resources to attend activities. Locations like *Gateway clubs* and *local venues* are frequently noted.

Implication: While some participants have their own transport, others depend on support, so ensuring accessible venues and reliable transportation is essential.

C. Outings and Experiences

Many participants enjoy activities like *bowling, gym visits, going to football matches, and day trips*. Specific mentions of *theatre, horror films, and Baileys at the pub* show the diversity in preferences. Several comments reflect the joy participants feel from these outings, e.g., "I really enjoy the outings," "Enjoy days out."

Implication: Offering a variety of outings, aligned with participants' preferences, fosters engagement and satisfaction.

Moderate Priorities

A. Health and Fitness

Activities like *gym visits* and *football* are mentioned, showing interest in physical activities. Comments about *salad preparation* suggest that healthy

eating initiatives are valued in interactive settings. A few participants highlighted challenges, such as disliking staff changes at gyms or physical limitations, which can hinder participation.

Implication: Fitness and health activities should be tailored to individuals' physical abilities and preferences, with minimal disruption from staffing changes.

B. Skill Development

Activities like *cooking (salad preparation), acting, and dancing* show interest in skill-building programs. A parent's comment about their son maintaining a full life after school highlights the importance of continuity in skill-building and personal development.

Implication: Programs should aim to equip participants with life skills while also fostering long-term personal growth and independence.

Lower Priorities

A. Preparing for Work

Parents of younger participants or those with severe disabilities noted that employment-focused programs are not always applicable. However, some comments highlight the desire for continuity in skills that could translate to meaningful engagement in adulthood, e.g., **"I would like for when he leaves school...to have a full life."**

Implication: While employment preparation may not suit all participants, programs could focus on fostering independence and meaningful engagement for those with different capabilities.

B. Proximity to Shops

Proximity to shops is vital for those needing food alternatives (e.g., gluten-free) or when food is unavailable during activities.

Implication: Ensure venues close to shops or provide food options that cater to dietary restrictions.

Additional Insights from Comments

1. Stability and Familiarity

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Comments like **"don't like staff changes"** and **"friends on a Monday"** suggest that participants value routine and stable relationships with staff and peers.

2. Personalisation and Inclusion

Specific mentions like **"Gary Barlow,"** **"radio station back,"** and **"football with my cousin"** reflect the importance of tailoring activities to individual interests. Comments like **"10/10 staff"** and **"incredible"** indicate strong satisfaction with existing services, reinforcing the need to maintain high standards.

3. Accessibility Challenges

Comments like **"Had to put don't mind...due to severity of my daughter's disability"** and **"find it difficult"** highlight that accessibility is not only about transport but also about ensuring activities are inclusive for all levels of ability.

Question 12 : "What things do you/they like doing that makes you/them have a good day?"

77 people answered and 30 people skipped this questions

The feedback provided indicates a wide range of activities and experiences that contribute to a positive day for the participants. The responses reflect the importance of social interaction, physical activity, creative expression, routine, and personal preferences in shaping a fulfilling day.

1. Social Interaction and Relationships

Key Activities:

Comments like **"Seeing friends"** and **"Having fun with my friends"** highlight the importance of companionship. The value of familiar faces and meaningful interactions, such as *having fun and laughing with people who care* or *talking to people about worries*, was also emphasised.

Implications: Socialising with familiar people, making new friends, and creating a sense of community are crucial to participants' emotional well-being. The feedback suggests that ensuring opportunities for group activities and friendly, supportive environments should be a priority.

2. Physical Activity and Exercise

Key Activities:

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Comments like "Go on a walk," "Swimming with support," and "Karate Monday/Friday" suggest that physical activities are highly valued. Many participants mention activities that provide both physical exercise and social interaction, such as *group exercise classes* and *sports* like *football.*

Implications: Physical activities contribute to participants' sense of well-being and are important for maintaining both physical and mental health. Providing regular opportunities for exercise and movement, especially those that can be done in a group or with support, should be encouraged.

3. Creative and Sensory Activities

Key Activities:

Several comments highlighted creative pursuits, such as *painting*, *art groups*, *making sticky pictures*, and *singing/dancing*. Sensory activities also feature prominently, including *sensory items*, *sensory play*, and *music therapy*. Engaging with sensory experiences, such as *water play*, *cooking*, and *playing with textures*, was noted as enjoyable for some participants.

Implications: Creative expression through art, music, and crafts is a key element of positive engagement. Providing opportunities for participants to express themselves creatively and experience sensory activities can enhance their quality of life and emotional health.

4. Structured and Routine Activities

Key Activities:

Comments such as "Routine, knowing what's going to happen" and "The activities on offer and the structure to the day" reflect the importance of a predictable and organised schedule. Many participants value having a set routine, which gives them a sense of security and reduces anxiety.

