



# Age Scotland's Dementia Training: Building a community of learning together

End of Year 3 Summary Report

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November 2022

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# Executive summary

## Background

There is a growing understanding across Scottish society that dementia is everybody's business. Over time more people will be affected by dementia, and there is a need for a response to better meet the needs of people affected by dementia and to ensure they are included in society. Over the past three years the Age Scotland Dementia Training Project has been an important part of building this shared understanding. It has developed as a centre for delivering expertise and best practice knowledge about dementia and its impact to a wide range of audiences.

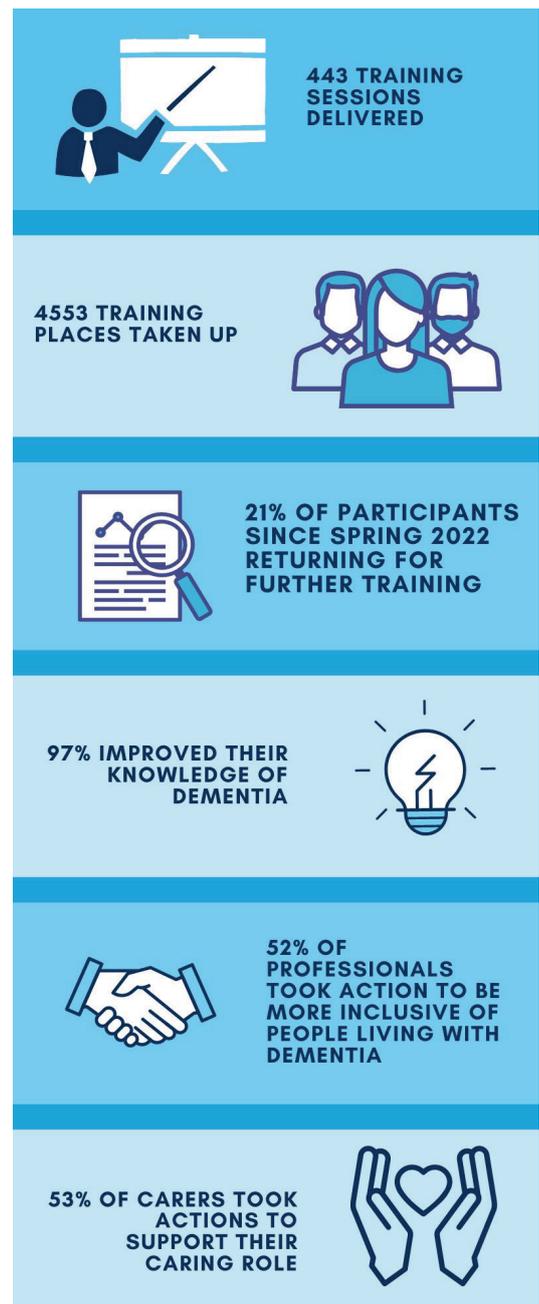
Age Scotland's Dementia Training Project has been funded by the Life Changes Trust and The Robertson Trust since 2019. This has built on Age Scotland's previous work, the Early Stage Dementia Project, to expand its awareness training programme including developing new topics and extending its reach.

## Approach to the evaluation

This final year evaluation was conducted using the Matter of Focus approach and Matter of Focus software OutNav. This practical and robust, theory-based approach to evaluation is informed by contribution analysis and supports organisations to develop a clear understanding of:

- the theory of change underpinning their approach
- the data and evidence required to assess programme progress
- the contribution of the programme to intended outcomes
- what more can be done.

Matter of Focus worked with the Dementia Training team in 2019 through a series of workshops to develop an outcome map and evaluation plan for the work. The outcome map shows how the project team worked to improve outcomes for training participants, for the beneficiaries of services trained, and for Age Scotland. The training team then gathered and analysed data, feedback and evidence throughout the duration of the project, using OutNav. The analysis presented in this report draws on this data, evidence and initial analysis and has been carried out by the Matter of Focus team.



## Findings

**What they did:** The Dementia Training team have delivered a diverse and high quality training programme covering four core areas. These are: awareness raising, inclusion, workplaces, and carers' rights. The content of the training was informed by people with lived experience of dementia and tailored to the learning needs of participants. A total of 443 training sessions were delivered over the three years of the programme. The training team have built a community around the training through a train the trainer programme as well as their National Learning Event and Coffee Conversations series. These events enable participants to continue to deepen their learning, network and share ideas and innovations.

**Who with:** The training programme has had substantial reach. A total of 4553 participants have attended one or more training sessions, reaching all local authority areas of Scotland and a broad range of organisations. The team have successfully worked in partnership with organisations to extend this reach to people who may face barriers to attending training, including unpaid carers and people from ethnic minority communities, and have adapted their delivery to make training accessible.

**How people felt:** The response to the training has been extremely positive. Not only has the feedback from participants been overwhelmingly positive, but organisations have demonstrated a considerable investment in staff time to commit to the training. There is clear recognition by participants, and by Age Scotland, of the importance of improved understanding of dementia. The Training team have created a learning environment which is warm and supportive and where people can engage meaningfully with the information and relate it back to their own context.

**What they learned and gained:** Participants overwhelmingly report that their awareness of dementia is increased by the training, and they take away valuable knowledge and skills to deliver more inclusive services. 97 percent of participants reported that their knowledge of dementia had improved as a result of attending the training. Carers' Rights training has enabled unpaid carers and those supporting them to better navigate the complex systems they interact with. Within Age Scotland the team acts as a centre of expertise on dementia, supporting colleagues with best practice and sharing resources and opportunities via their wide network of participants.

**What they did differently:** Over half of both professional and unpaid carer respondents have been able to identify actions they have taken based on the learning in the six months following training. Many of those who have not yet taken action report that they intend to deepen their learning, which is also evident in the large numbers attending additional events such as the National Learning Event and being active in the wider learning community.

## Conclusions

For Scotland to move closer to a society in which people living with dementia are included, valued, and have their needs met, it is vital that that the professionals and services people encounter are aware and well informed about dementia and its impacts. The Dementia Training

Project plays a key role in this picture, providing expert advice informed by both research and the lived experience of people affected by dementia, to enable services to take action to improve their practice. The findings from this evaluation show that the project is making great progress towards these outcomes to date. They also highlight that training participants continue to face challenges and barriers to putting into action what they have learned. Participants demonstrate a clear appetite for further learning, and an ongoing commitment to improving the experiences of people affected by dementia.

The integration of this training programme as a core part of Age Scotland's work makes it well placed to continue meeting the challenges that people affected by dementia face now and into the coming years.

# Background

## About this work

Age Scotland is the national charity for older people, working to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50. Their mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that everyone can make the most of later life. Since 2015 Age Scotland have introduced a specific focus on dementia, building on their expertise in training to run the Early Stage Dementia Project which delivered a programme of dementia awareness training. In 2019 Age Scotland received funding from the Life Changes Trust and Robertson Trust for a three-year project to continue the delivery of awareness training and expand this programme to include a further three strands; Inclusion training, Workplace training, and Carers' Rights training. A train the trainer element of this work for the awareness strand began under the Early Stage Dementia Project and has continued over the three years of this project.

The project began in 2019 with the development of the three additional strands alongside delivery of the existing awareness training to individuals and organisations across Scotland. As with so many other projects, the initial plans for this work were heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Members of the Dementia Training team were initially redeployed to support delivery of Age Scotland Covid Support services, before returning to training delivery in a new and innovative remote programme which was quickly developed and rolled out. In the project's second year they continued to deliver training programmes online and saw a particular expansion in the topics developed and covered in the Inclusion strand. This enabled the team to meet the learning needs of a diverse group of organisations who were also adapting the way they support individuals living with dementia and their carers to accommodate social distancing requirements. The team also developed and hosted a set of self-study modules as an additional way of meeting participants' learning needs. In the project's third year they have operated with a smaller team than in years one and two, with a focus on core delivery of the existing training offer.

The design and delivery of this work has been strongly influenced by the broader policy landscape for dementia within Scotland, which includes a human rights based approach to dementia reflected in both the Scottish National Dementia Strategy (2017-2020) and Alzheimer Scotland's 8 Pillar Model of Community Support. This places a focus on preventative approaches, holistic support, and community connections. These approaches are particularly relevant to the Inclusion strand of training which offers a broad range of topics to enable organisations and services to adapt their services (including those delivered online during the pandemic) to the needs of people living with dementia. The project also aims to support the continued integration of dementia as a strategic priority for Age Scotland, reaching across all areas of the organisation's design and delivery.

From the outset of the project, the development and delivery of training has been based on principles of co-design, both formally and informally, with:

- Organisations supporting people living with dementia and their carers. This has included consultation on the development and tailoring of the training (e.g. Walking Football),

piloting new training, providing testimony and acting as expert guests, and sharing resources and tips.

- People with lived experience of dementia and their carers. Consultation has been more challenging due to pandemic restrictions; however, in year 2 of the project the team have conducted one-to-one and group consultations with a range of partners, people living with dementia and their carers, leading to valuable insight.

