

Investigation into the experience of people with dementia using taxis and minicabs



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1. Executive Summary

This research was completed by Rica in partnership with Innovations in Dementia (iD) and the Camden Minds DEEP group (Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project). It is part of a three year project funded by the John Ellerman Foundation to develop and carry out consumer research with people with dementia.

The aim was to investigate the experience of people with dementia using taxis and minicabs and how the service could be improved.

The research was informed by four participants with mild to moderate dementia who all travel by taxi or minicab at least once a month. The workshop consisted of three sections; individual discussions, subgroup discussions and a discussion round up. The individual discussion one on one with each participant focused on their journey to the workshop whereas the sub group and discussion round up covered all past experiences with taxis and minicabs.

Feedback from participants highlights three important areas for taxi and minicab service providers to consider and improve on to deliver a good service for passengers with dementia. Ideally:

Identification

- Booking staff provide the passenger with information about the driver and vehicle.
- Booking staff convey the information fully and accurately about the booking to the taxi or minicab driver.
- Taxi and minicab drivers identify themselves to the passenger noting who the journey is for and the journey destination.

Assistance

- Booking staff ask if a passenger needs assistance.
- Booking staff pass on any information about assistance to taxi or minicab drivers to ensure assistance is delivered.
- Taxi and minicab drivers also ask if a passenger needs assistance.
- Taxi and minicab drivers be aware of the type of assistance that may be required.

Awareness

- Booking staff consider providing passengers with the same driver they've used before
- Taxi and minicab drivers be aware of the passenger's mood before talking during a journey.
- People with dementia do not always want to reveal that they have dementia to the taxi or minicab booking staff or driver.



2. Acknowledgement

Central to this work was the willing collaboration of our participants to express their thoughts and feelings freely and be open to further exploration of their opinions. We would like to thank all of our investigators who entered into this spirit of open discourse and were a pleasure to work with.

We would also like to thank our research partners:

Innovations in Dementia - is a community interest company that works nationally with people with dementia, partner organisations and professionals with the aim of developing and testing projects that will enhance the lives of people with dementia. Innovations in Dementia facilitates the Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project (DEEP), a UK network of groups of people with dementia who want to influence policy and practice. www.innovationsindementia.org.uk

Camden Minds – is a closed group for individuals who are living with Dementia. The group is an involvement group who actively participate in providing information to professionals and the wider community in the London Borough of Camden. Camden Minds are working to ensure that Camden is dementia-friendly by attending events to promote their personal experiences and provide advice where necessary.

3. Rica

Research Institute for Consumer Affairs (Rica) specialises in consumer research with older and disabled consumers. Founded through Consumers Association, publishers of Which?. Rica became independent in 1991.

Rica has its own [Consumer Panel – the RicaWatch panel](#) – of over 700 people and is a disability-led organisation. Ten of the charity's twelve Trustees have a disability. Rica carries out [commissioned research work](#) with industry, other charities, service providers and policy makers to improve products and services. With grant funding Rica also publishes free [consumer reports](#) based on independent research.

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4. Introduction

In February 2016, the Camden Minds DEEP group approached Rica with an interest in being involved in Rica's research into accessible products and services for people with dementia.

This research is part of a three year project funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, completed in partnership with Innovations in Dementia (iD) and local groups developed through The Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project (DEEP).

Following a meeting with the Camden Minds DEEP group to discuss potential research, taxi and minicab service was decided on as several members of the group regularly have difficulty with these services.

The aim of the research was to investigate the positive and negative experiences people with dementia are having with taxi and minicabs and identify how the service could be improved.

5. Background

The Alzheimer's Society estimates there are 850,000 people with dementia in the UK. People with dementia need and want to be consulted about environments, services and products, just the same as other consumers. Conversations and surveys with people with dementia, and their carers, indicate that their main areas of concern relate to the practicalities of everyday living. Group work, especially with those living alone, reveals that it is the increasing inability to cope with the day-to-day activities that frustrates and depresses them and leads them to withdraw from even trying.

6. The participants and environment

All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

Four participants attended the workshop; three men (Harry, Ben and Philip) and one woman (Charlotte). All the workshop participants belong to the Camden Minds DEEP group and have mild to moderate dementia or Alzheimer's. Also in attendance was the Older Carers and Dementia Opportunities Coordinator from the Camden Carers Service (Helena) who runs the Camden Minds DEEP group.