5. **Implications:** A well-structured day that includes planned activities is crucial for many participants. Ensuring that programs are predictable and consistent can help participants feel safe and supported.

6. Relaxation and Leisure

Key Activities:

Activities like *watching* TV (e.g., *James Bond*, *Strictly Come Dancing*, *Mr. Bean*), *relaxing music*, and *having a cup of tea/coffee* suggest that relaxation is essential to participants' well-being.

For some, taking time for relaxation and enjoying quiet activities, like *reading magazines* or *playing games* (e.g., *dominos*, *bingo*), is a way to unwind.

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Implications: Leisure and downtime activities, such as watching TV, listening to music, or simply having a cup of tea, are vital for relaxation and emotional recovery. Incorporating these opportunities into programs can support overall well-being.

7. Food and Cooking

Key Activities:

Some participants enjoy activities related to food, such as *food prep*, *making a brew*, and *eating lunch* with others. There are also mentions of *baking* and *cooking*. Specific preferences for certain foods or activities, such as *enjoying a hot chocolate* or *eating at the pub*, were noted.

Implications: Food-related activities, whether cooking or eating with others, are important social and sensory experiences. Programs could focus on providing opportunities for participants to engage in food-related activities, promoting both social interaction and independent living skills.

8. Personal Interests and Hobbies

Key Activities:

Participants mentioned interests such as *sports (football, karate, and swimming)*, *gardening*, *watching movies* (e.g., *James Bond*, *Strictly Come Dancing*), and *photography*. Personalised activities such as *writing poems*, *watching washing machines in the launderette*, and *correcting TV shows* reflect the individuality of some participants' interests.

Implications: Providing opportunities for participants to engage in their personal hobbies and interests helps promote individual choice and satisfaction. Tailoring activities to personal preferences can enhance engagement and foster a sense of accomplishment.

9. Well-being and Emotional Support

Key Activities:

Many participants emphasise the importance of feeling accepted and valued, mentioning *positivity*, *praise*, and *being liked*. The need for emotional support is reflected in comments about being around people who understand specific needs or worries.

Implications: Emotional well-being is fundamental to having a good day. Ensuring a supportive environment where participants feel accepted, valued, and understood is crucial. Positive reinforcement and attention to emotional needs will enhance the quality of participants' experiences.

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Question 13 "Are there any new things you/they would like to do?"

49 people answered and 58 people skipped this question

1. Interest in Creative and Craft Activities

Key Activities:
Some participants expressed an interest in exploring new creative pursuits such as *pottery* or revisiting old hobbies like *woodwork*. Craft-related activities such as *crochet* and *art and craft* were also mentioned.

Implications: Providing opportunities to engage in hands-on, creative activities could meet participants' interests in exploring their artistic sides. Activities like pottery or woodworking could also support skill-building and self-expression.

2. Desire for Physical and Fitness Activities

Key Activities:
Many participants expressed interest in physical activities, ranging from general fitness classes to specific activities like *trampolining* and *horse riding.*

Implications: Expanding the variety of physical activities offered can help participants explore new ways to stay active and healthy. Including both structured classes and casual opportunities could cater to different levels of interest and ability.

3. Interest in Social and Group Experiences

Key Activities:
Participants highlighted the importance of social experiences, such as *meeting new people*, *going out with friends*, or participating in group-based activities. Group trips, such as *beach trips* or *museum trips*, were also suggested.

Implications: Organising outings and group activities can provide participants with enriching social experiences and opportunities to build friendships.

4. Exploration of New Skills and Learning Opportunities

Key Activities:

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Some participants expressed an interest in acquiring new skills, such as *learning to drive*, *learning a language*, or *trying a musical instrument* like the violin. Practical life skills like *meal preparation* and *self-care* were also mentioned as areas of interest.

Implications: Offering skill-development programs that focus on practical, creative, and personal growth could be highly beneficial. This could also support participants in achieving greater independence.

5. Desire for Trips, Outings, and New Environments

Key Activities:

Suggestions like *trips out to new places* or *exploring different environments (e.g., farms or allotments)* indicate a desire to expand horizons and experience new settings.

Implications: Organising day trips or outings to varied locations can provide new experiences and foster a sense of adventure.

6. Individualised and Unique Interests

Key activities included *people watching, ninja warrior* (possibly a creative or cultural interest), *becoming a YouTuber, watching the washing machines at the laundrette.* These responses highlight the unique preferences of some participants, reflecting highly individualised interests.

Implications: Tailoring activities to align with unique and niche interests could enhance engagement and allow for personalised experiences.

7. Contentment and Preference for Routine

A significant number of participants expressed contentment with their current activities and routines, indicating that they do not feel the need for new experiences at this time.

