

# DEMENTIA FRIENDLY CINEMA



Calamity Jane – Singalong



It is an opportunity for people who have dementia and their families and carers to be able to go out and do something which is just about normal life.”

BARBARA DOUGLAS, QUALITY OF LIFE PARTNERSHIP

Tyneside Cinema’s Dementia Friendly Cinema monthly daytime film screenings are based on a successful action research pilot project run in 2015. The pilot was initiated by the Elders Council of Newcastle, supported by a steering group of specialist partners, part funded by the Ballinger Charitable Trust and evaluated by Newcastle University’s Institute for Ageing.

The pilot identified and overcame barriers and stigma to enable people living with dementia, their carers, companions and families to come to the cinema and watch a series of classic films and musicals. The simple steps and care that was taken in developing Dementia Friendly Cinema enabled people who are often excluded, to enjoy an everyday cultural experience in a supportive, friendly and social environment. The pilot was very successful and had a dramatic impact on both the cinema’s staff and operations and the audience members.

This case study highlights the challenges addressed, the careful planning and approach taken, as well as the outcomes and learning from the pilot. The experience and learning from the pilot project informed the new three-year screening programme, which launched in Dementia Awareness Week in May 2016.

## KEY ELEMENTS OF THE APPROACH

Asking people what challenges they face in coming to a cinema and how we could help address these

Listening to ideas about what films people wanted to come and see

Engaging partners who understood the issues, could provide advice and help reach people living with dementia and their carers, companions and families

Doing as much preparation as possible before the launch

Making appropriate adjustments to the building to make it easy to access and move around

Raising awareness and understanding within the organisation and training staff

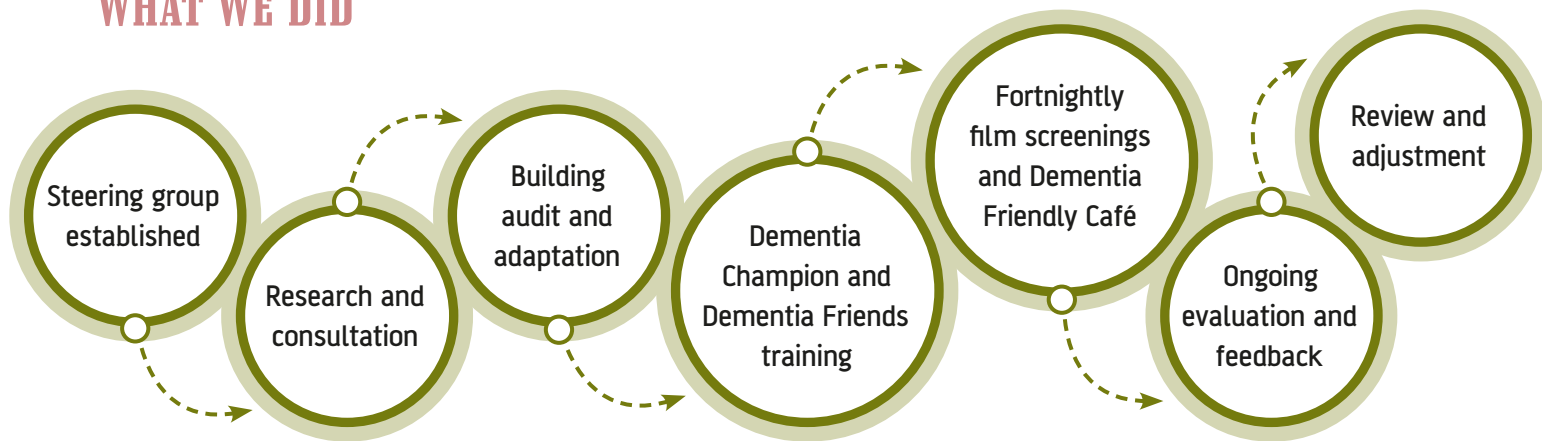
Overcoming stigma around dementia by making the project and approach very visible

Publicising the screenings in the media, through local networks and in community settings

Providing a relaxed and supportive environment for everyone to enjoy themselves

Evaluating the screenings and the project from the start and acting on learning

## WHAT WE DID



After an initial approach and £3,000 pump priming funding from the Elders Council, Tyneside Cinema appointed a project manager and lead staff member to develop the project in February 2015. Following initial research, a Steering Group of experts was engaged from The Elders Council, Quality of Life Partnership, Dementia Care, Alzheimer's Society, Newcastle Carers and Newcastle University Institute for Ageing. The latter acted as the evaluator for the project.