It was important that a venue familiar to the participants was used for the workshop, therefore Argenta House in Camden was chosen as this is where the group meet monthly. One large room which facilitated break out groups was used.

7. Method

The workshop took place on Friday 9th December 2016 at 2pm and lasted approximately two hours. Prior to the workshop participants were sent an information sheet which briefly explained about Rica, the project aims, the format of the session and the discussion points. See appendix A for the participant information sheet.

As the workshop was the DEEP group's monthly meeting, Helena booked the participants minicab journeys and paid for the journeys on arrival as she usually does. For the purpose of the workshop, participant arrival times were staggered so two participants arrived every 10 minutes. Also, different minicab companies were contacted so that the level of detail asked for by the booking agent could be compared. Helena noted down some details of booking for each participant's journey.

Two Rica researchers attended the workshop. Both had the same prompt sheets for discussions and took notes and audio recordings. See Appendix B and C for the prompt sheets.

The workshop was arranged in three parts:

7.1. Individual journey discussion

On arrival participants were greeted by a Rica researcher for a one to one discussion about their journey to the workshop. Participants had been made aware that their journey to the workshop would be discussed and they had been invited to take notes.



Each participant was given a consent form to read and sign before the discussion began to confirm their participation in the research. The discussion on their journey covered each stage of a minicab or taxi journey and participants were asked for three main points where they thought the journey could have been improved and also what improvement they would want. See Appendix B for the individual journey discussion plan.

Each participant's individual journey discussion lasted approximately 10 minutes. Once all individual discussions had been completed there was a short break.

7.2. Sub group discussion

A Rica researcher talked more about the research, the work of Rica and the project, and went through the information sheet and consent form that participants had been given beforehand.

The intention was to then split into two equal subgroups for a general discussion about past experiences of minicab and taxi use and preferences of use. However, Harry's minicab failed to pick him up for his journey to the workshop, despite being booked. This resulted in Harry arriving 60 minutes after the other participants. The decision was made to start the sub group discussion with Ben, Philip and Helena and when Harry arrived for him to have the discussions one on one with a Rica researcher.

Researchers had prompts to ensure the discussion touched on specific areas but active listening was used to expand on participant experiences and potential areas of interest.

The following areas were covered in the discussion:

- Background on each participant's current taxi usage
- How participants select a minicab or taxi firm to use
- Participants past experiences of using minicabs or taxis
- Awareness of new technology

This discussion lasted for approximately 40 minutes. See Appendix C for the sub group discussion plan.

7.3. Discussion round up

Following a short break all participants, Helena and the Rica researchers reconvened as a group to share the main points discussed.

8. Results

8.1. Individual journey bookings

Table 1 below shows the details which were covered by each of the minicab firms when Helena booked the participants' minicab journeys to the session.

All minicab firms asked the time and location of the pick-up and none asked about the payment. The level of detail asked about the passengers varied across the firms. Only firm A asked for the number of passengers however they didn't ask for the passenger's name. Firm B only asked for the passengers name on both occasions whereas firm D asked for the name and passengers contact number. None of the firms asked if any assistance would be needed. Firm C did not accept the booking.

Table 1: Individual journey booking details

	Answer time	Pick up details	Passenger details: number of passengers, passenger name, passenger contact details	Payment
Firm A Charlotte	Immediate	Time and location	Number of passengers	Not asked
Firm B Ben	Immediate	Time and location	Name	Not asked
Firm B Harry	Immediate	Time and location	Name	Not asked
Firm C Philip	-	Time and location	N/A – booking refused	
Firm D Philip	Took a while	Time and location	Name, contact number	Not asked

The following additional comments were noted about two of the minicab firms contacted:

- Firm C – very rushed and panicked and proceeded to turn down the booking and suggested trying another company as it was a busy time for them.
- Firm D – were initially going to turn down the booking due to the pickup location but then changed their mind and accepted.

8.2 Individual journey discussions

8.2.1. Charlottes journey with Firm A

Charlotte's minicab had arrived 10 minutes early so parked up along the road from Charlottes flat. Coincidentally Charlotte leaves her flat 10 minutes early to allow time for locking up and making her way to the minicab if necessary. As the minicab driver had been told Charlotte would be waiting outside, the driver pulled up and asked if she was waiting for a minicab. Charlotte thought this was good and that he was being efficient.