Implications: Maintaining consistency and ensuring that current programs are fulfilling and well-structured is just as important as introducing new opportunities. Participants who prefer routine may benefit from gradual changes rather than sudden new additions.

Question 14: "Are there any problems with the current Day Opportunities now?"

79 people answered and 28 people skipped this questions
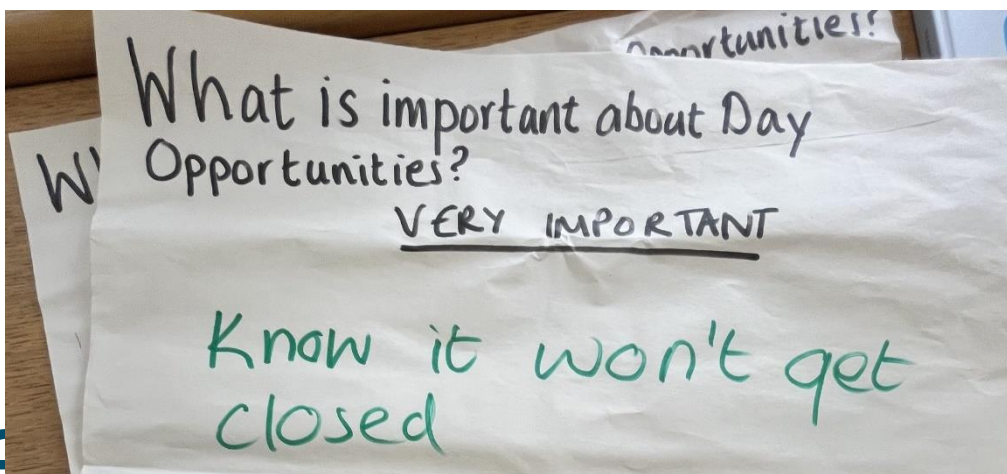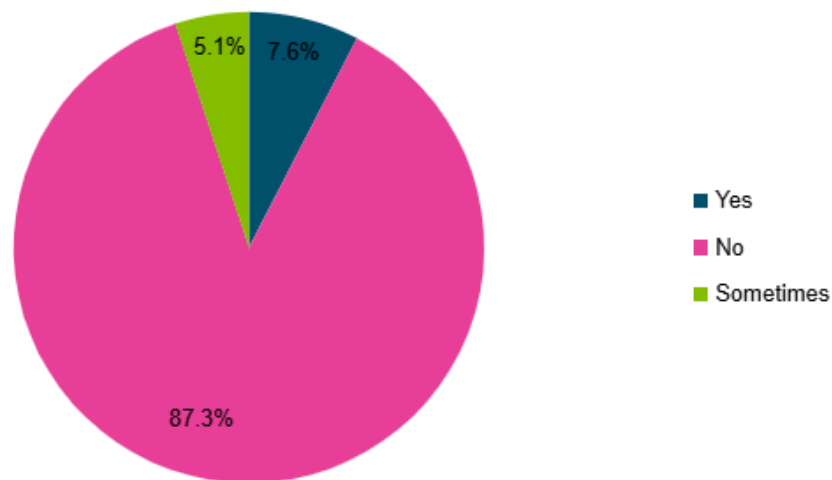
1. Transport and Accessibility Issues

Key Feedback: Participants highlighted difficulties with transportation, particularly for wheelchair users and those reliant on accessible vehicles or buses.

"Transporting wheelchair users as we have few drivers to drive their cars,"
"currently no bus so struggle getting into the car."

Implications: Limited transport options significantly impact individuals' ability to access day opportunities, especially for those with mobility challenges.

2. Limited Opportunities for Specific Groups

Key Feedback: Some participants feel that current offerings do not cater adequately to individuals living with dementia, leaving this group underserved.

"Not enough for people living well with dementia,"
"very few opportunities for those living well with dementia."

Implications: Expanding programs and services tailored to people living with dementia can provide meaningful engagement for this demographic.

3. Staffing and Resource Constraints

Key Feedback: Limited staff availability and lack of resources like Wi-Fi and printers were noted as barriers to enhancing the quality of day opportunities.

"Would benefit from more 1-to-1 – not enough staff at the moment."
"No Wi-Fi, printer at stage."

Implications: Resource and staffing constraints may reduce the ability to provide personalised support and limit access to digital or administrative tools.

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4. Social and Emotional Challenges

Key Feedback: Emotional well-being and interpersonal dynamics within groups can negatively affect participants' experiences.

"When people tell me what to do upsets me,"
"sometimes upset – personality clashes in group."

Implications: Supporting positive group interactions and addressing personality clashes are crucial to maintaining a welcoming and inclusive environment.

