

## Summary Report Age Concern Mystery Shopper Activity

### **Acknowledgements**

Grateful thanks go to the Kent LINK Mystery Shoppers who helped with this project. These were Jim Hancock, David Morris and Ray Fuller. Others also offered their support, but due to various unexpected constraints (including the weather) were unable to take part.

### **Introduction:**

For this second stage in the project, a series of unannounced visits and telephone calls were made by the Mystery Shoppers to the following day centres:

- Dartford
- Gravesend
- Maidstone (Hambledown House)
- Northfleet
- Sevenoaks
- Swanscombe & Greenhithe
- Tonbridge (Town Lock Day Centre)
- Tunbridge Wells (Wood Street).

The visitor / caller posed as a member of the public who was interested in a service and making an enquiry for themselves or on behalf of an elderly relative or friend, either through making a visit or telephone call.

### **Methodology**

The Mystery Shoppers were given a series of scenarios in advance to show them the type of situation which they might be representing when undertaking the activity. They were asked to record their observations and findings on a checklist which was provided, to be completed as soon as possible after leaving the centre.

The Mystery Shoppers who conducted the activity by visiting the centres were asked to judge the welcome they received, including access to centre, telephone manner (if a call was made to the centre in advance), ease of finding the centre, greeting on arrival, and the atmosphere, including the furniture, smell, temperature and general ambiance of the centre.

All of the mystery shoppers were asked to enquire about the provision made by the centre for the following:

- Transport
- Refreshments
- Dietary provision and meals
- Services such as hairdressing, chiropody
- Dementia or mental health conditions
- Trips
- Entertainment and stimulus.

For those visits which were conducted over the telephone, the Mystery Shoppers were asked to concentrate on the more tangible questions and to find out information about the provision which the centre offered in the above areas. They were also invited to record observations about the helpfulness of the person they spoke to and how easy it was to get through on the telephone.

## **Findings**

The findings incorporate the observations and records of both those LINK participants who completed a visit to the centre and those who made contact with the centre over the telephone. Where possible, one of each was completed for each centre. Some of the observations below are reported in the participant's own words where this is considered to add value – these are denoted using speech marks.

## **Dartford**

This centre received a visit and a telephone call.

### **Information**

The centre is open daily from Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 4.00pm. Transport for clients is provided door to door and is included in the cost of the centre, which is £6.20. Clients are served tea and toast on arrival at the centre in the morning and there are hot and cold drinks and snacks available later on. Lunch is also included in the price and there is a varied menu, with a main course and a dessert, including provision for special diets. The clients are mixed ability, and some have dementia.

There is a bathing service available for attendees at a cost of £2.50. Hairdressing is available at the centre on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and chiropody is available every six weeks, as well as optical and hearing aid services. A district nurse visits the centre regularly and is available at all times to discuss any medical matters with clients should they need to. A variety of client led outings such as pub meals, theatre trips and summer outings are arranged by the centre, with the cost varying depending on the activity and the venue. Clients are encouraged to get involved with daily activities such as chess, scrabble, cards and a variety of other board games and there are also regular quizzes and bingo sessions held. Keep fit classes are held on Wednesdays and groceries are available to buy three times a week.

**Welcome**

The caller received a helpful telephone response. The visitor attempted to contact the centre in advance to arrange a visit but was unable to speak to the manager, who was already on a call. When he had not received a call back over an hour later he decided to visit unannounced. On arrival he was greeted by the manager, who gave him a warm welcome and apologised for not having returned the earlier call. The centre is located within a sheltered housing complex and the visitor reported that there were no clear directional signs visible before the main entrance making it difficult to find. There is good disabled access and the centre appeared tidy from the outside.

**Atmosphere**

The visitor reported that the centre (including the toilets) was clean and well maintained with an open plan lounge. The furnishings were clean and comfortable. The visitor reported that there was a pleasant ambiance at the centre and that clients appeared happy. There were no problems reported with regard to temperature or atmosphere at the centre. The visitor reported that he would be happy to use this centre.