Charlotte was happy with the driver's manner and his driving. They talked during the journey which Charlotte was happy to do, as there was not much traffic and he knew where he was going. Although Charlotte commented that the driver was "helpful and charming" she felt he was fishing slightly to see who she was going to see.

On arrival at the destination the driver rounded the cost from £5.60 to £5; Charlotte acknowledged he was trying to help her. When Helena came to pay the driver at the destination the cost was £5.60 again.

Overall Charlotte was satisfied with her journey:

"He was helpful; he asked if I needed help getting out. He had done his research; he knew exactly where it was. The vehicle was clean, which I always look at" – Charlotte

There was one area of improvement for Charlotte's journey as when the driver went to open the near passenger door for her he was unable to. After trying different methods he managed to open the door however Charlotte commented that this didn't give her much confidence and made her question whether he was a professional driver.

Charlotte also shared some previous experiences with minicab and taxis and her thoughts for general improvement during the discussion:

- Booking – Charlotte finds it difficult to book over the phone herself as she struggles to understand people on the phone. She needs people to leave gaps between words.
- Minicabs vs taxis – Charlotte prefers taxis because there is a black cab company she knows. Also, due to minicab identification:

"I feel much more confident [in a black cab] because anybody can pretend to be a minicab" – Charlotte

- Identifying a minicab – Charlotte would be happier if minicabs had a clearly visible disc with the minicabs details on so she would know what to do if something went wrong, or if there was something she didn't like.

“Unless I get out and take the license plate number and with dementia you can't because I would have to write it down and by the time I got the paper out, would have forgotten [sic]” – Charlotte

- Talking during a journey – previous experiences when a minicab driver has spoken during the journey have unnerved Charlotte.

“I have had one from hospital where he was chatting and not looking where he was driving and I was terrified” – Charlotte

8.2.2. Ben's journey with Firm B

The minicab was 15 minutes late to pick up Ben. The most notable thing about Ben's journey was his feeling that the taxi driver was not very friendly. He 'sensed' the driver's attitude and could not put his finger on what the problem was with his attitude but felt very strongly he was not friendly.

For the journey to be improved Ben would not want to have waited for the minicab and for the driver to have an improved attitude.

8.2.3. Harry's journey with Firm B

On arrival the minicab driver rang Harry's doorbell to alert him. The driver didn't ask Harry if needed any assistance at the start, during or at the end of the journey but this was fine with Harry as he didn't require any. Harry described the driver's manner as friendly and proficient and commented nothing could have been improved.

“Nothing would have improved the journey, it was impeccable” – Harry

8.2.4. Philip's journey with Firm D

When the minicab driver greeted Philip at the pick-up location they confirmed who the minicab was for, but also went on to ask Philip where he needed to go. This confused Philip as he could remember vaguely where he was going, but not the specific detail such as the full address and postcode. On the journey Philip found the driver to be chatty and friendly which he didn't mind.

8.3. Sub group discussion [Charlotte, Ben, Philip and Harry]

Ben and Charlotte primarily use public transport and so rarely use taxis or minicabs, aside from getting to their monthly DEEP group meeting. Philip uses taxis and minicabs more frequently, usually three times a month. Both he and Ben have taxi cards.

Harry uses a taxi or minicab one or twice a week mainly to go out in the evening. He uses public transport more frequently catching the tube every day but the bus rarely. People organise Harry's taxis and minicabs for him so he has no preference over the company used but he comments he would choose a minicab as they tend to be cheaper.

Drawing on their previous experiences with taxis and minicabs, participants gave the following feedback on how the service provided by taxi and minicab companies could be improved.

8.3.1. Selecting a taxi or minicab company

Charlotte would always use a black cab over a minicab because of the training that black cab drivers have and because of negative experiences with minicabs:

“First time I took a minicab I missed the train as the driver didn't know how to get to the train station” – Charlotte

“Have been disastrous, didn't drive very well” – Charlotte

Philip highlighted that different companies have different benefits and when selecting a company to use he takes these into account. For example, Philip uses his London Taxicard to get cheaper journeys with specific taxi firms. However he commented that he can't always rely on the taxi or minicab to arrive on time, whereas other companies he finds more reliable.

