



Dementia-Friendly Film Screening Pilot: Evaluation

Trudie Cain

October 2025





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Executive summary

Background

This report discusses the results from an evaluation of a Dementia-Friendly Film Screening (DFFS) pilot which was designed to support social participation and inclusion for people living with dementia and their caregivers. The evaluation examines the pilot's effectiveness, identifies successes and areas for improvement, and draws lessons for future dementia-inclusive programming.

Developed through cross-sector collaboration, the initiative aligns with the Age Friendly Tāmaki Makaurau Action Plan and Auckland Council's equity and inclusion priorities. Findings provide evidence to guide decisions about expanding or embedding the initiative into ongoing practice.

The DFFS pilot responded to the growing need for inclusive, community-based opportunities for people living with dementia and their caregivers. Developed by Auckland Council in partnership with Dementia New Zealand (Auckland), Alzheimers New Zealand, and the Age Friendly Auckland Implementation Rōpū, the pilot aimed to provide safe, accessible, and enjoyable cinema experiences that foster social connection and reduce stigma.

The pilot design incorporated input from people living with dementia and caregivers, alongside international best practice, to create dementia-friendly screening guidelines covering venue accessibility, film selection, intermissions, and social opportunities. Three cinemas across Auckland were selected based on their accessibility and location (The Vic in Devonport, Rialto in Newmarket, Reading in New Lynn). Event promotion was led by Dementia NZ and Age Friendly partners.

A total of three events were run between March and May 2025, including more than 150 attendees.

Volunteers and council staff supported attendees, and feedback from each screening informed continuous refinements. The evaluation was designed and undertaken by the author of this report in her role as researcher with the Social and Economic Research and Evaluation team at Auckland Council.

Method

A qualitative approach was undertaken to evaluate the pilot's effectiveness and participant experiences. Data collection was carried out at each screening, and included:

- **Direct observations** conducted during the film screenings to assess the environment and participant engagement and interaction.
- **Feedback cards** distributed at the events to gather immediate attendee reflections and suggestions.
- **Semi-structured interviews** with people living with dementia and their caregivers to capture personal experiences and perceptions of the events.

- A survey of cinema staff to understand their perspectives on the pilot's implementation and impact.

All qualitative data were analysed thematically.

Key findings

Observations

Observations provided real-time insights into how the venue, staff, volunteers, and programming shaped attendee experiences.

Each event fostered a warm, inclusive atmosphere, with attendees engaging in conversation, laughter, and storytelling. Staff, volunteers and caregivers were proactive and attentive, and spontaneous acts of kindness supported a dementia-friendly approach. Food and refreshments enhanced the welcoming atmosphere. Audience engagement was high, with the films (especially *Strictly Ballroom*) eliciting applause, laughter, and dancing. Seating and sound levels were generally appropriate, and minor sensory issues, such as cold temperatures or a slippery floor, were addressed.

Event flow was largely smooth, although some attendees experienced minor confusion around arrival instructions and announcements in the more complex venues. Adjustments during the pilot addressed many of these issues. Despite some logistical challenges, attentive management and strong relational care ensured a successful and engaging social experience.

Venue accessibility varied. Reading offered spacious lifts, accessible bathrooms, and clear layouts, while The Vic's uneven floors and Rialto's multi-level design posed challenges. A higher-than-expected number of wheelchairs at Rialto highlighted navigation concerns, though strong volunteer and caregiver support helped mitigate these issues.

Interviews and feedback forms

Attendees praised the warmth, hospitality, and attentiveness of staff and volunteers, noting that greetings, seating assistance, and regular check-ins fostered an enjoyable event. Refreshments and social time after screenings were often highlighted, as they provided meaningful connection, memory sharing, and community building. The musicals were well received, though many emphasised that the welcoming atmosphere mattered more than the films themselves.

Suggestions for improvement included enhancing venue accessibility, such as wider aisles, better lifts, and accessible toilets, and providing announcements. Feedback on film programming called for greater variety and sensitive pacing. Promotion could be expanded to reach more diverse audiences, with clear messaging about inclusion. Small improvements to food and hospitality were also noted.

