

M look forward to living longer these days. Men born in 1850 might have died at 65. Men born in 1875, however, would have survived longer, to 77, perhaps. Apart from exceptional circumstances such as wars, each generation has generally enjoyed greater life expectancy than their parents. This is explained by a general improvement in living standards (better housing, healthier environment), lifestyle (fewer people smoking, for instance) and healthcare (such as the use of statins to lower cholesterol), which outweigh recent developments such as obesity. This trend continues – which is one reason why the state retirement age is being increased, because people are living longer than was anticipated when the original calculations were made. And all this has consequences for care homes.

Heathlands Village, on the edge of the Manchester suburb of Prestwich in Bury, has noted "massive changes". Joyce Khan, marketing manager, says that "even in the past five to 20 years, you can see that the kind of people who come in are very different from before – far frailer and less independent."

"Funding is also an issue today," she says, as "there is less funding, so people tend to begin by trying to manage at home, with carers or adaptations". Whereas previously "people used to come in out of choice and might have been quite capable to care for themselves but were just lonely, nowadays 70 per cent of people we care for have dementia in some form or other."

Due to these changes and because the elderly today are frailer and more confused, the home has increased staffing ratios. It has also modified the buildings to help people with dementia, for instance a themed mural has



Sharing a smile and keeping active at Heathlands Village

been put up outside the dining room, to help residents recognise that this is the place where they come to eat.

Further restructuring is under way, "so that residents can find their way around independently" says Joyce. This will require major fund-raising.

A "memory box" is placed outside each room, containing a house number and familiar objects to help residents identify their own room. Memory boxes are also placed in the lounge, as a stimulus for communication. Relatives are encouraged to give Heathlands as much information on the resident as possible, which can be used by staff to trigger their minds. Heathlands offers group and individual support for family members.

Activities at Heathlands are devised to engage dementia residents – they include challah-making or fun with Yiddish words. Heathlands' kitchens are supervised by the Manchester Beth Din. It also has its own synagogue, used by residents and the local community.

The home's nursing department has beacon status – the highest possible under the national Gold Standards Framework for end-of-life care.

Originally known as The Home for Aged Jews, Nightingale, in south London, has a 170-year history and originates from the East End. In 1908, the home moved to its current site in Clapham, which has been continually upgraded over the years. An extensive development programme is now under way.

Nightingale's "holistic and person-centred model of care" gives sensitive attention to each resident's physical, intellectual, emotional, cultural, religious, social and creative needs.

The home has a full range of medical and nursing facilities, including a well-equipped physiotherapy and occupational therapy department and a medical clinic. Residents also enjoy the home's gardens, café, synagogue, hairdressing salon and shop. They can take part in exercise classes, lectures,

In April this year, Nightingale joined forces with Hammerson House, in north London – a union that benefits both homes and the wider community. The two homes have always had a close relationship; both are well established charities in the Jewish community and have a common ethos.

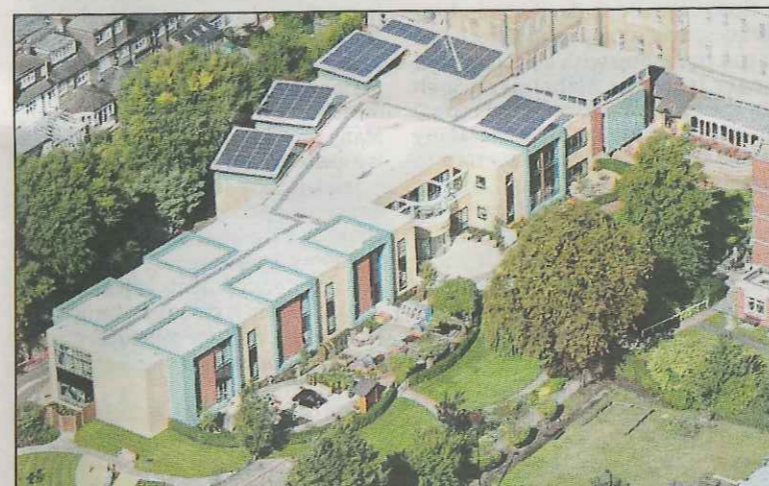
The merger was motivated by the desire to learn from each other and plan for the future. For instance, a pioneering dementia unit opened at Nightingale last August, in partnership with the Bradford Dementia Group at the University of Bradford – and Nightingale Hammerson will continue to develop this work. At the same time, the homes have retained their individual identities and friendly atmosphere.