5. Communication and Awareness Gaps

Key Feedback: Lack of clear communication about available activities and the desire for more flexible, drop-in opportunities were highlighted.

"More information to be provided on exercise classes,"
"as outlined above about more drop-in groups."

Implications: Improving communication and providing comprehensive, easily accessible information can help participants and carers make the most of available services.

6. Gaps in Services During Holidays

Key Feedback: Families of young people in full-time education expressed frustration about the lack of day opportunities during school holidays.

"Currently unable to access anything like this from social services... it would be nice if there were some services for her when school is closed, especially in the six weeks holidays."

Implications: Expanding holiday-specific services could help families who require additional support during these periods.

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7. Positive Feedback

Key Feedback: Some participants expressed satisfaction with the current day opportunities, indicating that the program meets their needs well.

"Brilliant"

Implications: Retaining and building on successful aspects of the program is essential to maintain positive experiences.

Question 15: "What help is most needed as the young person you care for grows up?"

23 people answered and **84** people skipped this question.

The feedback highlights key areas of concern and support needs for young people as they transition into adulthood. These responses are grouped into recurring themes, offering insights into the challenges faced by carers and young people.

1. Personal Care and Hygiene Support

Key Feedback: Support with personal care and hygiene was highlighted as a primary need for some young people.

Implications: Providing consistent and compassionate personal care services is essential to maintain dignity and health as individuals transition to adulthood.

2. Consistency and Quality of Carers

Key Feedback: Reliable and consistent carers who understand the individual's needs were identified as critical.

"Carers that come regular and are getting better. Mostly in the evening because they want to go out sometimes in the evening."

Implications: Ensuring continuity of care and fostering relationships with regular carers can improve young people's quality of life and confidence.

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3. Socialisation and Building Relationships

Key Feedback: Socialisation was frequently mentioned, with an emphasis on forming meaningful relationships and participating in group activities.

"To continue socialising, accessing life skills," "i like making new friends," "good group of people."

Implications: Opportunities for social engagement in safe and supportive environments should be prioritised to prevent isolation and foster personal growth.

4. Life Skills Development

Key Feedback: Building life skills such as communication, independence, and practical abilities was seen as vital for preparing young people for adulthood.

"Gaining life skills confidence and independence in doing a variety amount of things in a safe environment," "a range of opportunities for them to develop skills."

Implications: Programs that teach everyday skills, like cooking, budgeting, and transportation use, can empower young people to lead more independent lives.

5. Transition from Education

Key Feedback: Several respondents expressed anxiety about the lack of opportunities and services once young people leave full-time education.

"The concern will be what happens when they are no longer in education. What services and opportunities will there be for her then," "post-college there is very little out there."

Implications: There is a critical need to bridge the gap between education and adulthood by offering vocational training, employment support, and social programs tailored to young people with additional needs.

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6. Access to Information and Services

Key Feedback: Difficulty accessing information about available support and services was noted as a barrier.

"Where do you go for information. The only contact I have with social services is for reviews."

Implications: Providing clear and accessible guidance to carers about resources and support options can alleviate stress and improve outcomes for young people.

7. Emotional Support and Well-Being

Key Feedback: Emotional support, positive interactions, and a safe, sensory-friendly environment were identified as crucial.

"Love and attention,"
"communication and high sensory needs,"
"lovely people."

Implications: Ensuring young people feel valued and understood can enhance their emotional well-being and overall quality of life.

8. Employment and Independence

Key Feedback: Some respondents mentioned the importance of linking young people to employment or other meaningful activities that promote independence.

"Links is important for people like me – special needs,"
"opportunities for them to develop skills."

Implications: Collaborating with local businesses and organisations to create tailored job opportunities could provide a pathway to independence for young adults.

9. Positive Experiences with Current Services

Key Feedback: Some participants praised the existing services, particularly staff and activities, which contribute to a positive experience.

"Lovely to come along well treated staff are great,"
"girls are fabulous (staff),"
"fun,"
"everything fine with me."

Implications: Retaining and expanding these positive elements can further enhance the support provided to young people.

Question 16: "What help/training would you like to help you support someone who is growing up?"

9 people answered and 98 people skipped this question.

The responses highlight specific areas where carers feel they need additional help or training to better support young people transitioning into adulthood. Key themes include:

1. Respite and Support for Carers

Key Feedback: Carers expressed the need for respite services, especially during the evenings, to alleviate stress and give them time to recharge.

"Evening help to give carer a break."

Implications: Introducing more flexible respite care options can significantly benefit carers' mental and emotional well-being, enabling them to provide better support.

2. Transition Support

Key Feedback: Carers highlighted a lack of guidance during key transitions, such as moving from college to daycare.

"I don't need help now but at the transition stage from College to Daycare there is very little information and support to help parents/carers."