Overall, attendees valued the respectful and inclusive tone of the events, which fostered dignity, reduced stigma, and created joy. Though logistical challenges existed, the strong sense of care and community softened criticisms and highlighted the importance of thoughtful, participant-centred design. Many expressed enthusiasm for continuing and expanding the programme.

Cinema staff survey

Cinema staff who participated completed dementia-friendly training (provided online by Alzheimers New Zealand), which was helpful in building awareness and confidence in advance of the event. Staff felt well supported by organisers and volunteers. The relaxed social environment, especially morning tea and post-film mingling, were identified as key strengths. Accessibility features like dimmed lighting and accessible entrances were also acknowledged as contributors to the events' success.

Challenges included managing mobility aids during arrivals and coordinating accurate attendee mobility information. Staff recommended improvements in signage, navigation, and scheduling to reduce anxiety and crowding. Attendance at each event fell below registration numbers, prompting suggestions for further extending registration periods and charging a small fee to improve turnout.

All cinema managers expressed openness (but not commitment) to continue dementia-friendly screenings, noting that partnerships with organisations such as Auckland Council were crucial for communication and logistics. Staff feedback demonstrated strong commitment to accessibility and inclusive events, highlighting the need for ongoing collaboration and planning.

Strengths, challenges and recommendations

Strengths

Feedback from attendees, caregivers, event organisers, and cinema staff highlighted several key strengths of the initiative. Participants reported enjoyment, uplifted mood, and increased social interaction, with the screenings providing a rare opportunity to connect with others in a relaxed, stigma-free environment, helping to reduce feelings of isolation.

Small but thoughtful adjustments, such as softer lighting, refreshments, and the acceptance of non-traditional behaviours, created a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where people living with dementia felt comfortable and respected. The presence of trained staff and volunteers was central to the success of the events, with attendees valuing their attentiveness and calm demeanour, which fostered a sense of safety and support.

Engaging film choices, particularly nostalgic, light-hearted, or musical titles, resonated well with audiences. Predictable narratives helped maintain attention and comfort, especially for attendees with cognitive or sensory sensitivities. Together, these elements contributed to a positive, inclusive, and memorable experience for all participants.

Challenges and lessons learned

Despite overwhelmingly positive feedback, the evaluation identified several challenges affecting delivery and accessibility. Some venues presented physical barriers, including narrow aisles, stairs without ramps, limited lift access, or unclear signage, which created stress for attendees using mobility aids and their caregivers. Communication gaps were also evident, with some participants confused by aspects of the event, such as unexpected breaks or unclear instructions, and a few finding the "dementia-friendly" label off-putting. Travel to the screenings posed challenges for some attendees.

Balancing film selection presented another challenge, with attendees expressing interest in a mix of nostalgic and more contemporary or humorous titles, while length and pacing needed to accommodate diverse needs. Screenings were under-attended relative to registrations, highlighting the difficulty of predicting turnout and managing no-shows. Caregivers described emotional and logistical strain in preparing attendees, for example by arranging transport or health and safety plans, underscoring the importance of recognising their contributions in future planning. Broader systemic barriers, such as limited funding, workforce shortages, and fragmented dementia services, also shaped the context in which the events were delivered.

These challenges provide valuable lessons for refining future dementia-friendly programming, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and responsiveness to attendees' needs.

Recommendations

To build on the success of the initiative and address identified challenges, several key recommendations are proposed.

Accessibility: While pre-event walkthroughs were carried out to check lift access, seating, and other facilities, these also revealed that most cinemas could not easily accommodate more than four wheelchairs at a time. Future screenings should therefore prioritise venues with greater accessibility for people using wheelchairs or walkers, including cinemas with toilets on the same level as the screening and wider hallways.

Communications: Clear and inclusive communication should also be maintained, using multiple formats such as print, email, and phone, to outline parking, venue layout, schedules, and available support, with language tested to ensure it remains welcoming and easy to understand.

Staff and support: Strong staffing and volunteer support should continue, including targeted, role-specific dementia awareness training, adequate numbers of trained personnel on the day, and clearly defined responsibilities.