The team have taken an embedded approach to evaluation across the three years of this project. They captured feedback from participants of every stage in the process and regularly reflected on this and wrote up their insights in OutNav. This has ensured that the delivery of this project has been underpinned by an ethos and practice of continual learning and improvement. Over the life of the project the team have adapted their delivery to meet a range of learning and communication needs by working in this collaborative and evaluative way. Feedback is requested at the end of each training session, alongside more informal direct queries and responses from individual participants in follow up emails. Returns on feedback forms have been a consistent challenge through online delivery, with numbers being relatively small compared to overall participants. The feedback that has been received has been of very high quality, with rich qualitative descriptions of how people reacted to sessions, what they learned and gained, and how they intend to use the learning to adapt their practice. Participants have also been welcome to continue discussion with the team informally after sessions including giving feedback and raising additional learning needs. Additional longitudinal feedback has also been very valuable in its richness as well as the additional time participants have had to reflect on their learning and work.

## **Aims and objectives**

The Dementia Training team have worked with Matter of Focus and OutNav over the three years of this programme to embed a process of meaningful outcome evaluation across their work. This has established a continual process of reflecting and learning as the work has progressed. The aims of this final year evaluation are to:

- Understand how the training has contributed to improving outcomes for participants and their organisations, and the challenges and obstacles to achieving this;
- Understand the contribution of the Age Scotland Dementia Training Project to making Scotland a place where people affected by dementia can flourish.

## **Context for delivery**

At the outset of this work in November 2019, a systematic context analysis activity using the ISM (Individual, Social, Material) framework identified a range of factors which would influence the delivery of the project, which are summarised below:

- Unpaid carers of people living with dementia are often unaware of their rights as carers and how to access these rights, and experience many diverse barriers to accessing training on these topics. We need to pay careful attention to the way we set up training in

terms of duration, time of the day, location, physical space, use of technology and work closely with our target audience to design training in ways that are right for them.

- Dementia is still stigmatised and there is lots of misunderstanding around what people living with dementia can meaningfully get involved in. Community and voluntary organisations have many fears about including people with dementia, some of which are misplaced, and some of which are realistic. We need to engage with these fears at the point of setting up training and also as an integral part of the training itself.
- Political austerity is influencing the ability of health and social care partnerships to meet the needs of people living with dementia and their carers. Training by itself will not fulfil these needs. People need many different forms of ongoing support. It is important that the training sessions include discussion of and signposting to other forms of support including the Age Scotland Helpline, Alzheimer Scotland, TIDE, and advocacy services.
- The dementia support landscape is busy, so the training team need to be clear about the unique offer of this training.

In addition to these, the impact of Covid-19 brought with it additional factors that not only directly affected the delivery of this project, but also the service landscape, and the lives of people living with dementia and their carers. The sudden halt to face-to-face delivery and adapting to new remote ways of working at the end of year one meant that the Dementia Training project needed to quickly adapt project plans and strategies to meet the training needs of organisations for the following years. Many people living with dementia and their carers experienced huge difficulties and losses during the pandemic, and in particular the loss of social connections has meant that many of the supports people rely on to live healthy and included lives have not been available. There continue to be significant fears for many around social contact which mean that support structures have not ‘bounced back’ following changes to restrictions in the way some other sectors have been able to.

These factors remain pertinent at the end of the project’s third year, with the addition in Autumn 2022 of the cost of living crisis. The impact of rising costs is a huge concern to people living with dementia and their carers in terms of meeting basic needs and avoiding the potential physical and social impact of extreme temperatures. This will also have an impact on the ability of services and supports that operate in their communities to provide services. There is a concern that the types of issues individuals or organisations bring to the training team (especially carers) will relate to much greater needs. What this will mean for the workforce of services and how they can prioritise needs beyond the day-to-day is unclear, as is how this will impact the type of people seeking out and engaging with training.

The wider social and policy landscape in Scotland at the end of year three offers some additional factors to consider for future work, which includes both risks and some opportunities:

- There is a risk that awareness raising training can be seen as making life more difficult for people working in services and supports as it creates more work. The Dementia Training team have over the past three years built a strong reputation for high quality expert training and have to date successfully avoided this risk affecting engagement.

- Reforms to social care and the consultation on and planning for a National Care Service will undoubtedly be a high priority for everyone affected by dementia. There is a concern that the voices of lived experience may get lost in this process.
- The development of a new Dementia Strategy, however, feels different to those in the sector, with a shift in understanding amongst policy makers on the importance of the voice of lived experience.

## Methodological approach

This final year summary evaluation report was produced by Grace Robertson, Senior Evaluation Consultant with Matter of Focus and Dr Ailsa Cook, Matter of Focus Director. The report draws together evidence of impact across all three years of the Dementia Training Project. The report first sets out the project's outcome map, the theory of change which demonstrates how the project makes a contribution to outcomes for participants and for the wider community. It lists the relevant risks and assumptions which underpin the theory of change. It then sets out a summary of the project's progress towards outcomes under the outcome map headings, drawing together triangulated analysis of the available evidence against success criteria. The report concludes with an overall assessment of progress towards outcomes and evaluator reflections on what this means for future work.

The work shown in this report has been carried out using the Matter of Focus approach. The Matter of Focus approach is a theory-based approach to outcome monitoring and evaluation, learning and improvement that builds on contribution analysis. This report has been produced in OutNav, a software system developed by Matter of Focus that supports organisations to take a collaborative and outcome-focused approach to evaluation planning, implementation, analysis and reporting. Age Scotland Dementia Training Project have used OutNav to gather and analyse data, feedback and evidence throughout the duration of the project. The data and information used in this final report spans the start of this project up to August 2022.

At the start of this project in 2019, Matter of Focus worked with the Dementia Training team to conduct a logical and structured process of:

- Developing a theory of change for this work informed by an understanding of the context in which it operates.
- Agreeing an outcome map which demonstrated how the activities of the project contribute to outcomes.
- Developing a plan to gather data to understand whether or not the team are making progress towards identified outcomes. This included integrating current data and information collected, as well as capturing data specifically for this purpose.
- Systematically reviewing this data against each of the stepping stones for each pathway in the outcome map.
- Summarising key findings against each of the stepping stones to tell the project's contribution story.

The project's End of Year Two report was produced using this approach and can be found here: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-scotland/media/dementia-training-year-2-highlights-report.pdf>

For this final report Matter of Focus have undergone a further process of:

- Interviewing four organisations who have commissioned in-house Dementia Training to develop a series of impact case studies which inform this report and are published in full in the report appendices;
- Systematically reviewing and analysing qualitative data collected from year 3 training participant feedback;
- Working closely with the Dementia Training team to review and address gaps in data and information;
- Conducting an interview with Dr Kainde Manji, Head of Dementia at Age Scotland, about the impact of this project on the organisation as a whole.