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Implications: Developing structured transition programs and better communication between services can ease the process for carers and young people.

3. Access to Information

Key Feedback: Some carers felt they lacked awareness of available resources and options for the young person in their care.

"Knowing what's available, having a variety of options, them getting fulfilment."

Implications: Providing clear, centralised information about services and opportunities can empower carers to make informed decisions.

4. Specialised Training

Key Feedback: Training in areas such as occupational therapy techniques, puberty management, communication skills, and fostering independence was requested.

"OT help re breaking tasks down, managing puberty,"

"communication skills, how to stay safe, learning emotions, independence skills."

Implications: Offering specialised workshops or courses in these areas can equip carers with practical strategies to better support the young person's growth and development.

5. Emotional and Relational Support

Key Feedback: One respondent emphasised the emotional aspect of providing love and attention, reflecting the importance of relationship-building alongside practical skills.

"Love."

Implications: While not a "training" need, this feedback underlines the importance of empathy and emotional connection in caregiving.
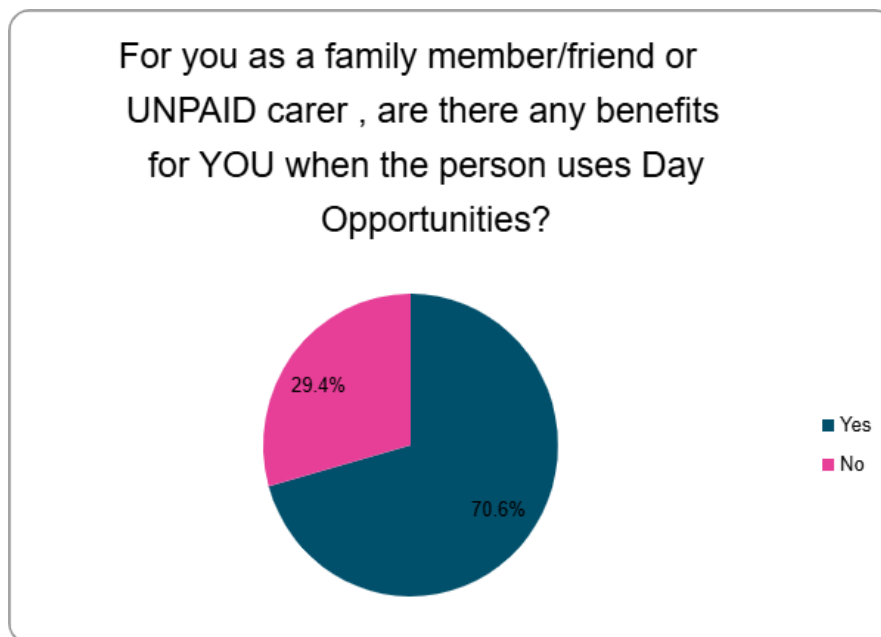
6. Situational Needs

Key Feedback: Some carers indicated that they do not currently need additional training due to their specific circumstances.

"My son is in supported living, I believe that the training is adequate,"
"n/a as my children are not yet young adults."

Implications: Tailoring training programs to address different caregiving situations (e.g., supported living, younger children) ensures resources are appropriately targeted.

Question 17

17 people answered and 90 people skipped this question.

For you as a family member/friend or UNPAID carer , are there any benefits for YOU when the person uses Day Opportunities?

- 70.6% Yes
- 29.4% No

The feedback to this question highlights significant benefits for family members, friends, and unpaid carers when the individuals they support participate in Day Opportunities. These benefits are grouped into recurring themes, emphasising the value Day Opportunities bring to the broader support network.

1. Respite and Personal Time

Key Feedback: Many respondents emphasised the opportunity to take a break from caregiving responsibilities, allowing time for rest, relaxation, and personal interests.

"Gives me a well-deserved break, time to maybe catch up on sleep and relax, a mental and physical break,"
"I am able to get some down time,"
"Better ability to do things I enjoy."

Implications: Day Opportunities serve as a critical form of respite care, helping carers recharge and maintain their mental and physical health.

2. Practical Benefits

Key Feedback: Carers mentioned the practical advantages of having time to manage household responsibilities, errands, and other obligations.

"Time to complete other important tasks such as life admin, shopping, other errands,"
"It means I have time to do things with other family members, to do the day-to-day things involved in running a house."

Implications: By reducing the day-to-day pressures on carers, Day Opportunities help them balance their caregiving roles with other responsibilities.

3. Peace of Mind

Key Feedback: Carers appreciate the reassurance that the person they care for is safe, active, and engaged in meaningful activities.

"Knowing that my son is out safely, experiencing different opportunities means I've been able to pursue a career,"
"Piece of mind that my son is active and engaged,"
"Knowing they are in a safe place."

