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THERAPEUTIC ACTIVITY AND RESPITE

Golf Days Out, a new social enterprise, is helping people with dementia undertake meaningful activity, while offering respite for their care givers



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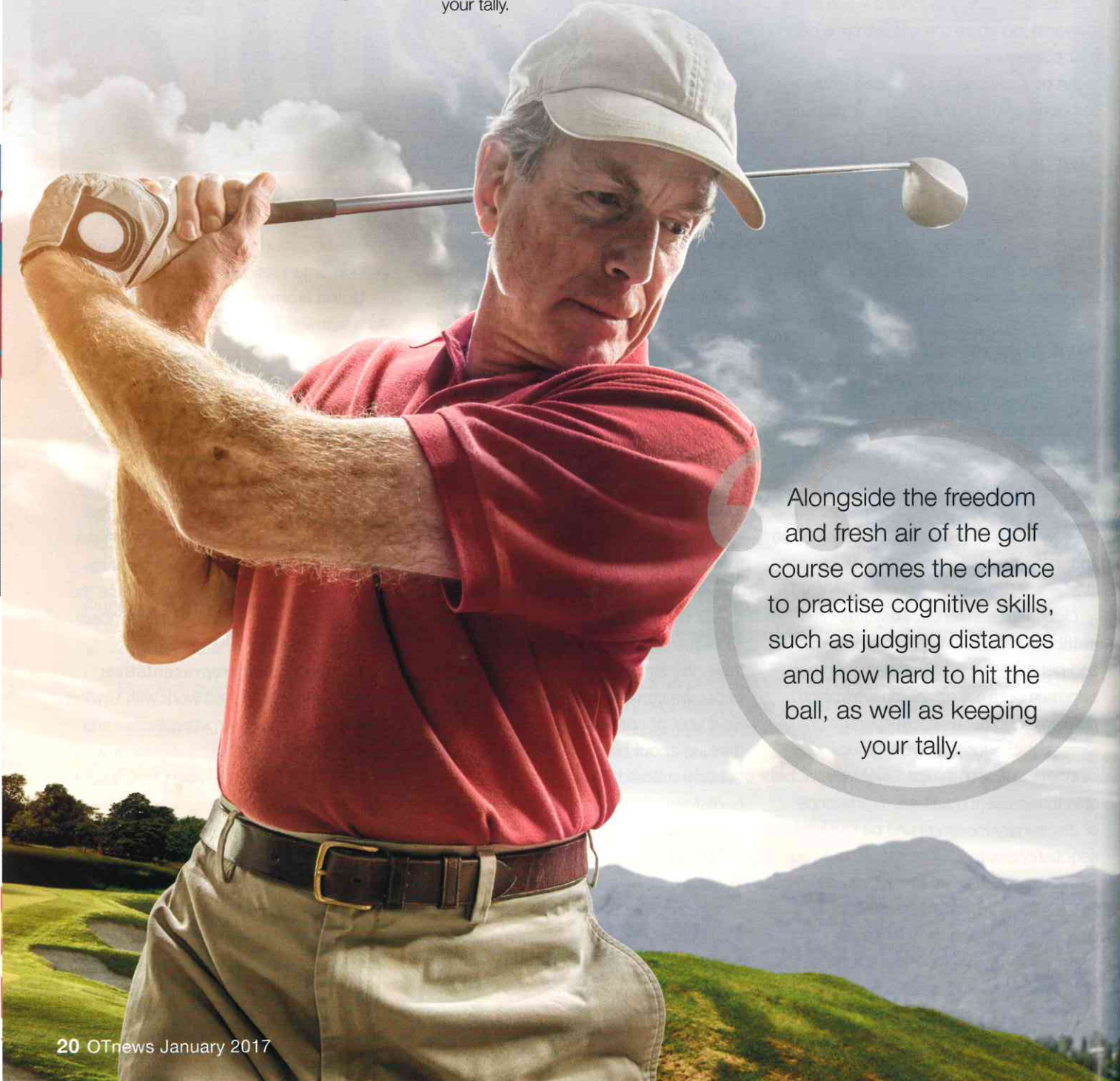
A new initiative in Lincolnshire is being described as an innovation in therapeutic activity and respite. **Carol Duff** and **Danny Walsh** explain how this budding social enterprise is helping people living with dementia and their care givers

Consultant occupational therapist and senior lecturer Carol Duff and senior lecturer Danny Walsh, both at the University of Lincoln, have been working to evaluate a new initiative in Lincolnshire.

It is well known that physical exercise is good for people with dementia, but it is not often that golf is considered as an option. Golf Days Out is a refreshing exception. It is a budding social enterprise that uses a local golf course to offer meaningful activity and respite both for people living with dementia and their care givers.

The vision of a care worker with an enthusiasm for golf, Anthony Blackburn, Golf Days Out generates a sense of camaraderie with its unique blend of physical activity, the outdoors and cognitive and social stimulation.

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Above: Lincoln Golf Centre owner Brian Logan (left) and golf 'buddy' John Bird (right), with Golf Days Out originator Anthony Blackburn (centre) and golfers Nick Newton (second left) and Mike Eastham.