Film programming: Film programming should remain diverse, offering a mix of familiar, nostalgic films alongside contemporary or humorous options, keeping screenings to 90 minutes or less with an intermission.

Transport: Transport options could be explored through partnerships with transport providers, ensuring vehicles accommodate mobility aids and attendees receive clear instructions and contact information.

Outreach and marketing: Outreach and marketing should continue to target people living with dementia and their caregivers, utilising community networks, health services, retirement villages, and personal testimonials to reach those most likely to benefit. Where appropriate, consideration should be given to providing caregivers with information, space to connect, and practical assistance.

Sustainable growth: Planning for sustainable growth could include piloting events in new locations, engaging diverse audiences, and collaborating with dementia-friendly organisations to co-deliver, co-host, or co-fund screenings as interest and capacity increase.

Conclusion

The DFFS initiative demonstrates how thoughtfully designed, inclusive community events can enhance the wellbeing of people living with dementia, their caregivers, and whānau. By creating safe, welcoming, and respectful spaces, the screenings provided opportunities for connection, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging.

Evaluation findings highlight both the strengths of the initiative and practical challenges, particularly around accessibility and communication, that could be addressed to ensure ongoing success. With ongoing refinement, the programme can be expanded to reach more people while maintaining high-quality support.

This pilot exemplifies how modest, community-driven adaptations can reduce stigma, foster social connection, and promote dignity. Its lessons extend beyond dementia-friendly screenings to other inclusive, age-friendly cultural programmes, showing how public spaces can be transformed into places of joy, participation, and care. Dementia-friendly practice is not a fixed checklist but an evolving, relational approach that values lived experience and prioritises genuine inclusion.

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1 Introduction

This report evaluates the effectiveness of the Dementia-Friendly Film Screenings (DFFS) pilot, an initiative designed to support social participation and inclusion for people living with dementia and their caregivers. The evaluation assesses how well the pilot met its aims, identifies what worked well and where improvements could be made, and draws out lessons for future dementia-inclusive programming.

The initiative aligns with key priorities in the Age Friendly Tāmaki Makaurau Action Plan and Auckland Council’s commitments to equity and inclusion. Developed through a cross-sector collaboration involving Auckland Council, Dementia New Zealand (Auckland), Alzheimers New Zealand, and members of the Age Friendly Auckland Implementation Rōpū, it contributes to local and global efforts to create age-friendly, dementia-inclusive communities.

This report provides evidence to inform decisions about whether and how the initiative could be expanded or embedded into ongoing practice.

2 About the Dementia-Friendly Film Screenings pilot

The Dementia-Friendly Film Screenings (DFFS) pilot was developed in response to the growing need for inclusive, community-based opportunities for people living with dementia and those who support them. Dementia affects nearly 83,000 people in Aotearoa New Zealand, a figure projected to more than double by 2050 (Alzheimers NZ, 2025). While much of the public focus centres on clinical care, people with dementia also need opportunities for connection, participation and social inclusion. Many face stigma and isolation that limit their ability to participate fully in community life (NZ Dementia Cooperative et al., 2020).

In this context, and as part of Auckland Council's commitment to becoming an Age Friendly City, Auckland Council's Community Policy team partnered with Dementia New Zealand (Auckland), Alzheimers New Zealand, and members of the Age Friendly Auckland Implementation Rōpū¹ to develop a series of specially designed film screenings. The sessions were created to be safe, accessible and enjoyable, fostering social connection and a sense of belonging for both people living with dementia and their caregivers.

The pilot received \$10,000 in funding from the Ministry of Social Development's Age Friendly Fund, with Auckland Council serving as grant holder and project lead.

Dementia New Zealand played a key role in outreach and co-design, working with a lived experience advisory group to shape the pilot and promote participation.

2.1 Purpose and goals

The initiative was grounded in a strengths-based approach that recognised people living with dementia as active members of the community who deserve equitable access to cultural and social opportunities. The DFFS pilot aligned with Auckland Council's wider priorities around equity, participation and inclusion, and supported the Age Friendly Auckland domains of social participation, respect, and community support.