**Gravesend**

This centre received a telephone call.

**Information**

The centre is open daily from 9.00am to 5.00pm but transport home is available from 2.00pm onwards. The cost of the centre is £4.00, including a set lunch menu which caters for special dietary requirements. Transport is available for an additional cost of £3.30. Clients have access to a tea bar and a small shop, this provides breakfast for example egg on toast for 70p. Bathing is available at a cost of £3.90. Hairdressing is available most days at the centre and chiropody three days a week at a cost of £13.50. The centre arranges gentle exercise twice a week, and there is bingo hosted daily. Raffles and quizzes are also held regularly, there are day trips mainly in the summer months, as well as two to three holidays per year (either a weekend or five days).

**Welcome**

The caller reported a very helpful telephone response and the centre offered to send information leaflets out to him.

**Atmosphere**

This centre only received a telephone call so it was not possible to make observations on the atmosphere at the centre.

**Maidstone**

Two telephone calls were carried out enquiring about the Harbledown House centre.

**Information**

The centre is open Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 10.30am to 2.30pm. Refreshments are provided twice during the day. The cost of the centre is £4.20, or £3.90

without transport. Some of the current visitors have mild dementia. Bathing is available at a cost of £3.00. Services such as hairdressing or chiropody are available by arrangement and computer classes are also available for clients. Day trips arranged, particularly during the summer months, although these are subject to the availability of transport and volunteers. A set lunch menu is provided for clients at the centre, the price is included in the cost of the centre and dietary needs are catered for. Hot drinks and snacks are available throughout the day at no extra cost. Activities which are available at the centre include musical bingo quizzes, talks, exercise classes and a variety of board games including chess and scrabble. There is also a Nintendo Wii at the centre.

### **Welcome**

Both callers experienced difficulty in reaching the centre. For the first caller, staff at the centre were unable to take the call initially, but called back on his mobile. For the second centre, the enquiry was dealt with by telephone with a member of staff from the centre in Mill Street.

### **Atmosphere**

Due to the difficulty in reaching the centre by telephone to arrange an appointment, there was no visit made to the centre, so unfortunately the visitors were unable to make any observations on the atmosphere at the centre.

<b>Northfleet</b>
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This centre received a visit.

### **Information**

The centre is open from 9.00am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday and the centre hosts a lunch club on Sunday from 10.00am until 3.00pm. The cost is £4.50 per day, with lunch included and there is a charge of £2.50 for transport to the centre and home. Hot drinks are available, at a charge of 45p, and biscuits are 2p. Special dietary requirements are catered for at the centre.

Services available to clients at the centre include hairdressing (from £3.00), bathing / showering (£3.00), laundry (£4.00) and chiropody (£10.00). Other services which are provided on a regular basis are dentistry, opticians, a hearing aid clinic, benefit / welfare advice and library. The centre arranges a number of regular activities including sing-a-longs, bingo and quizzes, and there are monthly visits from the local choral society for a 'Silver Song' group. The centre also arranges regular trips which are client led, and the cost of these is dependent on the activity and venue. A number of evening groups are held at the centre, Bridge Club on Tuesday and Thursday from 7.15pm until 10.30pm, Tai Chi on Wednesday from 7.00pm until 9.00pm and Whist Club on Friday from 7.00pm until 10.30pm. Clients of the centre can attend these groups, although transport is not provided as they are operated by outside organizations. There are also two rural groups operated by the centre; Culverstone fortnightly on a Tuesday and Vigo on a Wednesday.

### **Welcome**

On arrival, the visitor was greeted by the centre receptionist. The centre is located on a main road and is signposted clearly. The access was appropriate for disabled visitors and the outside of the building was tidy and well maintained.

## **Atmosphere**

The visitor reported that the inside of the centre (including the toilets) was clean and well maintained and the furniture was comfortable. The temperature was appropriate and there was a pleasant ambience amongst the clients. The visitor reported that he would use the centre in later years if given the choice.