There was an intense period consultation through surveys, interviews and focus groups to identify barriers and the needs of people with dementia and their families as cinema goers, as well as research into other similar projects. This informed the next steps, which included:

- An extensive audit of the building supported by Dementia Care and a range of temporary physical changes, including signage, contrasting stair treads, covered mirrors and padded columns
- Appointment and training of a staff member as the Cinema's Dementia Champion, who then trained all staff as Dementia Friends, with support from Alzheimer's Society
- Development of a robust evaluation framework with Newcastle University, appropriate for people with dementia and their carers and families
- Selecting and testing types of films with the audience
- Adapting how films are screened to accommodate the audience's needs
- Raising additional funding from Ballinger Trust to pay for physical adjustments, additional staffing to support audiences and the documentary film of the project

The development stage of the pilot ran from February to July and the film screenings launched publicly in July 2015, with films shown fortnightly until December 2015 and a period of evaluation up to March 2016. A membership scheme was set up so that people could be kept informed about screenings and people were encouraged to sign up online or at the box office.

The Steering Group met monthly to monitor and direct the project, as well as publicising the project through their networks, with carers and people with dementia and with professionals. The project was informed by the regular evaluation and feedback from audiences and staff and adjustments were made to address issues which were raised.





It is selective what we pick to watch... happy ending ones... the feel-good factor. It's a change, a form of escapism and a means of getting out"

MAN WITH DEMENTIA

## BARRIERS TO ACCESSING CINEMA

Based on our consultation about people with dementia accessing the cinema, we learned that they often find it difficult to continue normal social and cultural activities as individuals, or with their families. They identified a number of barriers:

- There is a social stigma attached to dementia
- People find getting around a cinema difficult
- Normal film screenings can seem very loud and frightening
- Sitting in the dark can be confusing
- People in the cinema may complain if the person with dementia made a noise or if those supporting them were telling them about the film
- Many films playing in the cinema are unsuitable, and deemed depressing or inappropriate for the audience
- Timings of screenings need to be optimised for the audience
- Carers and family members can find going to cultural venues with their loved ones difficult



## OUR APPROACH

Setting screenings on a day and time best outlined in consultation as best suited for the audience

Prompting screenings through all regular media, but most importantly via partner 'gatekeeper' organisations

Clearly labelling the event as 'Dementia Friendly' in order to provide a clear message to the audience and wider public about the project

Opening screenings for anyone to attend, whilst advertising as Dementia Friendly

Encouraging people to come with friends and family to enjoy a film

Charging a low admission price of £4.50, with free admission for a carer

Having staff trained to guide and support people throughout their visit

Giving an introduction to every film and encouraging people to stay afterwards

Being relaxed about the start time to enable everyone to settle

Turning the lights up a little and the sound down when the film is showing

Not showing any adverts

Encouraging people to engage with the film – singing, clapping, talking, laughing

Providing break out/quiet spaces if people need to leave the screening

Asking people about their experiences and recording these immediately after each film

Learning from staff and audience feedback and making any additional adjustments needed

Having a reserved Dementia Friendly Café space in our Café Bar after every screening



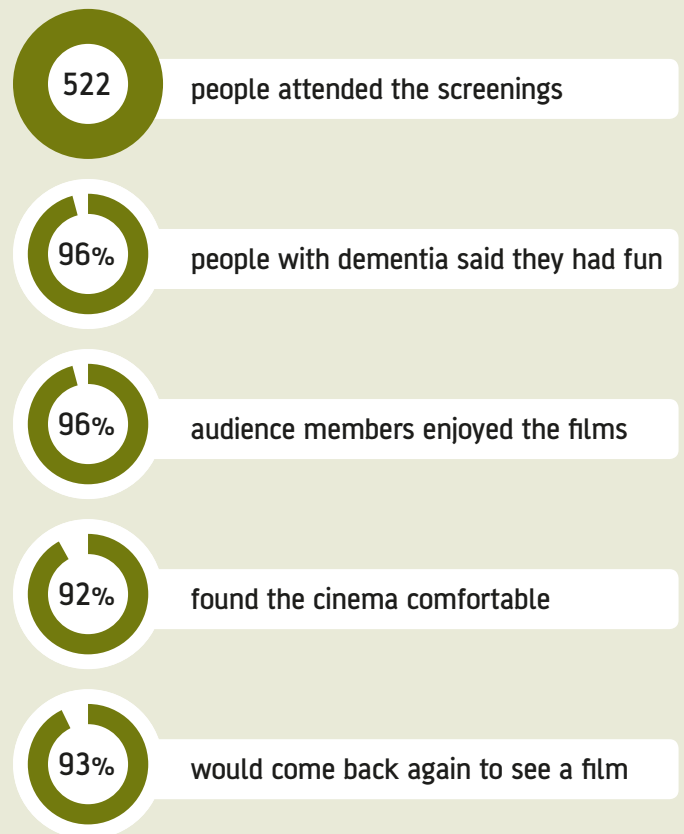
Singin' In The Rain

10 films were screened fortnightly between 30th July and 3rd December. The film choices were based on research into similar programmes and informed by extensive consultation. This process provided a clear direction and a programme of popular musicals was put in place. It also suggested some other genres to try and these tests proved that not screening musicals saw audiences clearly slump.