## Risks and assumptions

### RISKS

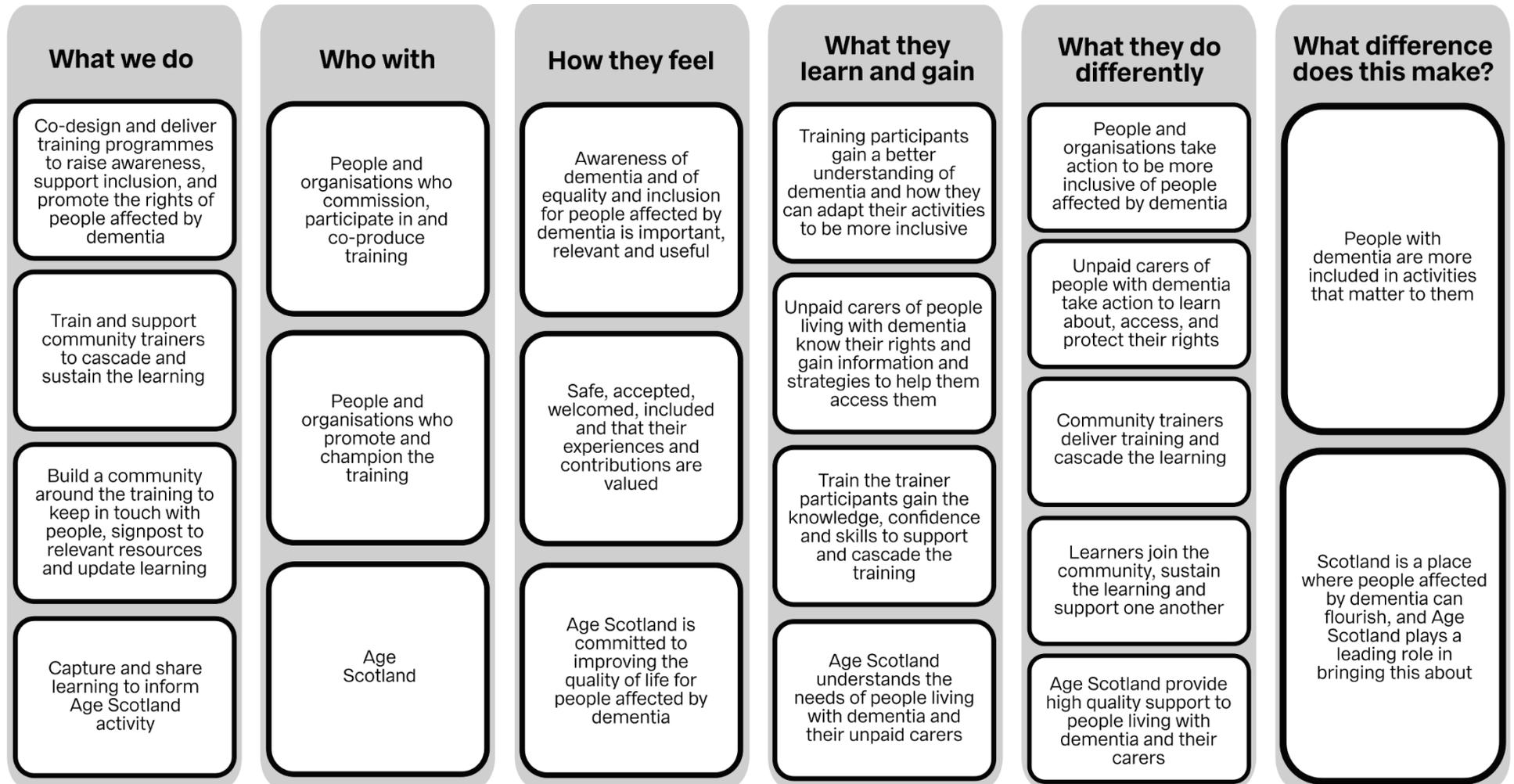
- ⚠ People bring lots of emotions to the training sessions and we don't hold them well
- ⚠ Our reach is limited and we don't reach marginalised groups and communities
- ⚠ The impact of coronavirus pandemic and social distancing changing the way organisations work and rendering some inclusion training content obsolete.
- ⚠ We run training supporting carers to know their rights, but the infrastructure isn't always there to enable them to access them

### ASSUMPTIONS

- ⚠ People participating in training which is well delivered and relevant will increase their learning and awareness of the topics covered
- ⚠ We have the skills and knowledge to provide high quality training on topics that matter to people
- ⚠ We co-design training with potential beneficiaries and people living with dementia
- ⚠ We reach people and organisations who can benefit, including third sector organisations, community groups, employers, unpaid carer networks
- ⚠ People trust us and want to share their stories and experiences with us
- ⚠ We can access the expertise we need to run well informed training courses from Age Scotland and other partners

## Dementia Training outcome map

The Dementia Training outcome map is the theory of change which demonstrates how the project makes a contribution to outcomes for training participants and for people living with dementia and their carers.



# Summary findings

## What we do

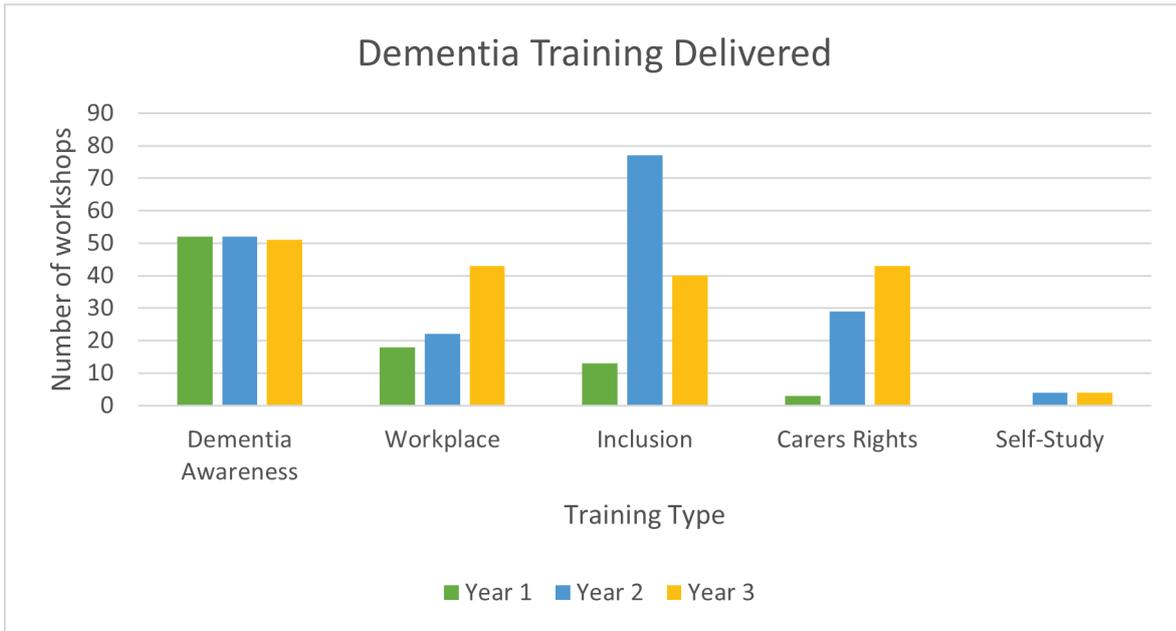
### Key Messages:

- The Dementia Training Team have delivered a high-quality, broad and diverse training programme covering a wide range of topics, adapting and flexing their offer to reflect the changing context that organisations operate in, and adapting delivery to access needs of participants including unpaid carers
- A 'community around the training' has emerged and become established both formally (through community trainers and additional events) and informally (through ad-hoc contact of individual participants and training cohorts)
- Dementia Training has become a core part of how Age Scotland inducts new staff, and the Team are a key resource for ongoing learning and best practice

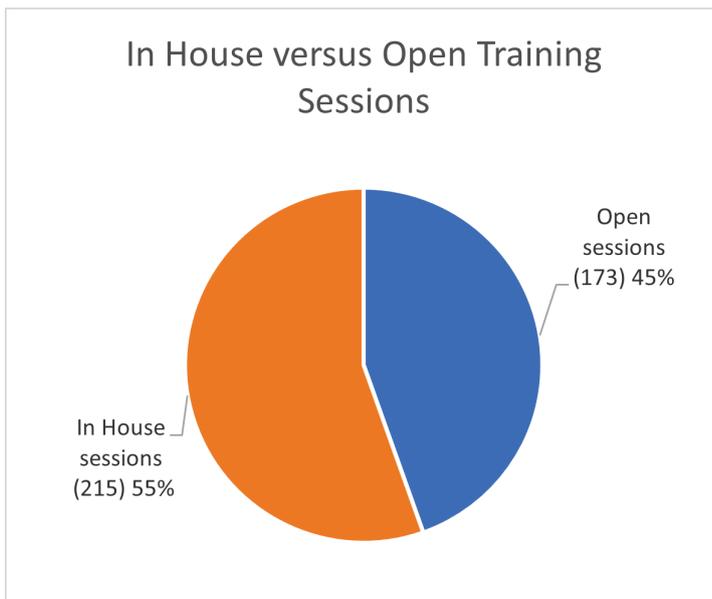
The key activities undertaken by the Dementia Training team over the three years of this work were:

- the development and delivery of the dementia training programme which includes four topic strands: Awareness training, Inclusion, Workplaces, and Carers' Rights;
- train the trainer support to a cohort of community trainers who spread the learning more widely;
- facilitating both formal and informal continual learning opportunities for training participants including Age Scotland colleagues.

Over the three years of this project the Dementia Training team have delivered a **total of 443 training sessions** across the four topic areas. The team have combined delivery of open sessions advertised in their training programme with delivery of commissioned in-house training to organisations for the benefit of their staff, volunteers, or the carers who use their services. In addition, from year 2 of this work the team developed and hosted 4 self-study modules (Dementia Awareness, and three Carers' Rights modules) to better meet the needs of participants who struggle to commit to live training sessions or who prefer this learning style. Figures 1 and 2 below give a breakdown of the number of training sessions delivered by topic over each year of the project, alongside a breakdown of the percentage of those sessions which were delivered as open sessions versus commissioned in-house training.



**Figure 1 Breakdown of training sessions by topic**



**Figure 2 Breakdown of In House versus Open Training Sessions**

Year 2 saw a large growth in both the number of and diversity of Inclusion Training sessions, as a response to the changing training needs of organisations who were adapting to service delivery during the pandemic and using new tools (such as video calls) to engage with people living with dementia. A risk identified in this work was that these inclusion courses would be less relevant due to the impact of the pandemic; however, the uptake of these new training offers suggests that inclusion training was more relevant than ever as organisations quickly pivoted to operate in a new socially distanced way.