Key goals of the pilot included:

- Providing a positive and inclusive experience for people with dementia and their whānau or caregivers
- Creating opportunities for connection and participation in community life
- Contributing to stigma reduction by making public spaces more welcoming and accessible

¹ The Age Friendly Auckland Implementation Rōpū is a multi-stakeholder group supporting delivery of the Age Friendly Tāmaki Makaurau Action Plan, and includes representatives from Age Concern, Haumaru Housing, CNSST Foundation, Toa Pacific, the Tāmaki Makaurau Marae Collective, Auckland Transport, Kāinga Ora and council staff.

2.2 Co-design and development

A light-touch co-design process ensured the pilot reflected the needs and preferences of those with lived experience of dementia. A workshop held in February 2025 brought together six people living with dementia, five caregivers and supporters, and staff from Auckland Council and Dementia NZ. The workshop was facilitated by the Council project lead (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Contributors to the planning workshop

The group drew on both local insights and international best practice to shape a dementia-friendly cinema model tailored to Auckland's context.

Based on this workshop and wider research, a set of cinema guidelines was developed, including:

- Daytime screenings
- Brighter lighting
- Mid-film intermission
- Clear signage and wayfinding
- Acceptance and normalisation of movement, vocalisation, and noise
- Film selection focused on familiarity, emotional safety, and nostalgic appeal

Beyond physical accessibility, the screenings were designed to prioritise values of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga. Attendees would be welcomed warmly and encouraged to stay after the film to connect and socialise over morning tea.

2.3 Delivery

Cinemas were selected (and some declined) following a walk-through to assess their willingness and capacity to accommodate people living with dementia. Geographical location was also considered to ensure coverage across Auckland.

Three cinemas across Auckland were identified as suitable and screenings were scheduled between March and May 2025:

- The Vic, Devonport – a heritage cinema in a village setting (Figure 2)
- Rialto, Newmarket – a central arthouse venue with a boutique atmosphere (Figure 3)
- Reading Cinemas, LynnMall – a modern, accessible multiplex with spacious seating (Figure 4)



Figure 2: The Vic, Devonport



Figure 3: Rialto, Newmarket



Figure 4: Reading, New Lynn

Promotion was led by Dementia NZ through support groups, community networks, and social media promotion with Age Friendly partners helping to extend reach (Figure 5). Auckland Council managed communications, registration, and pre-event information to support accessibility and ease.




Auckland Council and Age Friendly Auckland present:

The Dementia Friendly Film Festival



Singin' In The Rain

THE VIC CINEMA, DEVONPORT

Monday 31st March 10.30am



TICKET NUMBER: 013458789

Register your attendance to this film here: <https://forms.office.com/r/rc7UAeuzze>



Strictly Ballroom

THE RIALTO, NEWMARKET

Wednesday 30th April 10.30am



TICKET NUMBER: 013458789

Register your attendance to this film here: <https://forms.office.com/r/YTNTHyYNRc>



Singin' In The Rain

READING CINEMA, NEW LYNN

Wednesday 28th May 10.30am



TICKET NUMBER: 013458789

Register your attendance to this film here: <https://forms.office.com/r/B4G94XuF9G>

Email agefriendlyauckland@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz if you have any questions

Figure 5: Promotional poster

Volunteers from partner organisations were present at each event, helping to create a calm, welcoming environment and supporting participants as needed (Figure 6). Their involvement also eased pressure on cinema staff and contributed to a sense of shared care.



Figure 6: Volunteers and Auckland Council staff at Rialto

The pilot emphasised continuous learning, with feedback collected after each event and used to refine the approach. Following feedback from the first screening, for example, a brief announcement was added at the start of each screening to let attendees know there would be an intermission, that they were welcome to move around or chat during the film, and that morning tea would be served afterward.

Cinema staff were engaged throughout, supporting the integration of dementia-friendly practices into their mainstream operations.