“Depends on the circumstances as to the company and the need for certain things” – Philip

Charlotte likes that with certain companies if you make a regular booking such as for a hospital appointment, you can ask for the same driver each time. Ben agreed that using the same company each time could be good as the booking staff would get to know you. However, she acknowledged that it may not always be the same driver.

“Thinking about the personality of the person driving you it will be different everywhere” – Ben

Harry was satisfied with the service he has received from taxis and minicabs in the past. He couldn't recall having any problems when booking or hailing a taxi and hasn't had problems paying for a taxi as his carer has organised this for many years.

“I think they provide a very standard service and I'm quite happy with it” – Harry

8.3.2. Booking a taxi or minicab journey

The first comment participants had about booking a journey was related to the process of being put on hold when they phoned. All agreed that instead of having hold music they would prefer it if they were phoned back once a member of booking staff was free.

As mentioned previously in the individual journey discussion Charlotte (page 9) has difficulty understanding people on the phone and so needs people to leave gaps in-between their words. If a company had this information saved it would be beneficial for Charlotte during the booking process however participants had mixed views on the saving of personal information.

Ben and Philip wouldn't mind having their address saved by the taxi or minicab company however Ben was concerned about details being passed onto another company.

“It's not them, it's the numbers they convey your numbers to without thinking” – Ben

Charlotte was more concerned with giving details about the help that she might need as she felt it might make her vulnerable, but did acknowledge it would be important for certain things such as if someone had a visual or hearing impairment.

“If it were important, if you couldn't get in without help or something- are occasions where would be necessary almost” – Charlotte

The saving of personal details does not concern Harry. However he wouldn't tell the taxi company about his dementia, mainly as he would have forgotten if he had done so and, if asked, would deny it.

All participants wouldn't disclose to a company that they had dementia and definitely wouldn't want such details to be saved as they're concerned about the implications this could have for their safety. Ben suggested that if he needed help from a taxi or minicab company that was related to his dementia, he would tell the company his needs but would say it was for another reason.

"If it's recorded there's so much ignorance about it they may think, that's an easy target we can suggest to go in with them to help them and they'll let us because they don't understand" – Charlotte

"Think to divulge that information to anybody is a bit dodgy to say the least" – Ben

Participants mentioned three things they would want the company to do when booking:

- All participants want a company to tell them information about the taxi or minicab which would be arriving for them so that they could identify it when it arrived.
- All participants want to be told the approximate cost of the journey when booking.
- Philip commented that when booking he would want the company to ask if any help was needed instead of having to volunteer the information himself.

8.3.3. A taxi or minicab journey

Participants do not mind how a taxi or minicab driver alerts them of their arrival, for example phoning, knocking on the door or beeping their horn, however, all were concerned with how the driver then goes on to identify themselves. Philip shared with the group that when his minicab arrived to bring him to the session, the driver confirmed who the minicab was for but then asked Philip where to go. Philip knew vaguely where the minicab was for but not the specific detail. All participants thought that a driver should confirm who the taxi or minicab is for and some detail about the journey destination.

"If they have your number and it gets through to you then you know it's not a scam" – Ben

"By phone is fine, but you know I give them the opportunity of just pressing the bell because I can see who it is" – Philip

"Would want them to say taxi to so and so [location] or taxi in the name of" – Charlotte



Similarly to when booking the journey, all participants agreed that it's best for the taxi or minicab driver to ask if the passenger wants or needs help instead of having to ask for it.

"I would think it's a good company if they asked rather than waiting for me to say" – Charlotte

"Shows a more professional caring attitude" – Philip

The main feedback from participants on the journey itself was about the interaction with the driver. Charlotte recalled a previous journey as being disastrous as the driver drove badly with one hand on the wheel and with music blaring out. She reiterated comments mentioned during her individual journey discussion, noting that whether or not she's happy talking with the taxi or minicab driver depends on the driving conditions.

"Wouldn't want them to be chatting if they were weaving in and out of traffic" – Charlotte

"If it's a difficulty journey, won't want to talk, want them to concentrate" – Charlotte

Aside from this condition, all participants did not mind whether the driver spoke with them. Ben commented that there's awareness from both the driver and passenger whether to talk.