Feedback from participants across all years of this work has consistently shown that **the training is of a high quality and informed by expertise and evidence**. In participant feedback from year 3 of this work, when asked ‘what I liked...’ about the training, of the 188 feedback

forms received, 56% of participants (106 responses) made specific reference to the training being engaging, well delivered, and meeting their learning needs. In particular, interactive tools including quizzes and group activities were frequently highlighted as effective and engaging. In addition to the co-design process described in the ‘about this work’ section, the training team continue to refine and develop training sessions based on suggestions and feedback gathered from participants to better meet the learning needs of those who attend. One participant described this positive learning experience in their response below:

“I absolutely loved the way the course was organised ... there was lots of very informative lecture mixed with activities in groups which made it very interesting” - training participant feedback

Dementia Training is also delivered by the **31 Community Trainers** who have been a part of this strand of the work (four of these were already trained at the beginning of the project, with 27 trained in the past three years). They are supported through quarterly refresher and discussion sessions where they can share their experiences and learning with their peers and get advice with their delivery, and ongoing support as needed.

The Dementia Training team’s approach to delivery is designed to go well beyond one-off sessions where participants receive information. Ongoing discussions and sharing of further information is built in to this practice through:

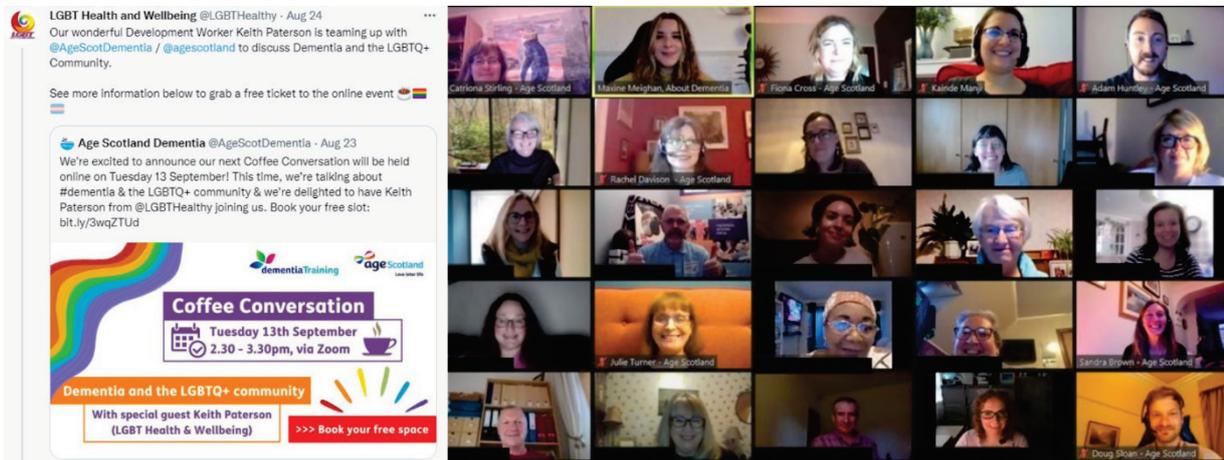
- issuing quarterly newsletters which include updates on relevant topics and new research, and contributions from the community about their work;
- enabling participants to share contact details with each other in sessions if they choose to, and providing contact details after sessions by request with agreement and following data sharing guidelines;
- encouraging participants to get in touch with additional questions or for further resources, and where a question is raised in a training session the team do further research on the topic and share the additional information to all participants in a follow up email.

In November 2021 this community building work went further with a **National Learning Event** in partnership with About Dementia, bringing together people with lived experience of dementia, carers, and professionals to explore what everyone can do to create, empower and effect change. This all-day event included 7 keynote speakers and 21 interactive workshops on:

- Enabling outdoor activities and spaces
- Empowering carers
- Taking the lead from people living with dementia
- Intergenerational approaches to inclusion

The success of the Learning Event and appetite for further discussions led the Dementia Training team to set up a series of **Coffee Conversations**. These bi-monthly themed discussion groups provide an opportunity for people to come together to hear inputs from organisations,

and to share resources and opportunities, ideas on inclusion, and to reflect on challenges. This additional offer brings a wide range of people together, with alternate focuses on people living with dementia, and their carers. Each session explores themes which are relevant to communities. Past themes have included stigma, rights, and dementia and people from minority ethnic communities.



**Figure 3 National Learning Event and Coffee Conversations**

**Sharing learning across the whole of Age Scotland** has taken both formal and informal approaches. Age Scotland’s Head of Dementia, Dr Kainde Manji, describes the team as a “font of knowledge” enabling a cyclical process of information sharing across the organisation leading to high quality information and materials:

- Informally, due to the wide range of contacts with training participants. The team are able to circulate resources, opportunities and service information that can benefit people living with dementia and their carers via colleagues in the Age Scotland Helpline and Community Development teams, reaching an even wider range of beneficiaries. Colleagues are also aware that they can contact the team as a resource for ad-hoc advice around training needs and how to make events or materials dementia inclusive. This has included Age Scotland branded materials such as PowerPoint slides and Zoom backgrounds.
- More formal sharing includes the Age Scotland Trainers forum that meets on a regular basis to share good practice with colleagues in the Veteran’s Project, Health and Wellbeing, Information and Advice, and Workplaces teams.

## Who with

### Key Messages:

- Dementia Training is reaching a very wide audience with very high uptake, and places are being taken up by people from across the whole of Scotland and across a wide range of sectors
- The Team have been successful in reaching groups including unpaid carers and people from minority ethnic communities by working in partnership with organisations
- The profile of the training is raised and championed both by Age Scotland and by organisations who have benefitted from participating

Dementia Training participants include individual professionals working in a wide range of organisations who sign up to the open programme, professionals within organisations who commission bespoke in-house training, unpaid carers of people living with dementia, and colleagues from Age Scotland.



**Figure 4 Training places uptake by topic**

The Training has reached a huge audience across Scotland. Across all three years of this work **4553 training places have been taken up** by individuals including open programme participants, in-house sessions and self-study modules. This includes places for participants who have returned for more than one training course and the exact number of unique participants is not known; however, this figure shows the broad reach the team have engaged. Figure 4 gives a breakdown of these training places by topic area over each year. Since May

2020 the Dementia Training team have delivered **215 sessions in partnership with commissioning organisations**; again this includes double counting where the team have worked with an organisation on more than one occasion.

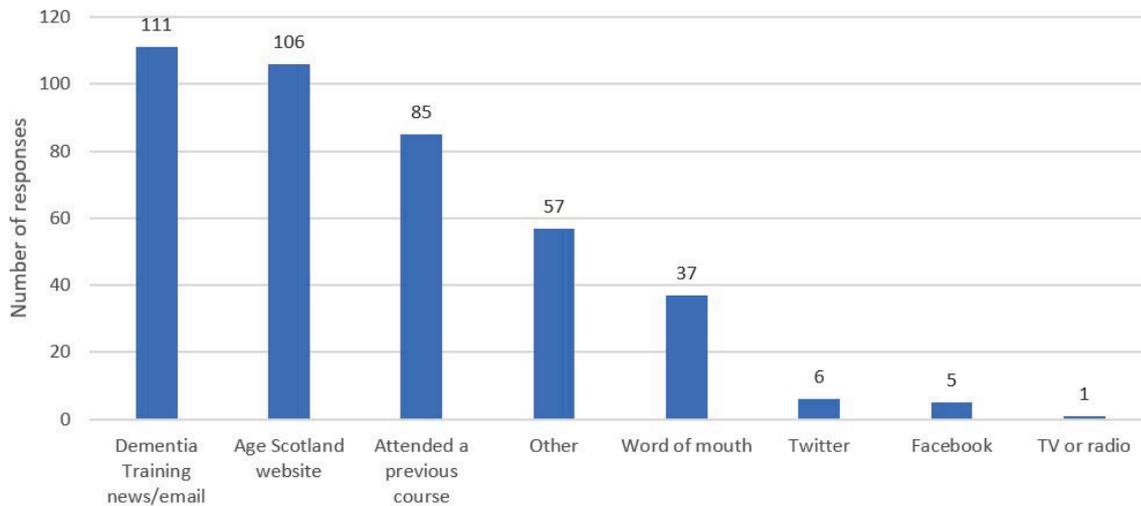
Of the professionals who attend open training sessions or commission training in house, the greatest proportion of professionals trained have been from carer organisations and local community groups/small charities. National charities, arts organisations and educational organisations are also well represented in the sectors reached by the training. The inclusion of dementia awareness as part of Age Scotland's Healthy Ageing Workshops has enabled a wider reach for this work to the private sector, with 29 sessions delivered to 323 participants. Age Scotland's Head of Dementia, Kainde Manji, reflected that dementia is not always an attractive training topic for private sector organisations due to its sensitive nature. The integration of dementia into Healthy Ageing workshops recognises the importance of being dementia aware and the skill of the training team in holding these sensitivities well.