<b>Sevenoaks</b>
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This centre received a telephone call and two visits.

## **Information**

The centre is open daily Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 2.30pm. Door to door transport for attendees is provided, with buses collecting clients between 9.00am and 9.30am. Lunch is provided, and this is included in the price, with a choice for main course and dessert and any special dietary needs are met. Refreshments are provided twice, with hot and cold drinks, cakes and biscuits at opening and in the afternoon. The cost to attend the centre is £7.00 including transport, or £6.50 without. There is an Age Concern office about half a mile from the centre which has a computer centre and offers free lessons for anybody who is interested. There is one computer at the centre for clients to use.

The centre welcomes visitors with dementia or mental health issues. Bathing is available with trained carers and a special bath. Services such as hairdressing and chiropody are provided, as well some massage / therapy services being available. Day trips are arranged at the centre, in the summer for example, they might go down to the river at Wateringbury. The cost of the trip could be up to £14, which includes all transport costs and food. Activities available to attendees of the centre include bingo and craft activities, there are CDs and radio available if clients want to listen to music and there is also a large TV with a Nintendo Wii console. The centre prepares for celebrations for example Christmas, Valentine's Day and many other ethnic celebrations throughout the year.

## **Welcome**

The caller received a helpful telephone response. The first visitor contacted the centre in advance to arrange the visit and was sent a map and directions in the post. He received a warm welcome from staff and volunteers on arrival, with a cup of tea within half a minute of arrival. The centre was 'satisfactory' in terms of how easy it was to find although he received "first class directions". The entrance signs were new and bright, and the access was tidy and suitable for a wheelchair user with ramps at the office and centre. The visitor also received a warm welcome from existing clients and reported that he felt the staff he met would make every effort to make potential clients feel at home. He felt that they were "not just doing a job but that they really cared for the people there, a sign of a happy, well-managed centre". The second visitor was greeted by the centre manager and noted that there was a noticeable unpleasant odour in the air at the time he visited.

## **Atmosphere**

The first visitor reported that the atmosphere was "more like a club than a day centre" and that he observed great respect between staff and clients. The furniture was comfortable and clean and the visitor reported that much of it looked new. With regard to the temperature, the visitor recorded that it was a cold day and he was pleased to remove his coat. There was a pleasant ambience, and most people were chatting away to others. The visitor spoke to a few who were

pleased to be there. The second visitor echoed the sentiment that the clients appeared to be happy with the service received. Both visitors reported that if given the choice, they would attend the centre.

## **Swanscombe & Greenhithe**

This centre received a visit.

### **Information**

The centre is open from 9.00am – 3.00pm Monday to Friday. The cost to attend is £7.00 per day, including return transport, lunch and refreshments throughout the day. For those clients who do not require transport, the cost is £4.70. A varied lunch menu is available and the centre is able to cater for those with special dietary requirements. Clients can use the bathing / showering service at a cost of £2.10 and there is also a hairdressing facility four days a week, for which the cost is dependent on the service required. Chiropody, optical and hearing aid services are provided at two weekly intervals, again the cost varies depending on the service required. A district nurse visits the centre regularly and is available at all times to discuss any medical matters with clients.

The centre holds regular keep fit classes and a variety of client led outings are arranged throughout the year. The staff encourage clients to take part in daily activities including chess, scrabble and various other board games. Quizzes and bingo sessions are also arranged regularly. A client led committee is in place and meets regularly with the management to discuss a variety of topics.

### **Welcome**

The visitor was met by the centre manager. The centre is located in a small cul-de-sac within a residential area, the visitor felt that it could be difficult to find as there were no clear directional signs visible before the main entrance. There was suitable access for visitors using a wheelchair and the outside of the centre was tidy with no litter.