2.4 Timeline

The DFFS pilot ran from January to August 2025:

Table 1: DFFS timeline

Period	Activity
Jan-Feb	Co-design workshop to develop model and guidelines
Mar-May	Screenings delivered at three venues, data collection
June-July	Analysis and report writing
August	Report submitted

3 Evaluation approach and methods

3.1 Purpose and scope

The evaluation aimed to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Dementia-Friendly Film Screenings (DFFS) pilot in promoting inclusion, enhancing social connection, and providing a positive experience for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

It focused on the three pilot events held between March and May 2025 at venues in Devonport, Newmarket, and LynnMall. The evaluation explored attendee and staff perspectives, delivery processes, and short-term outcomes, with particular attention to:

- Attendee experience and satisfaction
- Accessibility and implementation
- Perceived benefits and challenges
- Lessons for future dementia-friendly initiatives

This section outlines the evaluation design and data collection methods used across the pilot.

3.2 Evaluation design

A mixed qualitative approach was used to build a rich understanding of the pilot's impact. The evaluation plan was reviewed by Auckland Council's Research Ethics Review (RER) process (Reference: 2025-01).

The research design was informed by dementia-inclusive research guidance (e.g., Murphy et al., 2015) and prioritised flexibility, respectful engagement, and communication support. All participation was voluntary and based on informed, accessible consent.

Key evaluation questions included:

- What were attendees' experiences of the screenings, and how did these align with the intended outcomes?
- To what extent did the screening environment support participation for people living with dementia and their whānau or caregivers?
- In what ways did the screenings foster social connection, enjoyment, and a sense of inclusion?
- What can be learned from the pilot to inform future dementia-friendly events?

3.3 Data collection methods

Data was gathered through five main methods:

Participant observation

The evaluator attended all three screenings and used a standardised observation template

(Appendix A) to record attendees' emotional and behavioural responses, as well as interactions with others. Observations focused on three broad time frames:

- Arriving and preparing for the film (getting refreshments and locating seats etc.),
- Watching the film and intermission
- Post-film morning tea

Field notes were transcribed and thematically analysed to identify environmental strengths and areas for improvement, as well as evidence of engagement.

Attendee satisfaction scale

At the end of each event, attendees were invited to indicate their overall experience by placing a token in one of three boxes marked with a happy, neutral, or unhappy face. This simple, visual method was designed to support different communication preferences.

While uptake was limited and results are not reported here, the activity often prompted conversation and encouraged participants to provide feedback using the written cards.

Feedback cards

Attendees at each screening were invited to complete a short feedback card during the post-film gathering, responding to two open-ended questions (Appendix B):

- What did you enjoy most about this event?
- What do you think could be improved for future events?

Attendees could write their own responses or have them transcribed by caregivers or volunteers.

A total of 40 feedback responses were received: 14 from The Vic, 16 from Rialto, and 10 from Reading. These responses reflect the views of considerably more than 40 people, however, as some individuals provided feedback on behalf of their group.

Responses were thematically analysed.

In-person interviews

A small number of attendees (n=12 across four interviews) participated in short, semi-structured interviews following each screening. These conversations explored attendees' expectations, experiences with venue access, suitability of the film, opportunities for social connection, and any challenges encountered (see Appendix C).

Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and adapted to suit individual communication needs. Caregivers were present, and interview length varied based on participants' preferences and comfort.

Responses were thematically analysed.

Survey of cinema staff and volunteers

Cinema managers and staff were invited to complete a short online survey (Appendix D) covering:

- Preparation and training
- Experiences on the day
- Unexpected challenges

- Reflections on what worked well
- Willingness to support similar events in future.

A total of four surveys were completed, providing useful descriptive insights into staff engagement and operational delivery. While the survey was intended for all cinema staff involved, responses were typically completed by managers only.

4 Findings

There was strong interest in the screenings, with each event well attended, though not at full capacity. Approximately 50 people attended The Vic, 50 attended the Rialto, and 55 attended Reading. In each case, registration numbers exceeded actual attendance, even though the project lead had intentionally overbooked registrations by around 30 per cent.

The following presents findings across the three venues (The Vic, Rialto, Reading). It includes results from observations, participant feedback forms and interviews with attendees and caregivers, and the cinema staff survey. Insights are organised thematically, with venue-specific notes included where relevant.