**483 training places were taken up in Carers' Rights** training over the three years of the project, which includes both unpaid carers of people living with dementia and professionals working in carer organisations. In years 2 and 3 of this work the Training team have worked in partnership with carer organisations to deliver targeted workshops to unpaid carers to broaden their reach and the number of unpaid carers directly benefitting from the learning. This direct approach of working in partnership with organisations has also helped to address the risk that the training would not reach marginalised communities, alongside a strategy for engagement with Age Scotland's Equality and Diversity Manager. The team have delivered 8 training sessions with Community Minority Ethnic Groups, reaching 82 people.

Thanks in part to the accessibility of online training sessions, participants have represented every local authority area in Scotland, and beyond, with one participant joining from Mexico! The Training team have reflected that without this online offer the ability for smaller organisations and individual carers to travel to access training courses from outside the central belt would have been a barrier.

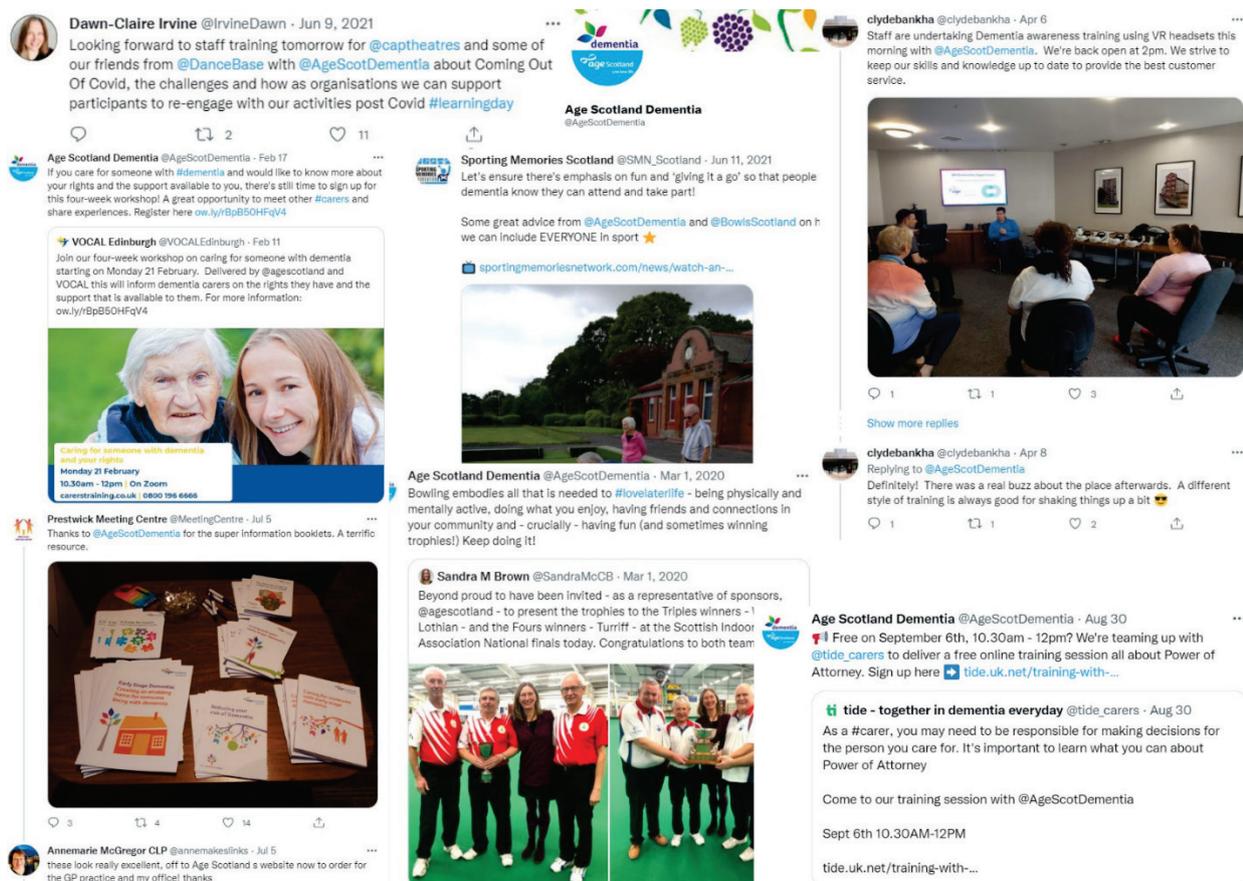
**The training programme is shared and championed** by both Age Scotland and more widely by organisations who benefit from and are engaged in accessing it, reaching a wide audience. Tracking where people heard about the training is more recent (from January 2022) and the responses show that the widest audience has been through the team's own promotional activities, with a significant number of participants returning who have attended courses previously. Figure 5 gives a breakdown of responses to 'How did you hear about the training?'.

## How People Heard About the Training



**Figure 5 How Participants Heard About the Training**

At the end of year 3, 1,296 individuals are subscribers to the Dementia Training mailing list. Organisations also champion the training via social media. The image below gives a spotlight of some of the tweets in which organisations share about the benefits of attending:



**Figure 6 Social media messages from organisations who champion the training**

All **Age Scotland staff** now attend dementia training sessions as part of their induction programme and have been included in the overall participant numbers listed above. The vast

majority of Age Scotland colleagues take up places on the open training programme; however, the participant numbers also include 5 specific training sessions delivered internally to 39 participants.

## How they feel

### Key Messages:

- High levels of engagement, commissioning by organisations, and participants' reflections on the learning are good evidence that this training is recognised as important, valuable and relevant for those who attend
- The Dementia Training Team create spaces in which participants feel safe and comfortable to explore emotive topics and that their contributions are valued; the Team are meeting participants' needs well
- Age Scotland demonstrates commitment to improving the lives of people affected by dementia by integrating dementia as a core strategic priority and ensuring the feedback loop of learning is built in across the organisation

At the start of this process, the training team identified that for the training to have the desired impact, target participants and organisations needed to feel that awareness of dementia and inclusion for people affected by dementia is important, relevant, and useful. Consistently high uptake of training places through both open training programmes and in-house commissioned training suggests that this is the case for those who engaged, with a large number of returning participants.

The majority of participants attend the training in a professional capacity, and therefore the relevance of training is largely focused on their ability to better support service users and customers, unpaid carers, or people in their local community. Workplace training also places emphasis on the ways in which organisations can better support colleagues who are living with dementia or care for someone who is.

By offering bespoke in-house training for organisations, the team has ensured even greater relevance for participants, focusing on their specific learning needs based on how staff interact with people living with dementia in different settings. This has included tailoring the training to focus on supporting communication such as during phone calls, or in customer service settings where staff may only have brief interactions with customers. Our engagement with the case study organisations found that all of them really valued the bespoke nature of the programme. For example, the People's Postcode Lottery commissioned a comprehensive staff dementia training programme involving a large investment of staff time, tailored to their particular context. An extract from their impact case study underlines their commitment to its importance and the value of the bespoke approach to training delivery.

The People's Postcode Lottery Customer Experience Team saw an opportunity to build on the existing dementia training as part of staff induction, to offer further support to the growing staff team to ensure they are using best practice to support potentially vulnerable customers. A bespoke in-house Dementia Friendly Customer Services programme was developed in partnership with the Customer Experience team to ensure the training would best meet the needs of the 150 staff engaged in the online training sessions.

The sessions were taken up enthusiastically by the staff team with support from senior leadership. They felt the information covered was extremely relevant to their day-to-day work and gave them confidence in supporting customers who may be vulnerable, grounded in good practice.

**“Go for the training, it's going to benefit people on the front line. Even if they are doing something already you can never have too much!”**



**Figure 7 Extract from The People's Postcode Lottery Impact Case Study**

There is evidence too that for some professionals the relevance of knowledge and skills gained in the training goes beyond their immediate work role. For example, following the training, a staff member of Capital Theatres said:

“This session was invaluable in helping me to understand what can be done to make their [people living with dementia] lives a wee bit easier, both at work and in everyday life. I'd recommend these sessions to everyone, whether in customer facing role or not. I feel so much more equipped to look out for and assist people who may be living with dementia. (And on a personal note I feel much less afraid of going to visit my much beloved Granny.)”

Another important factor in ensuring that training is effective is that participants feel safe, accepted, welcomed, included and that their experiences and contributions are valued. Evidence from participant feedback has been consistently strong over all three years of the project that the team's efforts to create a safe and welcoming space in training sessions are working well. At the start of this work the training team identified a risk that ‘people bring lots of emotions to the training sessions and we don't hold them well’; however, feedback across all three years of this work suggests that despite the highly emotive topic the team are allowing participants to explore the issues in a safe and supportive environment.

