



Innovations
in Dementia



Research report

Experiences of people with dementia

A visit to the ZSL London Zoo

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Acknowledgements

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The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers

The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) is the leading expert in inclusive research involving disabled and older consumers. We are an independent, national charity with over 50 years of experience in consumer research and insight in this specialist area. We are run by, and for, people with a personal experience of disability.

Innovations in Dementia

Innovations in Dementia (ID) is a social enterprise that works with people with dementia, as partners and volunteers, to develop and test ideas that will enhance the lives of people with dementia. ID facilitates DEEP (Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project), which brings together over 80 local groups of people with dementia across the UK

Great Camden Minds and Camden Carers

The Great Camden Minds are a dementia Involvement Group based in the London Borough of Camden and is facilitated by staff from Age UK Camden, one of the largest Age UK charities in London, and Camden Carers. The group meets on a monthly basis with the aim of reducing the stigma of dementia, influencing services and policies relevant to people with dementia and accessing peer support

ZSL London Zoo

The Zoo `officially' opened on 27 April 1828 and is steeped in history. The site in Regent's Park is home to thousands of different species. Opened in 1828 by the Zoological Society of London, ZSL London Zoo is the world's oldest scientific zoo and the brainchild of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. ZSL (Zoological Society of London) is an international conservation charity with the vision of conserving wildlife globally.

Introduction

DEEP groups in London all share a desire to change their communities to make them better for people with dementia. In addition to offering support to people with dementia and their carers, many DEEP groups have experience with conducting audits of venues and services to raise awareness of access needs of people with dementia. However, during a meeting with DEEP group leads from across the UK, it became evident that individual groups can struggle to scale their insights.

This partnership project between RiDC, ID and local DEEP groups offers an opportunity to bring together and share insights from local groups in London and document best practices. In doing so, our aim is to contribute to the wide distribution of knowledge and awareness about the needs of people with dementia and the removal of barriers that prevent their meaningful participation in society.

It is important to note that this participatory research was undertaken in a spirit of collaboration with the London Zoo and was not intended to take the role of an inspection. The project aimed to empower and give a voice to members of Great Camden Minds undertaking the audit, as well as supporting the Zoo in identifying and making a case for improvements as well as to celebrate successes.

The research question that guided this project was as follows:

How might local venues be made more accessible for people with dementia?

Background

Great Camden Minds is facilitated by staff from Age UK Camden and Camden Carers on a monthly basis. At the time of the research, the group counted approximately five members who attended the group on a regular basis.

RiDC visited Great Camden Minds on one occasion prior to visiting the Zoo. This meeting focused on introducing the project and brainstorming possible venues and activities that individual members in the group would like to attend for their entertainment and wellbeing. A long list emerged of attractions, things to do and places to see in London. Post-it notes were displayed across the table as a visual guide and reminder of all the ideas that were shared, and the group was tasked with picking their favourites.

During this visit we got a chance to meet four members of the group alongside the two group coordinators, where we introduced the project and went around the table brainstorming activity ideas.

Following the meeting, the researchers researched each activity and shared a summary of options which was presented back to the group by the group coordinators during their next meeting (more about this on slide nine).

After deliberating, the group decided that they wanted to investigate ways in which they could assess the suitability of visiting a zoo for people with dementia.

The group decided collectively that a visit to ZSL London Zoo on the 18th of May 2022 would be most suitable to research this project's objectives and visiting the zoo between 14.00 and 16.00 was most suitable to their needs. RiDC made ticket arrangements and agreed upon transportation with the Great Camden Minds group leader for a total of four participants attending.

RiDC also visited the ZSL London Zoo on one occasion to discuss the research objectives of the group and its practicalities, as well as objectives of the Zoo. Researchers met with the Community Engagement and Outreach Officer to discuss the project and prepare for the visit.

Accessibility at the ZFL Zoo

ZSL London Zoo is continuously exploring how they can make the zoo inclusive for all, and have already put many actions in place.

Staff training

ZSL Zoo provides accessibility training to staff who can then become ambassadors.

Accessible entry

- The Zoo is a member of the community access scheme¹ (more about this scheme on slide nine)
- The Penguin Pass queue hopper gives families the opportunity to hop queues at the Zoo.
- Carers can attend the Zoo free of charge
- The website offers an accessibility page with information enabling disabled visitors to plan their visit²

Activities

The zoo offer regular activities at ZSL London Zoo for people with disabilities. At the moment, activities are in place for:

- Blind or visually impaired
- Deaf or hearing impaired audiences
- Those with cognitive impairments

The Zoo is also working on opening a community centre to foster connections with community organisations (such as dementia groups).