Implications: The structured and supervised nature of Day Opportunities reduces stress and anxiety for carers, allowing them to focus on other aspects of their lives.

4. Social Inclusion and Enrichment

Key Feedback: Carers value the social and educational opportunities that Day Opportunities provide, which enhance the lives of those they care for.

"Person is engaged in activities and with others,"
"Knowing that our young people are accessing a stimulating environment outside of the home,"
"As a parent, I want to see my son having an enriched and fulfilled life."

Implications: Seeing their loved ones thrive in a stimulating and inclusive environment improves carers' emotional well-being and satisfaction.

5. Support for the Whole Family

Key Feedback: Carers noted the broader impact on family dynamics, enabling them to spend time with other family members and improve overall household harmony.

"Day Opportunities support the whole family,"
"It means I have time to do things with other family members."

Implications: By easing caregiving demands, Day Opportunities allow carers to strengthen relationships within the family.

6. Career and Independence

Key Feedback: For some carers, Day Opportunities provide the freedom to maintain employment or engage in independent pursuits.

"This has also been my son's routine. The daily break from each other is healthy...means I've been able to pursue a career."

Implications: The flexibility offered by Day Opportunities enables carers to sustain their careers, contributing to financial stability and personal fulfilment.

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7. Emotional Well-Being

Key Feedback: Carers take emotional comfort in knowing that their loved ones are living fulfilling and meaningful lives.

"Having an enriched and fulfilled life for my son would be the benefit to me,"
"Mum has a day where she is out and stimulated."

Implications: The emotional relief gained from seeing loved ones thrive helps carers feel more confident and supported in their roles.

Question 18: "What would improve Day Opportunities from your perspective as a family member, friend, or unpaid carer?"

13 people answered and **94** skipped this question.

The responses reflect a combination of practical suggestions, emotional needs, and systemic concerns, providing valuable insights into how Day Opportunities can better meet the needs of participants and their families or carers.

1. Accessibility and Information

Key Feedback: Difficulty accessing services and understanding the transition from education to adult services is a significant concern.

"If they were more accessible and if information on how to access the services were more readily available,"
"Currently feel like you get passed from pillar to post,"
"Unsure what the pathway looks like post-education."

Implications: Improving communication and providing clear, centralised information about services and pathways would alleviate stress for families and carers.

2. Respite and Flexibility for Carers
Key Feedback: Carers emphasised the need for more flexibility in service hours and additional respite options to accommodate their schedules and reduce stress.

"A break from caring,"

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"Home an hour later (5 pm instead of 4 pm) would have been very helpful whilst working,"
"Support the whole family."

Implications: Extending service hours and introducing flexible care options could help carers balance caregiving with work or personal responsibilities.

3. Additional Services and Options

Key Feedback: Respondents highlighted the need for increased availability of services, such as drop-in sessions, exercise classes, and additional daycare facilities.

"Drop-in sessions,"
"Exercise classes as he is getting worse to keep up morale,"
"More days,"
"More Day Care Facilities."

Implications: Expanding service offerings and creating new facilities or programs could address gaps in availability and ensure diverse needs are met.

4. Cost and Financial Burden

Key Feedback: The financial burden of topping up payments for services is a concern for some families.

"Cost. Direct payments doesn't cover the daily rate and it has to be topped up. I'm sure for some people this would be a financial burden."

Implications: Reviewing funding models and ensuring that direct payments adequately cover service costs can ease financial pressures on families.

5. Emotional and Family-Centred Support

Key Feedback: Respondents expressed the need for both shared activities and confidence in the safety and quality of care.

"I would like to join in the activities with my son to have fun together,"

"I would also like to feel comfortable to leave him somewhere safe as I do when he's at school."

Implications: Incorporating family-inclusive activities and ensuring high standards of safety and trust can improve carers' experiences and emotional well-being.

6. Contingency and Sustainability

Key Feedback: Concerns about the lack of alternative facilities highlight a need for contingency planning and service sustainability.

"If for any reason the one my children attend was to close there is nothing else suitable out there."

Implications: Ensuring the availability of multiple facilities and programs can provide families with reliable options in case of closures or disruptions.

Question 19: "Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your/their Day Opportunities?"

18 people answered and 89 people skipped this question.

The responses to this question offer a mix of positive feedback, personal reflections, and suggestions for improvement. Recurring themes are as follows:.

1. Overall Satisfaction and Positive Experiences

Key Feedback: Many respondents expressed high levels of satisfaction, with enthusiastic praise for the service, staff, and overall experience.

"Mama day opportunity is absolutely excellent,"
"Love it love it love it, staff are incredible,"
"Everything about it is good,"
"It's fun to attend."