In year 3 (2021-22) workshop feedback, when asked ‘what I liked...’ about the session, 34 participants (of 188 feedback forms received) made specific reference to the positive atmosphere training facilitators created in the sessions. Below is a word cloud highlighting key words used in this feedback:



## What they learn and gain

### Key Messages:

- There is consistent strong evidence that training participants gain useful and relevant learning, enabling them to be more aware of dementia and its impact, and how they can be more inclusive of people living with dementia and their carers
- Carers benefit both from their own direct learning, or through professionals they encounter being trained, which they can use at relevant stages of their caring journey
- 21 community trainers are still part of the community training programme with 11 trainers actively delivering workshops at the moment
- Age Scotland colleagues also benefit from the same learning outcomes, but additionally Age Scotland gains a vital informal source of expertise and best practice

At the core of this theory of change is the understanding that for services and society to be more inclusive of people affected by dementia there first needs to be awareness of dementia and knowledge about how it impacts individuals. That well designed and delivered training will increase participants' knowledge of the topic is an assumption underpinning this work. Across all three years of the project there has been consistent positive feedback about the quality of the training, and participants report that they have taken away useful learning about dementia from these sessions. Building on the existing learning outcomes evidence from years 1 and 2, analysis of feedback from participants in year 3 is highlighted below.

In year 3, 97% of respondents either highlighted a specific piece of learning from the training or described a more general rise in awareness or knowledge about dementia and how it affects people when asked 'what I'm taking away...' (184 of 188 feedback forms received). Figure 9 highlights examples of the learning participants gained. Additionally, 38 of these respondents also highlighted that the information received was 'what I liked...' about attending.

Of these responses, 39 workshop participants specifically indicated that they had gained **learning that would enable them to be more inclusive of people living with dementia**. The most common theme in this group was around communication skills and techniques, followed by the impact of environmental factors on the experience of a person living with dementia.

“I learned a few different techniques on how to deal with common communication difficulties.”

“I didn't realise how different parts of the brain had an impact on how someone with dementia would react, I found that interesting. I found it interesting as well mentioning how distracting background noises and busy areas can also affect a phone call with someone with dementia, which must have its pros with staff working from home.”

“It was EXTREMELY important to know the qualities a person with dementia would like to see in a Befriender. I really had come from a different - my - perspective. Considerations was a good topic and all we had assumed about 4 cases changed.”



**Figure 9 Examples of the learning taken from the training by participants**

Across the three years of this project, Dementia Training has contributed to the **improved awareness and understanding of carers about their rights and strategies to access them**. This is both directly via training delivered to unpaid carers, or indirectly by training people working in carer organisations who would then cascade this learning to the carers they support. One participant describes their plans to share this learning with carers below:

“Will share useful links with Carers and be more mindful of the changes that can make a difference. This will be particularly useful when we return to visiting people within their own homes.” - feedback from professional who supports carers

Feedback responses from unpaid carers are not separately recorded and are included in the summaries about learning above. A number of the comments could be identified clearly as coming from unpaid carers. Those comments all referred to the workshops either as being generally informative, or gave a specific example of information they had learned that would support them in their caring role. Specific examples of learning included information about their welfare rights and entitlements and how to access them, self-directed support and the Carers Act, and an improved understanding of how supports and services are delivered and accessed. Two carers below describe below the learning they took away from the session:

“The content of the Carers Act and my expectations of what my local authority can support me with” - carer training feedback

“I had no idea about carers' rights, self-directed support etc so I learnt a lot.” - carer training feedback

The range of topics covered in the training, plus the diversity of experience and stages on the caring journey for those attending, meant that what carers took away from the sessions was very individual. Carer Training Officer Aga reflected that for some individuals it was an opportunity to store information away for a later time when it would become relevant, that as people's caring journey changes different types of information become relevant at different points. Carers reported feeling more confident in asking for help and being more aware of the services available to them, including one carer who was able to take up appropriate support and credited the sessions as giving her the confidence to pursue this.

Carers also gained connection and a forum for sharing ideas and stories as a result of coming together for the initial training sessions, and following the initial four week programme the Dementia Training Team facilitated additional reunion sessions to continue the conversation.



**Figure 10 Extract from VOCAL Carers Training Impact Case Study**

In a case study about the impact of training delivered to unpaid carers, Aga Newson, Carer Training Officer for VOCAL, explained that the learning needs of carers can be fluid across the journey of a caring role. The training delivered worked well to accommodate a broad range of needs and experience levels.

Within Age Scotland, the Dementia Training team act as a repository for knowledge and best practice in dementia which is recognised as valuable and important. In particular, the policy team in Age Scotland can draw on this exceptional knowledge in helping them to explore ‘what does this mean?’ questions.

That Dementia Training is a core part of staff induction in Age Scotland speaks both to the commitment of the organisation to its importance and the broad reach of the learning across all roles and departments. For example, this increased awareness amongst Helpline staff ensures that there is a positive feedback loop of high quality information provided to service users. This also ensures callers’ needs and priorities are fed back to the policy team, giving better insight into what matters for people living with or affected by dementia, and grounding policy in this evidence.

## What they do differently

### Key Messages:

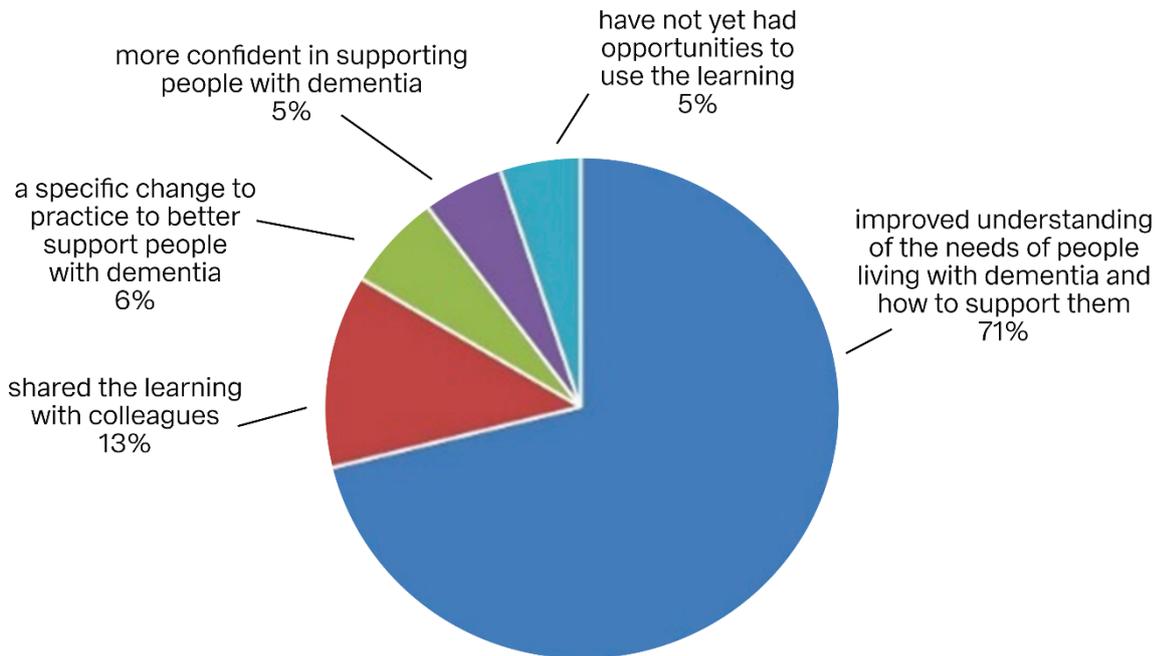
- Professionals who attended training have been able to adapt their practice to integrate learning from the training and be more inclusive of people living with dementia; however, there continue to be barriers to inclusion including the ongoing impact of Covid, and pressures on time and resources
- Some carers have reported that they have taken action to secure their rights; however, this is not a straightforward path and relies upon the ability of wider services to meet their needs
- Community trainers have delivered a total of 28 workshops to 196 participants
- A wider community around the training has developed with significant appetite and engagement for further learning
- Age Scotland's information and advice, and policy work, is strengthened and informed by Dementia Training

In year 3, **52% of participants said that they would do things differently following the training that would enable them to be more inclusive of people living with dementia** (89 of 170 feedback forms received identified by their comments as being professionals):

- 42 of those referenced that their increased awareness of dementia and its impact would enable them to better support people living with dementia;
- 40 participants said they would adapt the way they communicate with people living with dementia based on their learning from the training;
- 7 participants highlighted a specific action they would take in their workplace, including making adaptations to the physical environment.

Long-term feedback collected by the training team has been very useful in explaining what happened next for participants when they took the learning back to their workplaces. 122 forms have been received to date. In their feedback, **75% (92) of those respondents said that the training had positively impacted their work or volunteering role**. A further five respondents had not yet been able to use the learning. Figure 11 gives a breakdown of the themes from responses to the question 'Has the training impacted on your work/volunteering role? If so, how?'.

## Has the training impacted on your work/volunteering role? If so, how?



**Figure 11 Breakdown of how participants have used the learning six months after attending training**

A number of respondents highlighted that there were barriers that had prevented them from implementing the changes they had intended to make based on learning from the training to date. The continuing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (12 responses) and challenges due to time, resources, and staffing (12 responses) were the most common barriers identified. Four respondents highlighted that they had specific needs relating to digital tools to support their work. Continuing both formal opportunities for learning in additional workshops, or informal learning such as receiving tips and resources, were raised by 16 participants as actions that the Dementia Training team could take in order to support participants to make positive changes into practice.