Physical access

ZFL London Zoo is keen to understand what activities they could organise for people with dementia. The project came at a good time, because plans were in place to work with another Age UK group to develop this activity.

Findings from the research will be used to inform this project.

Based on this preparation the following objectives were set out for the visit:

- What are the challenges for people with dementia in visiting the ZSL London Zoo?
- How might any barriers be overcome to make the Zoo and its activities more suitable to the needs of people with dementia?
- What activities in the ZSL London Zoo are particularly interesting for people with dementia?

¹ <https://www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/visitor-information/community-access-scheme>

² <https://www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/visitor-information/accessibility>

What did we do?

Brainstorm activity

The first meeting with the group focused on brainstorming possible venues and activities that individual members in the group would like to attend for their entertainment and wellbeing. A long list emerged of attractions, things to do and places to see in London.

Participants expressed a diverse range of interests. These included a wish to reconnect with the classic cinema of their time, experiencing the nature of Kew Gardens and attending a ballet show.

The researchers observed that with each activity, different memories were brought to the surface, with members of the group recounting their experience as a stage performer, or how they used to visit various markets across London in search of vintage pieces, or discussing their favourite Hollywood actors from the golden era, and the movies they used to go and see. They illustrated these memories with the utmost detail, as if they had occurred just recently.

Selecting an activity

The researchers conducted a general risk assessment for each activity to enable the group to vote on their preferred activity. A presentation of these insights was created and sent to one of the group coordinators, who presented it to the group in their next meeting.

This presentation was focused on offering a brief overview of each activity's accessibility, showing early signs of the obstacles people with dementia may face. For instance, concerns were identified of flashing images and loud noises with the cinema activity, as well as challenging time constraints, with film showings often being in the late afternoon or evening.

These time slots are often not dementia friendly as older people with cognitive impairments can get increasingly tired and become more vulnerable in the evenings.

Other activities, such as the London bus tour, presented mobility constraints, with minimal wheelchair accessibility and dangerous stepping access.

Research approach

The following approach was agreed upon in consultation with Great Camden Minds staff to ensure the whole experience would not be too taxing on members of the group. The scope of the visit focused on the facilities as well as staff interactions.



Group discussion

During the visit, members of the group were encouraged to share their experiences in relation to accessing the Zoo and its facilities. Midway during the visit, the group gathered for a break and had conversations about the accessibility of the zoo visit thus far.



Observation

Throughout the experience, the two RiDC researchers were sensitive to participants' responses and documented these through observation, note taking and taking photographs. The researchers also listened to facilitators, which often added different perspectives and context.



Expert review

RiDC researchers and staff from Camden Carers and Age UK drew from their perspectives and observations based on experience of participants with dementia and accessibility needs.

Planning a visit to the ZFL Zoo

After deliberating over the presentation, the group decided that the Zoo was their number one choice. They considered that the zoo had sufficient access features for a safe visit: mobility aids were available if needed, there was access to multiple accessible toilets and level access to animal exhibits. However, most of all, the group was excited about the prospect of being in nature and seeing the diverse body of animals present at the Zoo.

Selecting a date and time

The group coordinator decided it would be best to schedule the trip on a day the group regularly met. Eventually a date was decided that coincided with the Dementia Action Week, which was to take place from the 16th to the 22nd of May .

The timing of the trip was chosen based on timings the group was familiar with (between 14.00 and 16.00) and with the awareness group members might get fatigued as the day progressed.

Pre-Visit

Two RiDC researchers visited the Zoo a week prior to the visit and toured the Zoo in order to determine the general accessibility and suitability of routes (see map on next page) and animal exhibits and identifying any possible challenges the group could face.

Accessibility needs and concerns were discussed with the Community Engagement and Outreach Officer. The main concern was the sloped pavement in some areas, such as tunnels found in the pink route, or the accessibility of dark animal exhibits such as the reptile house, as well as the floor seating during demonstrations (ie. the bird show) which were avoided on the day.

Other animal exhibits that were interactive in nature, such as the farm animals where one could pet the goats or the 'Butterfly Paradise' where one could walk among the butterflies were encouraged.

Booking Tickets

The Zoo invited RiDC to join [the Community Access Scheme](#)^{1- slide 6} . This scheme aims to help overcome some of the barriers that people face, by providing heavily subsidised rates and information, so that visitors can plan a visit and affordably enjoy a day at the ZSL London Zoo.

Organisations that are eligible are those who work with local older people, families on a low income and people with additional needs and disabilities. Organisations can apply online for tickets to share with service users to visit the Zoo, which RiDC did in order to enable the visit. The ZSL London Zoo already has many Community Engagement Partners based in Camden that work with older people.