### **Atmosphere**

The visitor reported that although the centre was clean and well maintained, there was no central heating at the time of his visit due to a boiler malfunction. The centre was being heated by portable electric heaters, but it was hoped that the repairs to the boiler would be imminent. The furniture in the main lounge where the majority of the clients appeared to spend their time consists of a table and chair layout and there were no armchairs in this area. The visitor did not feel that the temperature was comfortable and based on the environment he encountered the day he visited, would not consider using the centre in its present state.

## **Tonbridge**

This centre received a telephone call and two visits.

### **Information**

The centre is open from 9.30am to 3.00pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. The cost to attend the centre is £7.50 including transport. Customers arrive between 9.00am and 9.30am.

Refreshments are available throughout the day and a varied lunch menu is provided, catering for special diets as required. There were no clients with obvious mental health conditions, and one visitor was informed that there are particular centres in Tonbridge which offer additional support for clients with these needs.

Bathing is available onsite as an additional service and hairdressing and chiropody are available by arrangement. Regular trips are arranged, particularly in spring and summer and there are no restrictions on these in terms volunteers or transport. The centre runs a National Lottery Syndicate and if no client wins, then the money is added to the centre funds. Activities which clients can get involved with include Nintendo Wii, quizzes, musical bingo, exercise classes, crafts and talks and there are a variety of board games which clients have access to.

### **Welcome**

The caller noted that he received a very helpful and informative response when he managed to get through on the telephone, but there was no response to his first call.

The centre offered to send information about purchase and rent sheltered accommodation which would be appropriate to the needs of the potential 'client' which one visitor was posing on behalf of. It appeared that signs showing the location of the centre, which is located within a sheltered housing complex close to the town centre and the River Medway, could be missed. Wheelchair access to the centre is via a side door. Both visitors received a very warm welcome from staff and volunteers who greeted them when they arrived. One visitor commented that the appearance of the building was not impressive from the outside but that once inside it was cosy and comfortable. He commented that the staff would like a new dedicated building.

### **Atmosphere**

Both visitors reported that the centre had a nice atmosphere and that the centre (including the toilets) was clean and well maintained. There was a pleasant overall ambience and the furniture was comfortable.

## **Tunbridge Wells**

This centre received a telephone call and a visit.

### **Information**

The centre is open daily from 9.30am to 4.00pm Monday to Friday. The cost to use the centre is £6.50 and lunch is included in this charge. There is a further £2.50 charge for transport. Refreshments are available twice during the day in the form of hot and cold drinks and snacks. Services available at the centre include hairdressing (at a cost of £6.50 - £28.50), chiropody (£15.00) and bathing (£8.00). A beautician also makes regular visits to the centre and a manicure service and reflexology is available. Trips such as pub lunches are organised, particularly during the summer months, but these are restricted due to the availability of transport. Charges for the additional trips vary depending on the venue / location.

There are a variety of activities available at the centre including daily musical bingo and quizzes and equipment such as a Nintendo Wii, electronic darts and various board games is also provided for clients to use.

**Welcome**

The caller received a generally helpful response. The centre is located near the town centre, with good wheelchair access. The visitor located the centre with a little difficulty and received a warm welcome from the receptionist on arrival. Prospective clients are visited in their homes by the Centre Manager or deputy to discuss their requirements prior to attending the centre, which aims to ensure that each individual's needs are catered for.

**Atmosphere**

The visitor reported that there was a pleasant ambience in the centre, there were no problems with odour or temperature and that clients appeared to be happy with the service. The furniture was comfortable and there was a nice atmosphere. The visitor reported that he would use the centre in later years if given the opportunity.

**Summary**

In summary, the account above reflects the opinions of the individual LINK Mystery Shoppers based on their experience on the day they attended the centre. It is also worthy of note that the impressions of the atmospheres in services are very much subjective and may be difficult to quantify.

The LINK Mystery Shoppers were able to glean a great deal of information on the services which are offered to clients at the centres, which compliments the information already obtained in the focus groups which form the first part of the project.

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March 2010