4.1 Observations

Observations at all three screenings offered rich, real-time insights into how the environment, staff, volunteers, and programme design influenced participant experience.

Accessibility and physical environment

Venue accessibility varied notably. Reading's spacious lifts, accessible bathrooms, and logical flow facilitated ease of movement. In contrast, The Vic's slightly uneven floors and Rialto's multiple narrow lifts, long corridors, and limited walker storage posed challenges, sometimes causing stress and fatigue.

Much more difficult space to navigate because multiple levels, stairs, lifts, also more people with higher needs (Rialto)

There were more wheelchairs than anticipated and there was room for. The aisle was quite narrow by the time two extra wheelchairs were positioned. This raises concerns if there was a need to exit the building quickly (Rialto) (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Accommodating more wheelchairs and walkers than anticipated was challenging

Despite these concerns, strong volunteer support and practical problem-solving often mitigated difficulties.

Social atmosphere and community connection

Each event successfully fostered a warm, social and supportive atmosphere. Overall, the social atmosphere was upbeat, with attendees laughing and chatting together, engaged in spirited conversation, with several sharing personal stories with one another. This highlights the event's ability to foster social interaction and create a sense of connection.

Lots of happy chattering throughout the film (Reading)

Support roles and relational care

Staff and volunteers were consistently warm, proactive, and responsive in supporting attendees living with dementia. Caregivers were especially engaged, assisting with navigation and sensory needs.

There was very little for [volunteers] to do because the carers were so caring! (The Vic)

At Reading, the cinema manager maintained a visible, hands-on presence throughout, while at The Vic, Haumaru Housing staff offered physical support when needed, including “an arm to lean on” or help with walkers. Interactions were friendly and conversational and often appeared to be a highlight for attendees.

Kindness extended even between strangers. At Rialto:

[An attendee] was coming down the stairs and she took the outstretched hand of someone (she didn't know) for support and balance while she waited her turn. He put his conversation on hold so he could pay attention and fully support her (Rialto)

These moments of connection appear to be central to the pilot's success, showing that relational care, not just technical delivery of a film, is at the heart of dementia-friendly practice.

Audience enjoyment and emotional engagement

Overall, attendees showed high levels of enjoyment and emotional connection with the films. At The Vic (which screened *Singin' in the Rain*), the audience was quieter than expected, but still responded with humour, delight, and a sense of nostalgia.

There was plenty of giggling, laughter at appropriate moments, suggesting people were highly engaged in the film (The Vic)

The response to *Strictly Ballroom* at Rialto and Reading was notably more energetic, perhaps reflecting the film's upbeat tone. During the 'Paso Doble' scene, attendees frequently clapped along, while some even danced in their seats and raised their arms to the music. One memorable moment followed the kiss scene, which drew clapping, giggles, and a delighted "oh my goodness!" from one attendee.

Strictly Ballroom appeared to be the more well-received of the two films, leading organisers to switch the final screening from *Singin' in the Rain* to *Strictly Ballroom* in response to audience feedback and enthusiasm.

Sensory considerations and comfort

Overall, attendees appeared to find the cinema environments comfortable, with good seating and appropriate sound levels. However, a few sensory and environmental challenges were noted.

At Reading, for example, some attendees commented that the cinema was too cold:

Someone wanted the air conditioning turned down because [it was] considered too cold for older people (Reading)

A more significant issue was the overly slippery floor, caused by a change in cleaning products. This raised safety concerns among both staff and attendees, particularly given the older adult audience. Staff responded promptly by sprinkling a substance on the floor to reduce slipperiness, which, while not fully resolving the issue, helped improve safety. Event volunteers also took extra care to walk attendees through the affected area and offer physical support when needed.

At The Vic, a quiet zone was thoughtfully set aside for those needing a break, though it was not used. Sound levels were generally well balanced across all venues, with one exception: at Reading, the coordinator's debrief was inaudible because the film had already begun.

While occasional issues such as temperature and acoustics caused some frustration, they rarely detracted from the overall sense of comfort, inclusion, and enjoyment. In many cases, the joy of participation outweighed logistical or environmental challenges, highlighting the value of accessible, dementia-friendly cultural events.