About the visit

Four members of the group were able to participate in auditing the Zoo. There were two facilitators from Great Camden Minds and two researchers from RiDC.

On the day

As much as possible the visit by the participants to the Zoo was viewed as a normal visit with no special consideration given except for a heightened critical eye. The researchers explained the need to document people's thoughts and opinions throughout the visit. They also made participants aware that facilitators would take pictures and that permission would be asked in case of use in any publication.

Consent forms were signed with members of the group on the day. One participant verbally provided consent and provided a written consent form on a later occasion. The scope of the visit focused on the Zoo's environment and its facilities as well as staff interactions.

The group congregated at the location where the group usually meet and travelled to the Zoo together in two taxi's that had been arranged by RiDC.

Given the size of the Zoo, two wheelchairs were also pre-booked over the phone, in case the group would need them on the day. A deposit payment for the wheelchairs was made on the day.

The group stayed together as they walked through the Zoo to observe different animals and use its facilities.

During the visit, the group was enthusiastically welcomed by members of the Zoo who were aware of their visit. At the end of the day, participants were encouraged to find a souvenir in the shop for them to memorialise their visit.

After the visit, the group travelled back in a taxi together.



Images: All four members of Great Camden Minds who attended the ZFL Zoo visit.



Map of the ZSL Zoo



Key

- Pink Route
- Blue Route
- Orange Route
- A First Aid
- T Toilets
- C Changing Places Toilet
- M Membership & Experience Enquiries
- I Information Kiosk
- P Photo Pick Up
- P Parking
- W Water Fountain
- L Luggage Lockers
- Z ZSL London Zoo Lodges
- Q Quiet Space
- C Charging Station

Food

1. Terrace Restaurant
 2. Zoo Treats
 3. Amwell Street Food
 4. Beach Hut
 5. Peckish Parrot
- Take-away food vans throughout the site - opening times vary

Shopping

1. Zoo Shop
2. Reptile Kiosk
3. Penguin Beach

Classrooms

1. Community & Learning
2. Rainforest
3. Activity Den
4. Lions
5. Huxley Lecture Theatre

³ <https://www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/visitor-information/map-of-zsl-london-zoo>

Findings



What did we find out about the accessibility of ZFL Zoo for visitors with dementia?

The first part of this section details helpful and unhelpful features that were identified during the visit with a light touch audit of the following areas or facilities:

- Navigating the Zoo
- Wheelchair access
- Information
- Staff interactions
- Facilities
- Other

This section also shares other more general reflections and insights gained from the visit that are considered relevant to enabling people with dementia to access the Zoo in the future.

What did we find out?

Maps

When the group arrived, they were welcomed by a staff member who explained certain aspects of the Zoo and made the group feel special and cared for. He pointed us to the wheelchair pick-up point and in the direction of a large board that had a map of the Zoo.

When asked if the group could have paper maps so everyone could participate in deciding where to go and which animals to view, it was explained that the Zoo had stopped issuing paper maps to be more sustainable, and that the large boards were placed in strategic areas to help people navigate their way around.

However, it was noticed that one needed to be pointed in the direction of the large map to find it as it was not placed directly at the entrance. Because the group was interested in the monkeys, they wandered off in the opposite direction of the large map and did not look at it until later.

Tip: It would have been useful to have a large version of the map directly at the beginning prior to being given access to different routes.

Because the large outdoor maps on the boards did not have a 'you are here' sign, the group found it difficult to use to navigate the Zoo. One participant expressed that it was "hard to see where we are on the map."

Tip: The group thought the board could be improved with a large round circle with 'you are here'. Still, there was a lot of information to take in for older people or people with cognitive disabilities like dementia.

Because visitors were encouraged to snap a picture of the board, it furthermore excluded many older people who don't carry smart phones or know how to operate them. It was noticed none of the older people in the group took pictures during their visit.

Tip: A participant commented "They really should have paper maps for those who ask for it", feeling the need for something they could carry and look at.



Image of large map. Note: This image was taken during an earlier visit a week prior and is added for illustrative purposes

It was observed that, at times, the group 'wasted' a bit of energy trying to establish where to go or walking in the wrong direction initially. When you don't have a lot of energy to spare, it means you have less time to enjoy the animals, or more importantly, find a toilet, or a bench to rest. The group liked the idea that the Zoo was attempting to be more sustainable, but in this instance felt it came at a cost of disabled and older peoples' needs and comfort.

What did we find out?

Staff presence

Whilst the group occasionally met with members of staff inside certain animal enclosures, such as the 'Butterfly Paradise', they also felt their visit would benefit from having more staff around to ask directions, in order to make navigating without a paper map work for everyone.