The impact case studies collected as part of this evaluation explain how those organisations have implemented what they have learned in their practice. For example, Monifieth Befrienders explained that the training has enabled their service to better meet needs, and more confidently offer support to people living with dementia:

Overall the biggest impact [for Monifieth Befrienders] was an increase in confidence for volunteers going into the community to befriend people living with dementia. In particular, the mood and wellbeing training gave participants a deeper understanding of what to expect when supporting people, allowing them to be more patient and to not take things personally if the friend they visit's mood is low, as this may be an impact of their condition. The training also placed an emphasis on focusing on the abilities of people with dementia rather than their disability.

As a service, Lindsey reports that the training means they can more confidently match befrienders and friends, and that carers of people with dementia feel reassured that the volunteer will be skilled and knowledgeable to support their loved one well.



**Figure 12 Extract from Monifieth Befrienders Impact Case Study**

In training feedback, **53% of carers responded with specific actions they would take that would support their caring role** (9 responses of the 18 identified by their comments as being carers). This included making applications for support and respite and accessing other services and supports in their area. Two carers below describe how they plan to use what they have learned:

“I have emailed the West Lothian Social Care department to ask how to apply for respite. I haven’t had time to fully digest all the information, it was all new to me, so I intend to use the links provided to go over them all.”

“Well, it reminded me to skip next week’s Circuits class and go to the Carers’ Cafe in Crieff for the first time in ages! It’s so important to maintain a supportive social life with others in the same boat.”

It is difficult to draw clear conclusions about what happened next for carers due to a number of factors. An identified risk in this theory of change is that ‘We run training supporting carers to know their rights, but the infrastructure isn’t always there to enable them to access them’ which acknowledges that whilst the information on rights is a vital step in supporting carers, this information and awareness alone is not the only factor which determines their ability to access support. One carer highlighted this challenge in their long-term feedback:

“[The training impacted me by] Giving me more information and confidence to plod on through with contacting professionals and trying to connect with services to get support for myself and my Mum” - carer response on the long-term impact of the training

This risk is still relevant and perhaps compounded by the continuing impact of coronavirus and other significant context challenges affecting individuals and organisations who deliver support. Dr Kainde Manji, Head of Dementia at Age Scotland, reflected that organisations are likely to see higher demands and more acute needs of people approaching them for support in the coming year, at a time when their capacity to provide support may also be limited.

There is a clear appetite for engagement from learners beyond their initial training sessions as part of a wider community, evidenced by the success of the November 2021 National Dementia Learning Event. The attendance of 120 participants demonstrates a commitment from learners to contributing to improving the lives of people living with dementia and their carers. This was also an opportunity to showcase some of the diverse and innovative work happening across Scotland to make it a more dementia inclusive place, and celebrate the knowledge, skills and experience within the learning community. The full report for this event is found [here](#) and also acts as a further resource that learners can draw on.

Participants fed back that they enjoyed the variety of the topics covered, that it was interesting and informative and that the opportunity to hear from a diverse range of voices and experiences was very powerful. One participant describes this below:

“I liked hearing from the key note speakers and then going into the workshops to look at things in more detail. The key speakers were very inspirational and thought provoking.” - event participant

When asked what they are taking away and what they would do next, 35 comments made reference to continuing learning, keeping in contact or following up new connections made in the event, and sharing what they had learned in the event more widely with others. One participant referred to a range of next steps to integrate the learning into their organisation:

“I have a list of actions and follow up points - and will think very much about how Inverness Shinty Club can tell the story of our Shinty Memories work.” - event participant

In addition to the Learning Event, training participants have taken up opportunities to further develop their learning and be part of a wider learner community by:

- engaging with bi-monthly Coffee Conversations to offer an alternative way to keep in touch through informally discussing and sharing ideas around topics including dementia and BME communities, Stigma, and Carers' Rights;
- a follow up discussion session three months after the Coming Out of Covid workshop to update where they had got to and discuss ongoing concerns;
- the Training team also observe workshop participants making links with each other and sharing contacts within sessions.

The positive feedback loop created by helpline staff's increased awareness and ability to support people living with dementia ensures that the huge wealth of knowledge on dementia held within Age Scotland can directly benefit callers through the provision of information and advice. This awareness also enables the Age Scotland policy team to have access to evidence in the trends in

enquiries for help and advice, leading to more informed policy work, which also informs the continuing development of the training. This can lead to remarkable insight into the challenges and priorities of people living with dementia and their carers.

New developments within Age Scotland that provide resources and technical solutions to support organisations to better meet the needs of people living with dementia would not have the same commitment or effectiveness if there wasn't a strong grounding in the wider context, and their delivery were not supported by high quality training which the Dementia Training team provide.

## **What difference does this make?**

Underpinning the Theory of Change for the Dementia Training project is an understanding of the social model of health and disability, which places responsibility on the structures, institutions, and services in our communities to understand and dismantle barriers to inclusion. In order for people with dementia to be included in activities that matter to them it is essential that those services and supports involved have the awareness and knowledge of how to better meet the needs of people living with dementia in order provide accessible, effective, and person-centred support. Dementia Training therefore plays a vital role in facilitating inclusion. The reach of its impact also relies on training participants meaningfully implementing and continuing their learning.

As described in 'what they do differently', there is good evidence that individual training participants have been able to make changes to their practice to be more inclusive using their learning. Four impact case studies (published in full in this report's appendices) gathered in the course of this evaluation go further by reflecting on the actions taken by organisations as a whole. These case studies, from The People's Postcode Lottery, Monifieth Befrienders, VOCAL, and Capital Theatres, each demonstrate that in diverse settings organisations have been able to adapt their practice to reduce potential barriers to inclusion for people living with dementia or for carers.

**“The training we get boosts confidence and allows you to understand that just by approaching someone with dementia in a slightly different way can make the world of difference. And because of it, you can see how people living with dementia can still enjoy their lives and end up with a better social life than most people working here do.”**

**- quote from Capital Theatres team member**

Capital Theatres are proud that their venues are not just a place that people can go for activities but they are a part of the community. This understanding has enabled staff to take the time to get to know customers, and offering a safe and inclusive space means that customers can feel confident and comfortable to spend time with them and share their own creativity.



**Figure 13 Extract from Capital Theatres Impact Case Study**

Further opportunities to share learning about inclusion and to celebrate and raise the profile of inclusive activities is made possible by the development of the wider community around the training. This also widens the potential audience for the benefits of this awareness and knowledge raising. Both internally within Age Scotland and externally through the training community, the Dementia Training team act as both a conduit and as a pool of best practice and expertise. Examples of innovative inclusive work such as Scottish Ballet’s Time to Dance programme are shared widely to both potential participants and to organisations who can explore what might be possible for them to deliver themselves.



**SS Wellbeing Festival** @SsWellbeingFest · 12 May



Time to Dance® is run by Scottish Ballet for people living with dementia and their families and carers. Taster session: Saturday 21st May.

[southsidewellbeingfestival.co.uk](http://southsidewellbeingfestival.co.uk) @AgeScotDementia @alzscot @AhpDementia @KeepItSouth @SsWellbeingFest @scottishballet



[southsidewellbeingfestival.co.uk](http://southsidewellbeingfestival.co.uk)  
SS Wellbeing Festival

**Figure 14 Example Tweet of dementia inclusive activities shared by past training participants**

Age Scotland's commitment to dementia as a core strategic priority, grounded in the hub of expertise within the Dementia Training team, makes the organisation well placed to continue to contribute to improving lives for people affected by dementia across Scotland.

## Conclusions

Across the three years of this project the Dementia Training team have delivered a wide reaching and high quality programme of training which has adapted well to significant external challenges and to the developing training needs of the large numbers who have engaged with it. This programme has gone beyond one-off training sessions by offering a range of both informal and structured continuing development opportunities for both professionals and unpaid carers. This community of learning built around the training enables networking, the sharing and cross pollination of ideas and innovations, which further contributes to improving the lives of people living with dementia.

The evidence analysed to inform this report, and found in previous end of year reports, demonstrates that the Dementia Training team are making strong progress in contributing to improved learning outcomes for training participants across a wide range of organisations in Scotland. Direct feedback from participants received includes rich qualitative data, and there is broad consistency within responses about their experiences of training and their learning which enables conclusions to be drawn across the wider group where overall responses have been lower. There is good evidence that this learning is having a positive impact on the organisations that participants are part of. This has led to improvements in practices to make organisations more inclusive for people living with dementia. It is clear that single or one-off training sessions alone form only part of the picture for improving the experiences of people living with dementia, through feedback from participants and their uptake of further training and community activities. The four organisations who have been able to make a strong commitment to learning and development in dementia demonstrated in their impact case studies, report deep and effective changes to their practice which enables them to be confident in the way that they include people living with dementia and carers in their services.