Implications: The overwhelmingly positive responses highlight that Day Opportunities are meeting the needs of participants effectively, creating a supportive and enjoyable environment.

2. Appreciation of Staff

Key Feedback: The quality and dedication of the staff were frequently praised, with many participants emphasising the positive relationships they have with staff members.

"Love all the staff,"
"I like everybody and all the staff at xxxx,"
"Staff are incredible."

Implications: The staff's role is central to the success of the program. Providing ongoing training and recognition will ensure staff continue to deliver high-quality support.

3. Social Connection and Loneliness

Key Feedback: One respondent highlighted feelings of loneliness and the need for someone to talk to during difficult moments.

"I am a bit lonely, sometimes I get a bit upset and would like to talk to somebody."

Implications: While the program is highly valued, addressing individual emotional and social needs could improve the experience for participants who feel isolated.

4. Enjoyment of Activities and Outings

Key Feedback: Participants enjoy the activities provided, particularly outings and group events, which are often highlighted as a highlight of the program.

"I enjoy doing what I do now,"
"I also like how we sometimes go out for day trips, which is one of my favourite things to do."

Implications: Maintaining a variety of engaging activities, including outings, will continue to enhance participant satisfaction.

5. Suggestions for Improvement

Key Feedback: Specific suggestions included adding new activities (e.g., a pinball machine) and addressing transport challenges.

"Wanted pinball machine, activity,"
"Transport issues at the moment."

Implications: Listening to participants' suggestions and addressing logistical issues such as transport will show responsiveness and further improve the service..

6. Gratitude and Acknowledgment

Key Feedback: Respondents expressed gratitude for the service and its positive impact on their lives.

"Thank you so much to all,"
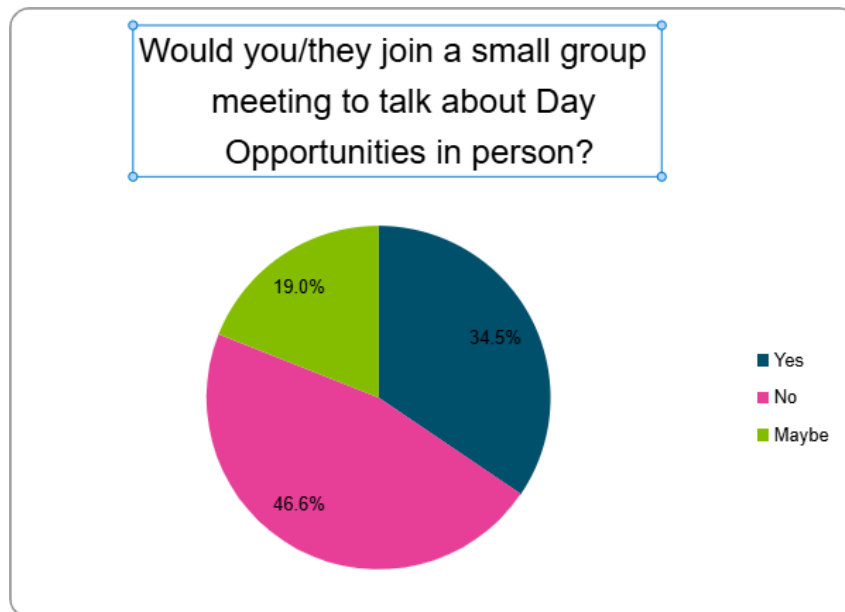*"Really good opened this fantastic service. Relaxed."*

Implications: Regularly celebrating successes and showing appreciation for staff and participants can foster goodwill and continued satisfaction.

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Question 20

58 people answered and 49 people skipped this question

Would you/they join a small group meeting to talk about Day Opportunities in person?

- Yes: 34.5%
- No: 46.6%
- Maybe: 19.0%

Question 21: If yes, please give us your contact details to get in touch. (We will not share this data with Darlington Borough Council) (GDPR)

30 people answered and 77 people skipped this question

Question 22:

If yes, what days and times would be best for you to come along?
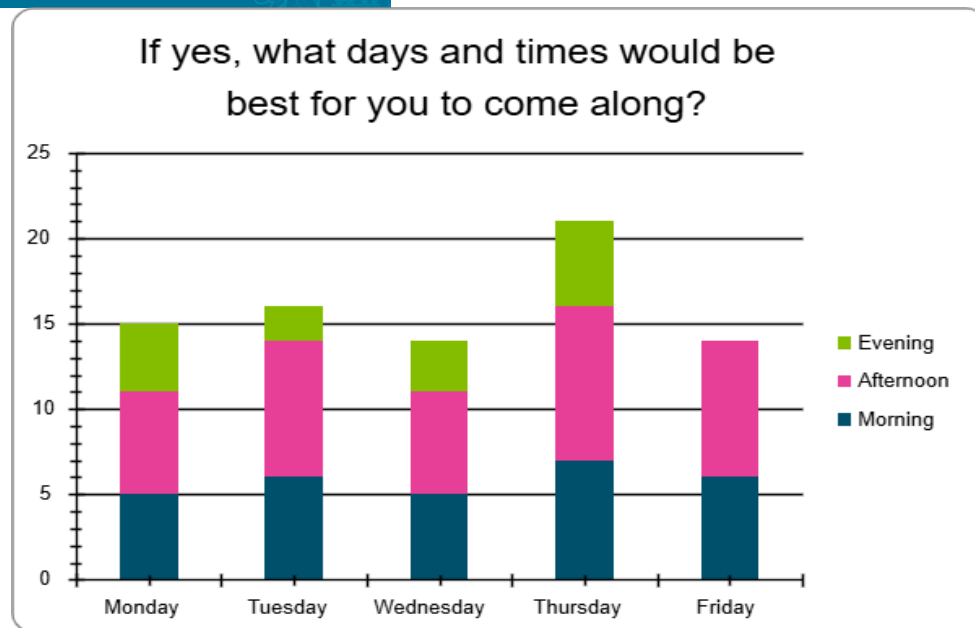
Conclusions

1. **High User Satisfaction:** Many participants and carers expressed appreciation for current day opportunities, valuing social interaction, supportive staff, and meaningful activities. However, feedback also highlighted unmet needs and barriers to access.

2. **Critical Needs:** Services are most in demand for individuals with learning disabilities, representing 71.7% of respondents. Other key groups include those with dementia, physical disabilities, and mental health support needs. The growing need for tailored support for neurodiverse individuals and those experiencing isolation was evident.

3. **Barriers to Participation:** Challenges include transport difficulties, affordability issues, limited activity variety, and gaps in service availability during holidays or for underserved groups. These barriers prevent full accessibility and engagement.

4. **Transportation:** Day opportunities struggled with transportation sharing. Vehicles were at times difficult to find availability for. Some of the vehicles were not fit for purpose when wheelchair transportation was required and sometimes did not have enough seats to transport full groups, meaning some people could be left out.

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5. **Finance:** Many of the services would love to open up to more people but funding is often an issue. Participants would like to attend sessions on a more regular basis, but funding is often a barrier. Some participants with a learning difficulty were no longer able to attend sessions due to changes to the way their care is funded. Having a personal budget was sometimes felt to be paying for a service that used to be funded separately and therefore they felt it was free of charge to them in the past.

6. **Importance of Routine and Structure:** Many participants value predictable routines and familiar environments, while others seek opportunities to explore new activities and skills.

7. **Role of Staff:** Supportive and well-trained staff are central to the program's success, with participants frequently praising their positive interactions with staff members.

Recommendations

1. **Expand Activity Options:**

   - Introduce creative pursuits like pottery, woodworking, and music programs.

   - Add more physical activities, including gym classes, team sports, and pool-based exercises.

   - Provide opportunities for group outings to beaches, museums, or city landmarks.

2. **Address Accessibility and Transport:**

   - Enhance transport services, including options for wheelchair users and rural participants.

   - Increase funding for transport support to reduce barriers to access.

3. Support for Underserved Groups:

- Develop targeted programs for neurodivergent individuals and those with dementia.

- Incorporate mental health and sensory-friendly activities.

4. Foster Independence and Skill Development:

- Offer programs focusing on life skills, employment readiness, and practical abilities like cooking and budgeting.

- Provide structured support for young adults transitioning from education to day care services.

5. Enhance Communication and Awareness:

- Improve outreach to raise awareness of available services, especially among carers and potential users.

- Create accessible resources that guide users through service options and transitions.

6. Increase Flexibility and Accessibility:

- Introduce drop-in sessions and more flexible attendance requirements to accommodate varying needs.

- Expand service hours, particularly during holidays and evenings, to support carers and working families.

7. Focus on Staff Development:

- Ensure ongoing training and adequate staffing levels to maintain high-quality care and support.

- Address gaps in one-on-one support for participants requiring additional assistance.

8. Build on Successes:

- Retain and enhance well-received elements, such as engaging activities, friendly staff interactions, and social opportunities.

- Gather regular feedback to continually refine and improve services.

9. Prioritise Emotional Well-Being:

- Develop programs that address loneliness, provide emotional support, and encourage positive group dynamics.

10. Ensure Financial Sustainability:

- Review and adapt funding models to reduce the financial burden on participants and carers.

- Explore partnerships and grants to enhance service offerings and infrastructure.

- Look at models for making sessions more financially affordable to the wider population.

- Ensure those in charge of their own budgets, fully understand payments for Day Opportunities.

DBC Response

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healthwatch