Tip: Information about where staff are stationed could be included when booking accessible tickets.

Routes

The group did not decide to follow one of the three coloured routes for a number of reasons. It was noticed that there was one large route and two shorter routes. One of the shorter routes (the pink route) was less accessible for a wheelchair as a result of having to move through two steep tunnels. The other route (the blue route) included some less suitable animal enclosures such as the dark reptile house.

As a result, the group made up their own route to see more suitable animals (the camels, the farm area where one can pet a goat, or the butterflies and the chatty birds) with a break in the picnic area where they could sit, and facilities where they could eat something.

Tip: We think these considerations could potentially inform a fourth 'access route' – suitable for older people and people with dementia.

Signage

Because the existing routes were less suitable, the coloured markings on the floor and signs with for example 'blue route' were limited in helping the group navigate the Zoo. Recalling a previous trip to the Zoo they took recently, one participant reflected that: "Going through the orange route, it went on forever. We kept seeing things we'd already seen"

This participant was referring to the difficulty of navigating the animal exhibits and the Zoo's routes by following the arrows on the pavement.

Tip: signposts could be further improved with images of animals, rather than merely text.

Participants noted that the animal 'paw prints' were useful to indicate what animals could be seen by following a certain direction, and that the smaller signposts were helpful.



What did we find out?

It was observed that in the 'Land of Lions', there was a lot more signage than in other parts of the Zoo. This makes the visit more special, however it can also make it more confusing for people with dementia who get distracted by the items and did not always understand in what way the information was meant to help them. One participant thought there was an actual station somewhere.



Wheelchair access

A wheelchair was booked in advance and could be collected after paying a deposit of £25. However, pre-booking was not a requirement. The process of collecting the wheelchair was smooth, with the staff member being extremely kind and helpful. Upon retrieval of the wheelchair, the staff member left her work booth and came out to help with getting the foldable wheelchair fully operational.

Initially, two manual wheelchairs had been reserved, however the group decided to only take one as they were happy to walk the routes and felt only one would be necessary in case someone felt tired.

The participants walked by themselves for the most part (two participants used a walking aid). One participant spent some time in the wheelchair when they were tired, but appeared apologetic in using it.

The researchers noticed there was some reservation toward using the wheelchair as participants appeared hesitant to use it even when tired.

Tip: The group felt it could have been good to hire a golf-type cart or 'airport cart' for groups of older people. As there is a limit on the time they can spend in the Zoo, it could be a way for them to see some different animals over a short period of time.

Electric scooters were also available in the same location as the manual wheelchairs, however these required a fee of £25 and a deposit of £30. They were available through pre-booking only.

Tip: To make the Zoo as inclusive as possible for everyone it is recommended to ensure electric scooters are made available at the same deposit price as wheelchairs and to make electronic scooters available without the need to pre-book. This could make a difference between visitors being able to visit the zoo independently or being forced to rely on someone else to push them.

Watching caterpillars become butterflies

Participants enjoyed the butterfly area and seeing and learning about the process of caterpillars turning into butterflies.



What did we find out?

Navigating the zoo with a wheelchair was doable for the most part, though the group did not attempt to access the ramp in the lion area.

The group was not able to understand signage pointing toward a wheelchair accessible lift. This was placed among the many other 'fake' decorative signs (ie. pointing toward a 'station') and it was unclear whether this sign was real or decorative.



In one instance, upon entering and leaving the 'Butterfly Paradise', the chain curtain (placed behind the plastic covers preventing butterflies from leaving the area) got tangled up between the wheels of the wheelchair.

Tip: Whilst appreciating the chackles have a purpose of protecting the animals, a sign to warn wheelchair users for this could be useful.



There were certain slopes throughout the Zoo that were too steep for wheelchair use. An example of which was seen in the penguin exhibit entrance, where the participant had to go down the slope on foot. The same was true for the circular glass wall at the zoo exhibit that allows visitors to look into the pool where the slope was quite steep, and the participant who was in the wheelchair at that time, had to get up and walk down.

Tip: Here, a handrail would have been helpful.



What did we find out?

At one point in the trip, after leaving the butterfly exhibit, one participant almost lost her balance due to an uneven pavement she stepped on. After this, the participant decided to use the wheelchair for the rest of the visit, as she felt safer. The image below shows the pavement the participant struggled with.



Staff Interactions

Whilst the staff we met and talked to were both helpful and considerate with our group, the group did notice they encountered less staff than expected.

When asked if participants would be able to come here by themselves, one participant replied: "To see certain animals, we would have to find someone [staff]." At one instance, one participant interacted with a staff member in the butterfly exhibit, asking them a series of questions about the insects. They were met with informative and friendly responses.