There are long-term plans for significant upgrades to the accommodation at Hammerson House, as well as continuing the work at Nightingale, to ensure both homes keep up with the changing needs of older people.

ACTIVITIES INCLUDE "FUN WITH YIDDISH WORDS"

kosher meals each day and all their laundry and cleaning is taken care of. The society does not provide personal or medical care, but can assist residents in arranging this care from outside sources.

A volunteer house committee arranges social activities and outings, oversees the management of the professional staff and recruits and organises other volunteers, who perform the smaller tasks which enhance the lives of residents. Many volunteers come from Progressive synagogues in and around London and Hertfordshire, but residents come from all religious backgrounds.



The Wohl Wing at Nightingale, a purpose-built dementia unit

Creative and nurturing activities can combat the distress of dementia

Pets take the lead in improving

SUPPORTING SOMEONE with dementia requires both practical understanding of the disease itself and an insight into the psychological and emotional journey. Dementia is a complex illness; it is challenging for everyone involved. This journey requires finding ways to cope – not only for the person with dementia, but also for the loved ones around that person. Living life in the moment and creating pleasant times are fundamental for success.

Each person with dementia experiences the disease differently, so the support that is required will vary. Memory loss and confusion can cause anxiety, frustration and distress, but there are strategies that can help an individual with dementia to live life to the full and alleviate distress.

Becoming involved in activities can



Therapist with canine colleagues

heighten stimulation and engagement. They can restore the self-esteem of people with dementia and improve

their relationships with others around them. For many with dementia, the creative parts of the brain often remain undamaged for a long time, so a huge range of activities can still be enjoyed. Crafts, painting, flower arranging, poetry, gardening or other hobbies can change people's lives and prevent despair.

As well as helping people with dementia to engage in such activities, the team at SweetTree Home Care Services are also providing individual cognitive stimulation therapy. This treatment, for people with mild to moderate dementia, involves around 14 sessions of themed activities, designed to actively stimulate and engage people with dementia. Each ICST session follows a general theme, with a choice of activities to cater to the interests of the individual, such as physical games, music, current affairs,

being creative or word games. SweetTree Home Care services has been involved with pilot studies with University College London focusing on this therapy and its staff are now able to offer it on a one-to-one basis

Another extremely successful component of support is pet therapy. Pets provide unconditional love and affection, which allows interaction without challenge.

Research shows that animal interaction can provide a socially acceptable way to satisfy the human need to touch (Howell - Newman and Goldman, 1993). SweetTree have found that Horace, its Pets as Therapy dog has reduced clients' signs of stress and increased their well-being through giving them the opportunity to nurture.

SweetTree's dementia care service has also started the Get Togethers scheme. This enables clients to meet

each other and share activities, or simply enjoy lunch or coffee and a chat. Get Togethers offers the comfort and security of a very small group. Clients with dementia display a shared, unspoken understanding, which is supportive and heartwarming.

This deep empathy is also seen in SweetTree's family support groups. These groups not only enable family members to express their feelings about having a loved one with dementia, they have also put people in touch with others who truly understand.

One aspect of the support groups is providing information – increasing relatives' understanding about dementia, in a training style, offering coping strategies and ideas for activities to help those with dementia to live life to the full, with people around them who understand their needs.

One size does not fit all. Different

activities are required to support different individuals.

Reminiscence therapy may be the key for one client and being part of the buddy scheme may be right for another. Similarly, the arts may be important to one person and doing the garden may inspire another.

A full personal history, given by the client or a family member, gives SweetTree a starting point in understanding the person's likes and dislikes, previous hobbies, pets, work and family history and enables the team to explore opportunities to alleviate distress and promote fulfilment and a good quality of life.

For more about the dementia service at SweetTree, contact Annette Warner: annette.warner@sweettree.co.uk or Dean Boshier: dean.boshier@sweettree.co.uk or call 0207 624 9944

All rooms with en-suite facilities and own gardens. Full range of activities outings to local places of interest

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For more information please call 0121 458 6



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