There continue to be barriers, both for organisations and for unpaid carers of people living with dementia, in implementing some of what they have learned from training sessions. Whilst the barriers affect organisations and unpaid carers in different ways, the continuing impact of Covid-19 and of limited time and resources are themes common to both of these groups. This again demonstrates that learning, whilst being an essential part of making positive change, is not the only factor in improving the experiences of unpaid carers and of the working practices of services.

There is a growing understanding across Scottish society that dementia is everybody's business as over time more people will be affected by dementia. There is a need for a response to better meet the needs of people affected by dementia and ensure they are included in society. Age Scotland's contribution to this space will continue to build on training and awareness raising, working collaboratively with people and organisations, and doing this in a flexible and adaptable way.

More than ever, it is essential that the particular needs of people living with or affected by dementia need to be understood and acted on at all levels, and at the heart of decision making. The continuing effects of Covid-19 and significant new challenges in the cost of living in Autumn 2022 will impact people living with dementia and their carers strongly. The development of a new

Dementia Strategy for Scotland hints at a shift in understanding amongst decision makers that the voices of people with lived experience of dementia are important and should be involved in policy development. The role of Dementia Training within this context can be powerful, in ensuring that people living with dementia and their carers are included in all areas of society, and so that barriers to participation are broken down and the voices of lived experience can be heard and acted on.

## Capital Theatres Impact Case Study



Capital Theatres operates three busy theatre venues in Edinburgh: the Festival Theatre, the King's Theatre and The Studio. Operating as a registered Scottish charity, they present world-class shows to entertain and inspire audiences of all ages. Enabling people with a lifelong love of theatre to participate and extend their engagement for as long as they wish to motivated Capital Theatres to bring in additional expertise with Age Scotland's Dementia Training team.

Dementia awareness training was built in to staff induction to ensure that all parts of the organisation have a good baseline understanding of dementia and its impact on audience members, with a mixture of in-house bespoke training and accessing spaces on the open programme. Staff members have returned to the sessions for a refresher on the topics and have been very invested in this work and opportunities to get involved and deepen their learning. That the training is built based on learning from lived experience and is tailored to the different context of staff roles and uses a range of learning tools has been important to the enthusiasm and success of this work. Staff fed back that they quickly gained an understanding of the need for patience and compassion, developed a genuine interest and got what they needed to do their jobs even better. The Dementia Training team co-developed the online activities training course alongside audience members by joining in with Capital Theatres' brew and blether session, to learn from the lived experience of people living with dementia and what was most important to them.

Dawn-Claire Irvine, Creative Engagement Manager, reflected that across the organisation the training has given staff a greater understanding of the needs of customers living with dementia, more confidence and knowledge of how they can help. Much of this builds on wider principles of delivering good customer service, but this goes further for people living with dementia by focusing on an attitude shift: that it's not just about looking after people, but about empowering people to do the things that are meaningful for them and celebrating what they can achieve.

"The training we get boosts confidence and allows you to understand that just by approaching someone with dementia in a slightly different way can make the world of difference. And because of it, you can see how people living with dementia can still enjoy their lives and end up with a better social life than most people working here do." – quote from Capital Theatres team member

Capital Theatres are proud that their venues are not just a place that people can go for activities but they are a part of the community. This understanding has enabled staff to take the time to get to know customers, and offering a safe and inclusive space means that customers can feel confident and comfortable to spend time with them and share their own creativity. Tea Parties for people with dementia and their carers are a highlight for staff, with team members desperate to get involved and even coming in outside of work to be a part of them! Dawn-Claire and the wider team are exploring ideas for what's next, sharing this learning more widely across the creative sector and continuing to learn and develop best practice: "to not have this would be unthinkable – we see the impact for people and their families, it's become a core part of what we do".

## Monifieth Befriending Impact Case Study



As a local charity supporting older people and those who have experienced bereavement, being dementia aware and having knowledge about the impact of dementia is very important to Monifieth Befriending for staff and volunteers. Age Scotland Dementia Training delivered three training courses to the staff and volunteers over a 9 month period:

- Dementia Awareness
- Dementia and Befriending
- Dementia and Mood and Wellbeing

These sessions were delivered online to a mixture of paid staff and volunteers, with resources being shared to those who weren't able to attend on the day. As a small charity, being able to access this training for free was a huge bonus, and the courses fitted in well to their existing training offer to volunteers. The Project Co-Ordinator, Lindsey, told us that although they may have preferred face-to-face training had circumstances allowed, the online courses were enjoyable, well presented, and accessible. In particular, the interactive nature of the sessions worked well for the team, keeping them engaged.

Training participants came to the sessions with a mix of prior experience and understanding of dementia; for some the information was very new, and for others it offered an opportunity to reinforce understanding and refresh their knowledge. Overall, the biggest impact was an increase in confidence for volunteers going into the community to befriend people living with dementia. In particular, the mood and wellbeing training gave participants a deeper understanding of what to expect when supporting people, allowing them to be more patient and to not take things personally if the friend they visit's mood is low, as this may be an impact of their condition. The training also placed an emphasis on focusing on the abilities of people with dementia rather than their disability.

As a service, Lindsey reports that the training means they can more confidently match befrienders and friends, and that carers of people with dementia feel reassured that the volunteer will be skilled and knowledgeable to support their loved one well.

## The People's Postcode Lottery Impact Case Study



The People's Postcode Lottery is a not-for-commercial-gain organisation with a mission is to help raise funds for charities and good causes and increase awareness of their work, and does this by managing and administering lotteries for charities. The organisation is committed to social responsibility and ensuring high quality training and development for its staff.

Initially they had got in touch with Age Scotland's Dementia Training team to support staff who were thinking about retirement through the Planning For Your Future training. Through this contact, the People's Postcode Lottery Customer Experience team saw an opportunity to build on the existing dementia training as part of staff induction, to offer further support to the growing staff team to ensure they are using best practice to support potentially vulnerable customers. A bespoke in-house Dementia Friendly Customer Services programme was developed in partnership with the Customer Experience team to ensure the training would best meet the needs of the 150 staff engaged in the online training sessions.

The sessions were taken up enthusiastically by the staff team with support from senior leadership. They felt the information covered was extremely relevant to their day-to-day work and gave them confidence in supporting customers who may be vulnerable, grounded in good practice. Within the team there was a range of experience coming into the sessions; for some staff this offered opportunities to challenge their assumptions about supporting people with dementia, and for others the training offered reassurance, and knowledge that underlined that they were doing the right thing already. Some staff reported that they have used the information they gained beyond the workplace, within their family relationships or in volunteering roles in their communities.

Lucina from the People's Postcode Lottery Training team told us that it was particularly useful to bring in the additional expertise of the Age Scotland Dementia Training team as a complement to their existing internal training, and that key to the success of this partnership is having shared core values as well as a flexible and tailored approach to the task of such a big training programme. For other organisations considering a similar challenge, she said: *"Go for the training, it's going to benefit people on the front line. Even if they are doing something already you can never have too much!"*

## VOCAL

### Impact Case Study



VOCAL is the Voice of Carers Across Lothian – an organisation run by carers for carers since 1994. VOCAL’s carer support teams work with unpaid carers to help identify the issues affecting them, and achieve the best possible outcome for carers. In addition to a wide range of services and supports for carers, VOCAL coordinates programmes of training and events that carers can access on topics that support their wellbeing and caring role.

The training offered by Age Scotland’s Dementia Training team was a great fit for the needs and interests of VOCAL carers, in particular the ‘Caring for someone with dementia and your rights’ programme. VOCAL’s training team runs many programmes in house but bringing in outside expertise on topic areas like dementia was very useful and offers additional opportunities to connect carers with supports.

The unpaid carers who accessed the training had a range of knowledge and experience levels and accessed the online sessions once a week for four weeks, and whilst some may have preferred in person support, the flexibility of online sessions was beneficial to carers’ busy lives. Good engagement from carers and their own feedback shows that they felt comfortable in the online space and the sessions were relevant and useful to them.

The range of topics covered in the training, plus the diversity of experience and stages on the caring journey for those attending, meant that what carers took away from the sessions was very individual. Carer Training Officer Aga reflected that for some individuals it was an opportunity to store information away for a later time when it would become relevant, that as people’s caring journey changes different types of information become relevant at different points. Carers reported feeling more confident in asking for help and being more aware of the services available to them, including one carer who was able to take up appropriate support and credited the sessions with giving her the confidence to pursue this.

Carers also gained connection and a forum for sharing ideas and stories as a result of coming together for the initial training sessions, and following the initial four week programme the Dementia Training team facilitated additional reunion sessions to continue the conversation. The flexibility for delivering additional sessions, and the partnership between VOCAL and the Dementia Training team, had made this a very positive experience for all involved, with plans in the future for further sessions and widening the topics covered. Aga told us *“this course can help many people and I recommend it”*.