The group attended the feeding of the penguins, during which staff gave a talk using a microphone. However, some of the participants found it very difficult to understand what was being said. One individual noted, "I can get bits of it, but I can't understand everything she's saying."

This participant felt the Zoo staff member was speaking too fast and not clear enough.

[Tip: This could be resolved by giving visitors written information to supplement talks](#)

An individual experience for the group was booked but unfortunately cancelled. This experience could potentially have resolved some of the aforementioned challenges, as one-to-one interaction with staff worked better for the group to learn about the animals.

[Tip: Potentially, staff training could be used to encourage staff to walk around the Zoo and pro-actively engage with older or disabled visitors.](#)

What did we find out?

Information

We observed that older people and people with dementia may be drawn to written and visual displays of information, perhaps even more than other visitors.

Tip: Some information is quite noticeably designed for the needs of (parents with) children and the group thought it would be good to ensure information provided is also provided with older people in mind.

The group expressed that the type of information they would like to see more of was about how long the animals had been living at the zoo for and their age. They also really liked to learn interesting facts about the animals (ie. whether a camel really stores water in their 'bumps') and were very interested in everything the Zoo did to preserve and protect wildlife.

Tip: They also would have liked to learn more about ZSL Whipsnade Zoo.



The participants that took part in the visit did not experience difficulties in reading the signs. The various 'stay quiet' and 'no flash' signs were easy for the participants to understand and often had reasonably accessible font sizes.

However, people with dementia can have visual difficulties because the dementia affects the parts of their brain that handle visual information coming from the eyes. This means they can have visual problems but healthy eyes. More attention could be paid towards the colour contrast for some of the signs. Certain colours, such as white on blue, present a poor visual contrast for people with sight impairments. Larger font sizes can also help improve readability further.

Toilets

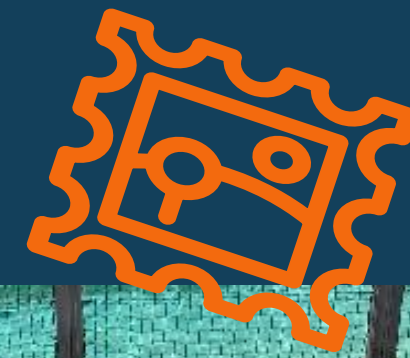
Several participants visited the bathroom facilities by 'The Farmyard' during the visit. It was noted that the step to get into the female bathroom was too high and presented a potential hazard for less mobile visitors. One participant said the toilet seating was quite low, which can be especially difficult for older people.

History

The group felt that, despite there being few older visitors in the Zoo, it was important to acknowledge the role that older people play in telling the 'heritage story' of a place like the Zoo, and therefore, they stressed how improvements could be made to enable access for older people. Especially for people with dementia, recalling memories from when they were young and visited the Zoo can have a lot of value.

This became evident when one of the participants brought old photographs that she took herself when she was younger during a visit to the Zoo. In the picture on the right, she shows them to staff members of the Zoo who told her they have a library that records such old images ^{4,5,6}. The ZSL's Library & Archives contains archival photographs of animals formerly at ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. Whilst most visitors of the zoo may have never heard about stories of the Zoo's early days, the participants of the group – being older and local to the area - knew them very well.

The participant who took the photos in the image above told the story of when a panda was given to the Zoo during the visit of the Chinese president, and how she saw an opportunity to quickly slip into the cage to take a picture from behind the panda– peeking just over its two little ears, from the perspective of the panda looking at the people instead of the other way around. Unfortunately, the picture was lost.



⁴ <https://www.zsl.org/about-us/zsl-library-collection>

⁵ <https://www.zsl.org/about-us/zsl-library-collection/the-zsl-archives>

⁶ <https://www.zsl.org/about-us/image-collection>

What did we find out?

Information

The group was able to access the accessibility toilet using a blue badge radar key that one of the Great Camden Minds leaders carried. However, had this not been the case it may have been difficult to find staff to access one in time.

Tip: It is recommended disabled or older visitors are informed about the need to either bring or ask for a radar key upon arrival at the Zoo, or at booking stages.



One of the participants who used this facility did not experience any challenges using it. The Zoo is also to be commended for having a sink that is movable to different heights. However, entering and exiting was somewhat difficult due to the weight of the door, which was quite heavy to both open and shut.



Seating

When the group arrived at the Zoo in stages (over two taxis) there was a need for them to wait at the entrance to gather. However, no seating was available before or directly after ticket checks. Staff were kind enough to let the first part of the group enter prior to scanning tickets so they could find a place to sit and wait for the rest, and the group found a place on a brick wall in the shade.