- 522 people attended the screenings
- 35% registered for free admittance as a carer
- People came from across Tyne & Wear and Northumberland
- Many family members attended with their loved one
- Groups from day centres/care homes attended with activity co-ordinators
- Audiences sang along, clapped, laughed and some even danced in the aisles

Northern Stars, young film-makers, made a documentary about the project and captured the experiences and voices of the audiences and those involved. The film is available online here. <https://vimeo.com/153262432>

Evaluation was carried out at every screening, in the cinema, to capture people's views and opinions as soon as the films ended, especially those with dementia.



## CHALLENGES

Most of the challenges were identified and planned for in advance, through training and physical adjustments, within the limitations of a listed heritage building.

Some enduring challenges were:

Accommodating large numbers of wheelchair users with limited spaces

Getting information to front-line staff working with people with dementia and their carers and families to raise awareness of the project

Getting input and feedback from audience members with dementia



## WHAT WORKED WELL

- Having a long lead in, with thorough consultation and preparation time
- The support of experts in the Steering Group to guide and inform the project
- The Cinema's willingness to accommodate and adjust to meet the needs of this audience
- Having well trained supportive staff to help people before, during and after screenings
- Creating a safe, supportive and comfortable environment in the cinema
- Designing an evaluation framework with the University from the start of the project
- Having lots of different ways of gathering information and feedback, especially for people with dementia to express themselves through video and audio clips
- Listening to audiences and staff and ensuring their views were heard and acted upon
- Having a social element and having fun in the screenings and afterwards in the Dementia Friendly Café
- Slow and steady build-up of awareness of the project through word of mouth, community venues, front line staff, local groups and networks
- The staff training and approach and the adjustments made to the cinema has made to the project
- Having young film-makers Northern Stars make a documentary about the project

“

We've laughed and we've cried,  
we've sung and we even got up  
in the aisle and danced”

DAUGHTER OF A WOMAN WITH DEMENTIA

## BUILDING ON SUCCESS

With continued funding support from Tyneside Cinema and Ballinger Trust and expert support from our Steering Group, Tyneside Cinema has embedded Dementia Friendly Cinema into its programme, incorporating the learning from the pilot. Our 2016-19 programme includes:

- Regular monthly screenings, so that people can plan ahead and make it part of their diary
- Dementia Friendly Café space in our café bar, so people can socialise after screenings
- Continued staff training programmes to maintain good levels of customer service for this audience
- Opportunities for audience members to influence what films are shown
- Building the membership scheme to keep people informed with online or box office sign up
- Audience outreach work to engage individuals, groups and networks in communities
- Some permanent physical adjustments to make the cinema more accessible
- Ongoing investment in temporary signage to make it easier to get around in the cinema

Alongside Dementia Friendly Cinema and the established and successful 'Silver Screen' film appreciation programme, the Cinema has also piloted running lunch clubs and a 'Cinema Buddies' programme with Age UK Newcastle for older people to overcome isolation.

Tyneside Cinema will continue to raise awareness across the cultural sector, as well as with policy and decision makers about the impact of these programmes for older people and encourage others to make more cultural provision available and more accessible to people with dementia and their families, carers and companions.



The Classic auditorium © Allan Mushen



We've managed to overcome the stigma associated with dementia, we have become a more Dementia Friendly organisation and are really proud of being able to welcome people, provide a supportive environment and see clearly how much they enjoy their experience."

JONNY TULL, TYNESIDE CINEMA

## FURTHER INFORMATION

To find out more, sign up as a member, or watch the film made about our project, please visit our Dementia Friendly Cinema webpage or contact us directly:

**Contact:** Jonny Tull, Film Programmer  
jonny.tull@tynesidecinema.co.uk

**Website:** <https://www.tynesidecinema.co.uk/whats-on/dementia-friendly-cinema>



Dementia Friendly Cinema is funded by:



Dementia Friendly Cinema project partners:



This case study was prepared by Declan Baharini, Project Manager, Dementia Friendly Cinema Pilot Project