Here's what the golfers living with dementia told us:

'I love the company and the banter - I've had an awful game of golf today but it didn't matter.'

'It's being outside in the fresh air and being able to participate.'

'Keeping up with the golf is tremendous - still being able to do it.'

'The golf helps me keep going.'

'I find speaking hard from the illness - I can't get the words, so this is important as I practise my talking and here it doesn't matter, we are all similar.'

'Camaraderie - the golf gets me to do things for other people.'

'It's a great thing - we help each other.'

'There's a real sense of community here and it's physical the golf... good for you.'

'It helps my wife - it gives her time of her own. [It's] a good break [and] I've won a couple of trophies. It all has the purpose of making you feel better.'

Carers were just as approving, giving strongly positive comments about seeing their partners being able to continue the golf and remaining active with an enhanced sense of purpose and self-efficacy. They also benefited from the respite the venture provides. Some of the comments from carers included:

'He wasn't a golfer but now he rarely misses a shot and absolutely enjoys it... it's the only time he comes out.'

'He was so excited after the first session that he'd be able to play again, it's nice to see him doing what he loved to do.'

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Above: Golfers Nick Newton (left) and Mike Eastham (right) are supported by golf 'buddy' John Bird.

etting started

Golf courses are invariably beautiful and peaceful places and the venture ties in with current thinking in mental health about the value of outdoor activity and 'cotherapy' for relaxation, boosting self-esteem and fighting depression and anxiety (Mind 2015). Golf also offers the opportunity to use and maintain social skills, form new friendships and keep in touch with a sporting passion.

For Golf Days Out, dementia friends training is given to interested local golfers who then become 'golfing buddies' to people living with dementia.

They then go on to play a full nine holes and have team competitions for trophies in which all can participate. The driving range and putting green are also put to good use.

No previous golfing experience is necessary and all levels help each other out. At the same time, carers have been encouraged to become a support group with little prompting from us, so this weekly venture provides significant health and social benefits at the same time.

Initial evaluations have been positive, highlighting the value attached to taking part, the friendly banter and the sense of togetherness.

Positive feedback

Patients were referred by the local Alzheimer's Society and Age UK. Qualitative evaluations used a modified version of the DEMOOL scale, which is an accepted quality of life measure for people living with dementia and their carers developed by the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London.

To start with short interviews based on the DEMOOL scale were used, but a full quantitative assessment will take place in the near future.

The first qualitative feedback gives a picture of positive attitudes among those taking part, including comments about being able to try on with a pastime they love and the camaraderie it generates and general improvements in occupational performance.

'I can't get him to a day centre, but I can't stop him coming here.'

'We (the other wives) meet up for a chat and a coffee, we've made new friends and we meet up outside too.'

'It allows me to be at work. I am not worried about him being here – I'm very reluctant to let him go to a lot of places but I am confident when he is here, I don't worry.'

'It's good here, he's got early onset and there's nothing for younger ones, but he's helped to fit in and he helps the others.'

'It gives him his own social life ... he says "its my thing" where he feels he's not reliant on other people so it gives him a sense of independence rather than illness.'

'The best way of describing it is that it makes him buoyant, he lights up when he comes here, it brings him alive again.'

'He also has Parkinson's and when he putts he's not shaking so much.'

'He always remembers the golf, whereas he doesn't remember other things.'

'This gives him an enormous sense of pride. He will polish his golf clubs and look after his golf shoes, it gives him a sense of purpose.'

'They help each other on the golf course so you have this chap with dementia helping another chap with dementia... they know how each other feels.'

'He's happier and he's more relaxed so I am more relaxed, it's priceless from my point of view to see him happy and doing something as he was always so active.'

'To see the look on his face when he did play golf again, was an experience that will stay with me for a long time.'

Further evaluation and future development

The qualitative results are significant enough to support a full quantitative research investigation, which should provide the necessary evidence to persuade commissioners of dementia support that this is worth investing in.

As people who have worked in dementia care for many years we can see the venture significantly helping people maintain their capabilities while having fun at the same time.

I love the company and the banter – I've had an awful game of golf today but it didn't matter.

We are piloting the scheme at the Lincoln Golf Centre, whose management and members have wholeheartedly embraced the concept and cannot do enough to support it. Indeed, many members know someone with dementia among their own families and friends.

The idea also has the support of the national golfing body Golf England and it is hoped to roll it out to other golf courses and embrace other medical conditions such as

Parkinson's disease, where we have already seen some remarkable effects on reducing tremors.

Leisure activities combining physical activity, cognitive stimulation and social skills are known to contribute to successful ageing (Baltes and Baltes 1990; Fischer 1995).

These studies cite biological health, mental health, cognitive efficiency, social competence and productivity, personal growth and control, life satisfaction, interaction with others and sense of purpose as key elements to a 'successful' old age.

Golf Days Out combines all these aspects whilst also providing a valuable respite break for carers.

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For further information on Golf Days Out contact Anthony Blackburn. Email: golfinsociety@gmail.com or Facebook: Golf in Society, or read the blog: www.golfinsociety.com