Tip: Placing a bench or two near the entrance before scanning tickets would be beneficial to groups of older and/or less mobile people visiting the Zoo.

Once inside the Zoo, the group was happy to be able to rest in the central picnic area. More spaces with benches throughout the zoo would make it more accessible for older people/ those with less mobility or hidden disability.

Tip: The benches can be somewhat camouflaged due to their colour. A contrasting colour might help people identify the benches more easily.

What did we find out?

The image below depicts the group resting in the central picnic area, which offered appropriate shade from the sun that day. However, as seen in this image, none of the group members were able to use the tables as they should be used which does not enable social interaction.

Tip: It is recommended to replace these picnic tables with designs that don't require people to climb over the bench to put their legs under the table.



Animal enclosures

Throughout the visit, participants often noted they could not see through the glass walls around the animal enclosures. This was particularly apparent in the monkey exhibit, with participants mentioning that, with the rooms being quite dark, the daylight reflection onto the glass made it especially hard to see the animals on the other side. It was common to see participants trying to shield the reflection from their eyes using their hand.

The image on the right shows members of the group trying to see past their reflection into the glass.

Shop

Participants were encouraged to pick out a souvenir in the shop prior to leaving. However, upon entering the shop we soon realized the choice of souvenirs was quite overwhelming.



In retrospect we thought that it would have been better to have a choice of specific items from a pre-selected display that the group could choose from. Mugs, a carry bag, fridge magnet or towel were popular choices.

Tip: Potentially, a small range of popular items could be sold in a smaller boot (such as near the penguins) or at the very entrance of the shop so people can avoid getting lost in a big shop.

Attracting older visitors

When the group sat down at one of the wooden picnic tables, one participant looked around and said after a long pause:

“You know what I have noticed? There is no elderly in the Zoo. We are the only ones.”

It raised an interesting discussion in the group, and we explored why that could be. Mostly, people felt it had to do with the price of tickets.

“They are still very expensive.”

The group also thought it was quite difficult for older people to navigate the Zoo, especially on their own.



What did we find out?

It would furthermore be helpful to have signage indicating the shop can be avoided to exit the Zoo, to make this option more clear for those for whom exiting through a big shop is confusing. At this point, a reminder about where the toilets are or having accessible toilets available would also be helpful.

Group pictures

At the exit of the Zoo, it was observed staff was present to collect professional pictures taken, which is something the group would have loved. However, by the time they learned about this option, it was no longer possible to take this picture – as the group learned it needed to be taken during their trip in the Zoo that had now come to an end, and the station was only set up for collection. The photography station was positioned by the 'Guy the Gorilla' exhibit near the main entrance, which the group had not realized

The group would have liked to know about this sooner and wondered whether they missed information about this and how they could have learned more.

[Tip: Possibly, this option could have been advertised as part of booking tickets through the access scheme or at some point at arrival, near the entrance.](#)

Allergies

Some participants noted there were limited options for lactose or gluten intolerant visitors, or those with other allergies. Being able to drink enough fluids, have a snack or eat can be especially important for older or disabled people.

[Tip: More alternative selections and information about allergens could be provided on menus to improve this.](#)