"Think you sense and they can sense whether want to talk" – Ben

The main improvement Harry would like from a taxi or minicab service would be ensuring he had a familiar driver for his journeys. Knowing the driver would make Harry more relaxed and he would trust them. His worry with a different driver each time revolves around payment; either being taken a longer route than needed or being given the incorrect change.

None of the participants were concerned about the driver giving updates on the journey's progress.



On arrival at the journey destination participants, again, would like the driver to take the initiative to offer help or ask if it's needed. Participants realise that help may be limited on arrival if the driver can't park up nearby, but Ben pointed out the importance of being dropped off as close to the location as possible regardless of the help. Charlotte thought it would be nice for taxi or minicab drivers to get out and open the door for the passenger, but again acknowledges it's not always possible so in an ideal world drivers would at least make sure a passenger gets in alright.

“I have known drivers to see you get in alright, but on the other hand you can't make that a rule because sometimes they're not properly parked” – Charlotte

8.3.4. New technology

None of the participants had smartphones so were unaware of the new technologies available for booking and using a taxi or minicab. A couple of the features of the new technologies were discussed with participants to see whether they thought they were useful. Participants thought the following:

- Knowing who the driver is going to be is useful.
- Knowing what car the taxi or minicab is going to be is useful.
- Knowing when your taxi is going to arrive is useful.
- Being able to send your journey route and ETA to a friend or family member isn't useful.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

Participants had mixed experiences when traveling to the session and also across their past experiences of using taxis and minicabs.

Charlotte, Philip and Ben are similar in their use of taxis and minicabs and their usual involvement in the process of arranging a journey. All talked about their positive and negative experiences at each stage of using a taxi or minicab and agreed on how the service could be improved. On the other hand, Harry's carer manages his taxi and minicab use so he had fewer comments and concerns with the service.

Feedback from participants highlights three important areas for taxi and minicab service providers to consider and improve on to deliver a good service for passengers with dementia:

9.1. Identification

One of the main concerns among participants was ensuring that the taxi or minicab that had arrived was genuine and for them. Charlotte, Philip and Ben unanimously agreed that on arrival they would like the driver to identify themselves by giving either, but ideally all, their name, the name of who the taxi or minicab was for and the journey destination. When discussing new technologies participants also thought it would be good to be able to identify the driver and vehicle themselves.

Communication between the booking staff and the passenger and the booking staff and the driver is important in ensuring this identification is delivered to reassure passengers.

- Booking staff should provide the passenger with information about the driver and vehicle.
- Booking staff should convey the information fully and accurately about the booking to the taxi or minicab driver.
- Taxi and minicab drivers should identify themselves, who the journey is for and the journey destination.

9.2. Assistance

Participants want the booking staff and taxi or minicab drivers to take the initiative to ask whether or not assistance is required instead of having to volunteer the information themselves. For participants this would be the sign of a good company. If not asked about assistance, participants highlighted the importance of drivers having a general awareness as to whether assistance is required. During the booking of the journeys to the session, none of the companies asked whether or not assistance was required.



If personal details about the passenger were saved this could help with delivering assistance; however this would depend on personal preference and the level of detail someone would be willing to share. Booking staff should ask if a passenger needs assistance.

- Booking staff should pass on any information about assistance to taxi or minicab drivers to ensure assistance is delivered.
- Taxi and minicab drivers should also ask if a passenger needs assistance.
- Taxi and minicab drivers should be aware of the type of assistance that may be required.

9.2. Disclosure

Participants commented they would not want to disclose that they have dementia and would just describe the help that they needed.

9.3. Awareness

As well as being aware of assistance needs, participants commented on the importance of booking staff and drivers being aware of how their behaviour impacts a passenger's feeling of comfort and safety.

Participants appreciated that using the same company each time wouldn't necessarily mean the booking staff could arrange the same driver; however they commented on the positive impact this would have on their journey. Participants commented that whether or not to talk during a journey is sensed by both the passenger and driver and in general participants aren't concerned whether they're talked to or not. In certain circumstances, however, drivers need to be aware that talking would make a passenger nervous.

Passengers want to know the driver is concentrating on driving, so playing loud music or talking during while negotiating heavy traffic may cause concern to some.

- Booking staff to be aware of the benefits to a passenger to have having the same driver.
- Taxi and minicab drivers should gauge the person's mood atmosphere and the driving conditions before talking during a journey.

End