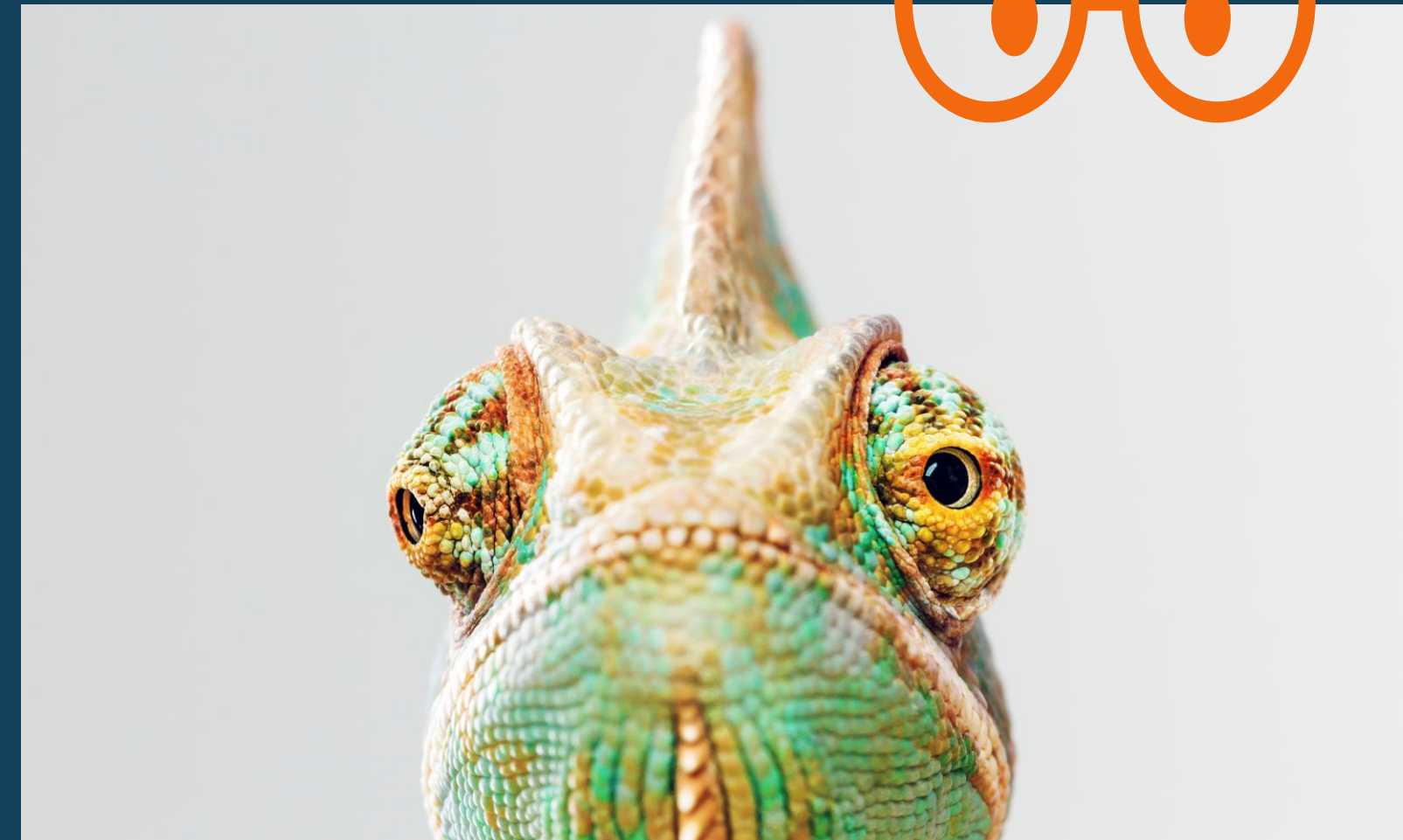
The group later learned there were free water fountains where bottles could be refilled, however these were not spotted by the group – potentially because they carried plenty of water bottles with them at the time and refilling was not needed.

Old and young collaborations

One member of the group had put some thought into what projects could be nice for the Zoo, to make it more accessible prior to the visit. She dreamed of partnering with the Zoo and a charity for blind people to create a fun project for children that asked them to guess the eye of the animals and match them.

She explained her fascination with animal eyes. “Why do some animals have eyes?” she wondered. And that their eyes were all so different. Her thought was proof to us that older people and those with dementia would be fantastic partners in future initiatives to connect the Zoo with local communities.

The ZSL Zoo is also currently in the process of building a Community Centre, where partner organizations will be able to book the space to hold workshops or work in collaboration with the Zoo. A pilot is being carried out with groups of older people, with activities such as bingo and quizzes, music sessions, arts and crafts, and gardening. Once the Community Centre opens, the Zoo plans to run these activities for older and more vulnerable groups regularly and foster innovative and inclusive collaborations with groups across London.



Recommendations



What else did we learn?

The first part of this section discusses suggestions and ideas to overcome challenges identified during the visit to further enhance accessibility in the following areas:

- Navigating the Zoo
- Wheelchair access
- Information
- Facilities
- Other

This section also shares more general reflections and insights gained from the visit that are considered relevant to enabling people with dementia to access the Zoo in the future.

Navigating the zoo

Here are some ideas on how to improve navigation in the Zoo for people with dementia.

Maps

- Ensure a map of the Zoo is placed directly at the entrance prior to being given access to different routes so people can plan where to go as soon as they arrive.
- Improve outdoor maps with a large round circle with 'you are here' to help people understand where they are on it.
- Make printed maps available for older people, those with access needs and those who ask (ie. people with hidden disability or parents with children). Potentially, laminated maps could be cleaned and re-used as part of a recycling scheme to address concerns about the sustainability of paper maps.
- Printed maps could be designed with accessibility in mind (example provided on next page)

Signage

- Signage on pavement could be improved by adding visuals of animal foot / paw prints consequently for all arrows to avoid people repeating the same leg of a route they have already seen in order to find the next part.
- Signposts could be improved with images of animals, rather than just text.
- Limit decorations to items that don't include signage, as this can cause confusion. Distinguish 'real' signage from 'decorative' signage in styling and placement, especially for wheelchair access (ie. in the lion area).
- Make it clearer how one can exit the Zoo without entering the gift shop for those for whom the gift shop may be confusing.
- Ensure water refill stations are clearly visible.

Navigating the zoo

Consider adding an 'access' route (example on the right, in yellow) that avoids slopes, confusing animal enclosures, highlights rest areas, and provides an estimation of how long it takes on average to complete.

For instance, by highlighting accessible areas or an 'access route'; rest areas, approximate walking distance/ estimated time etc.



Wheelchair access and information

Here are some ideas on how to improve wheelchair access in the Zoo for people with dementia.

Wheelchair Access

- Consider making electric scooters available at the same deposit price as wheelchairs and make electronic scooters available that don't require pre-booking.
- Consider making a golf/ airport-type buggy available for groups of older people. As there is a limit on the time they can spend in the Zoo, it could be a way for them to see some different animals in a short period of time.
- Warn wheelchair users to take care when using 'chain curtain' (ie. in the butterfly area) to avoid the chains tangling in the wheels of the wheelchair.
- Consider placing a handrail to access the round 'penguin window' which is too steep to access with a wheelchair.



Information

Here are some ideas on how to improve information in the Zoo for people with dementia.

Information

- Provide information with older people in mind. (ie. how long the animals have lived at the Zoo for and their age. Other topics of interest were interesting facts about the animals, how the zoo is helping to preserve and protect wildlife and information about ZSL Whipsnade Zoo).
- Provide old photographs and stories about the Zoo.
- Ensure signs have strong colour contrast (avoid white on blue) and where possible chose larger font sizes to improve readability for people with sight impairments.
- Improve alternative food selections and provide information about allergens on menus.
- Provide written information about where staff are stationed, potentially when booking accessible tickets or as part of an access route/ map.
- Consider giving visitors written information to supplement talks.
- Inform disabled and/or older visitors about the need to either bring or ask for a radar key upon arrival at the Zoo, or at booking stages.
- Consider indicating the location of free water fountains to refill bottles on the map.

Facilities

Here are some ideas on how to improve facilities in the Zoo for people with dementia.

Toilets

- Consider enabling step free access to regular toilets and raised toilet seating to make them more accessible in general. Older people who are not in a wheelchair may not have a radar key or be reluctant to use the disabled toilet.
- Consider an automated push-button system to open and close the toilet door of the disabled toilet (at wheelchair accessible level), as it may be too heavy to use for less abled visitors.
- Consider providing clear signage toward and/or providing wheelchair accessible toilets near the exit of the Zoo.

Seating

- Ensure benches are placed at the entrance, both before and after ticket checks as well as near the exit of the Zoo.
- Provide clear signage on how to exit the Zoo in a way that returns one to the entrance.

Other

Here are some ideas on how to improve facilities in the Zoo for people with dementia.

Other

- Consider providing further discounted tickets for older people without carers.
- Although positioning the photographers near the main entrance in blue ZSL t-shirts is a good approach, perhaps advertising taking group images at the Zoo entrance and as part of the community access scheme as well as information on how to organise it would help make it more visible.

Activities

- Ideas that could be potentially further developed into a dementia friendly activity could be to engage older people in telling the story and history of the Zoo. This could be done for instance by:
- A memory trail with stories older people told about when they visited the zoo when they were young (ie. sneaking into the case of the panda for a picture, or climbing under the walls)
- Collecting images from older members of the community and displaying them in the Zoo
- Empowering older people to participate in shaping activities or information aimed toward educating children (and adults)

Further information

RiDC

- <http://www.ridc.org.uk/news/improving-experiences-people-dementia-london>
- <http://www.ridc.org.uk/>

Great Camden Minds

- <https://www.dementivoices.org.uk/group/the-cameos/>
- <https://www.mentalhealthcamden.co.uk/services/great-camden-minds>

ZSL London Zoo

- www.zsl.org
- <https://www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/visitor-information/accessibility>
- <https://www.zsl.org/zsl-london-zoo/visitor-information/community-access-scheme>

Age UK and Camden carers

- <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/>
- <https://www.camdenccs.org.uk/>

DEEP Network

- DEEP guides to support the involvement of people with dementia <http://dementivoices.org.uk/resources/deep-guides/>
- Inside checklist: <https://www.dementivoices.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Inside-checklist-VFINAL.pdf>
- Outside checklist: <https://www.dementivoices.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Audit-Checklist-%E2%80%93-Is-this-outside-public-space-dementia-inclusive.pdf>

Innovations in Dementia

- <http://www.innovationsindementia.org.uk/resources.htm>

City Bridge Trust

- <https://www.citybridgetrust.org.uk/>

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