Event logistics and programme design

Overall, the event flow was effective, though some logistical challenges emerged, particularly around arrival instructions, announcements, and venue-specific limitations.

At The Vic, attendees were unsure where to go on arrival:

There appeared to be some uncertainty on arrival, but support people were well placed near the door and in other spots in the venue (photo booth and popcorn service). We learned to be more forthright in offering guidance (The Vic)

There were also no announcements to signal the start of the film, the intermission, or the film's resumption:

There was no announcement that the intermission had started. And there was no announcement that the film was about to start again ten minutes later. This would have been helpful (The Vic)

These issues were identified early and addressed in subsequent screenings with clearer, more consistent announcements.

At Rialto, attendees were unable to access the cinema until a set time, and limited seating in the foyer potentially made the wait uncomfortable. Further delays occurred due to unanticipated short staffing and the time required to assist the high number of attendees using mobility devices.

At Reading, the film began at the scheduled time, before all attendees were seated and before key announcements were made. When clear communication was present, it helped to set expectations and reduce uncertainty.

Food and refreshments were well received and enhanced the welcoming atmosphere, particularly those served after the film.

At The Vic, there were frequent questions about the event's duration, largely driven by parking limitations and pick-up logistics:

Lots of questions about how long the event will be, primarily because parking was only two hours in surrounding streets, but also because family members were picking up afterwards (The Vic)

The set-up at Reading was particularly effective. The manager put significant thought into how best to support the older adult audience. Although the cinema itself was some distance from the entrance, refreshments and bathroom access were strategically placed:

Once they got there, they didn't have to move much. It also helped us guide people away from the entrance and toward their seats (Reading)

Other minor challenges included occasional disorientation (e.g., one attendee momentarily forgot their seat, but quickly found it with a friend's help) and more frequent bathroom departures than expected, which caused minor disruption due to mobility limitations.

Access at Rialto was particularly challenging due to the venue's multi-level layout and small, slow elevators. One caregiver's frustration was clear when she encountered yet another set of lifts:

"You have to go up to come down" she said to her colleague, visibly frustrated (Rialto)

Interestingly, after the screening, she made no mention of these access challenges, even when asked directly, suggesting that the enjoyment of the film outweighed earlier frustrations.

Summary

Observations across the three screenings highlighted key factors shaping participant experience, including accessibility, atmosphere, and staff support. While some venues presented physical challenges, these were often mitigated by strong caregiver and volunteer support. The events consistently fostered a warm, social environment, with high levels of audience engagement, particularly during *Strictly Ballroom*. Minor sensory and logistical issues arose but were well managed. Overall, the combination of relational care and thoughtful delivery was central to the success of the screenings.

4.2 Attendee feedback

This section presents findings from attendee feedback forms (n=40) and in-person interviews (n=4) across all three venues. It is organised in two parts: first, what attendees enjoyed most about the events; and second, their suggestions for improvement. Each part is presented thematically, with venue-specific insights noted where relevant.

Some attendee quotes have been lightly edited for readability, without altering meaning.

4.2.1 What attendees enjoyed most

Hospitality, warmth, and small gestures

Warmth and welcoming attitudes from staff and volunteers were repeatedly praised. Attendees felt genuinely welcomed, cared for and respected, noting kind greetings, seating assistance, and regular check-ins:

Such a warm, caring welcome (Reading, P9)

The event organisers and venue staffers were so friendly and accommodating to the needs of the elderly (The Vic, P13)

The people involved. The organisation. Staff very courteous and understandable about the situation (Reading, P8)

Kind, attentive gestures, from cheerful greetings at the door to assistance with seating and regular check-ins, helped ease anxiety and created a calm, affirming environment:

Having a big smile on staff to greet us at top of escalator - really made me feel at home (Rialto, P16)

All the staff, you couldn't have faulted them. They were really, really helpful, really good, nice. Even [name] felt so comfortable (The Vic, Interview 1)

Refreshments like popcorn and ice cream added to a joyful atmosphere, experienced not just as treats but meaningful symbols of care, celebration, and nostalgia, enhancing the feeling of being honoured and included:

The unexpectedness experience! Such a warm, caring welcome, and the amazing drinks, ice cream and popcorn (Reading, P9)

I enjoyed everything about the film ... I enjoyed these things – friendly theatre staff greeting us, ice cream and popcorn before, morning tea – lovely and tasty (The Vic, P10)

Indeed, refreshments played a central role in shaping the experience. Morning teas were not only perceived as beautifully presented but widely seen as an important social moment, encouraging relaxed conversation, connection, and a sense of shared occasion:

Afternoon tea was a lovely touch ♥ (The Vic, P13)

The afternoon tea that we had was very well presented ... it was fantastic. I mean, that was a big spread you put on (The Vic, Interview 1)

Afternoon tea BRILLIANT!! (The Vic, P2)

Amazing drinks, ice cream and popcorn ... generous and varied morning tea afterwards (Reading, P9)



Figure 8: Morning tea at The Vic

These elements — warmth, attentiveness, and hospitality — helped transform the event into something more than a film screening. They created a joyful, dementia-friendly space where people felt safe, valued, and part of a community.

Social connection and community

The events provided valuable opportunities for connection with many attendees describing the post-film socialising as a highlight. This informal gathering fostered relaxed conversation, memory sharing, and moments of genuine connection. Attendees frequently wrote or spoke about the joy of meeting new people and the welcoming, inclusive atmosphere:

Meeting different people. Everyone happy (The Vic, P14)

Social connection with community (Rialto, P12)

We are always looking for ideas for outings – so this is something we can do easily, and it's a very different opportunity to meet different people (Rialto, P2)

Socialising and community engagement (Reading, P10)

The social mix of attendees, those with and without dementia, also helped reduce stigma and created a sense of normalcy and inclusion.

Well, the good thing about it is, because I don't have dementia, you don't have dementia, and there was no way of telling who was who. And I thought that was particularly good for people with dementia to go to something that was catering for more than dementia (Rialto, Interview 3)

For some, the experience extended beyond the event itself. Sharing stories and photos afterwards helped maintain a sense of connection with their wider family:

There was one family who joined their Mum for that event. They were very happy ... to make a special memory with their Mum at this stage in her life ... I shared photos of that family [with their group chat and] I can see all the other family members, all the different time zones, messages popping in. Wow, how nice is that? (Rialto, Interview 4)

Together, these reflections show the screenings were more than just entertainment. They were meaningful social experiences, fostering belonging, reducing isolation, and strengthening community.

Film selection and engagement

Attendees expressed mixed opinions about the film selection (see next section for potential improvements). Overall, most appreciated nostalgic musicals such as *Strictly Ballroom* and *Singin' in the Rain*, which were generally well received for their uplifting tone and emotional resonance.

Excellent choice of movie – Light and entertaining ... Of our era – linked into our early years (The Vic, P9)

Brought so many memories back (Rialto, P1)

The musical elements were especially appreciated for being accessible and enjoyable even without close attention to the plot:

[Musicals] make them connected, yeah, and not too much. You know, a fairly straightforward storyline ... rather than complex things that sort of go everywhere (The Vic, Interview 1)

But for many, the film itself was not the main draw. The value lay in the cinema experience, being in a welcoming, inclusive environment and enjoying a shared outing with others.

I booked two months in advance. I didn't care what the film was, it doesn't matter (Reading, P2)

Accessibility, comfort, and logistics

Attendees consistently praised the planning and attention to detail that made the events accessible, comfortable, and welcoming for those living with dementia. Comfortable seating, convenient venues, and smooth event flow were frequently noted:

Nice greeting ... Everything was very good and smooth (Reading, P1)

Timing is good (Reading, P6)

Ran well (Rialto, P13)

Intermissions were especially appreciated, offering time to rest and reorient:

Good idea to have the break in the middle (The Vic, P5)

Appreciation and desire for continuity

Participants expressed deep appreciation of the events. More than just entertainment, these outings offered meaningful opportunities for connection, cognitive stimulation, and respite from daily challenges.

We all enjoyed the experience ... Thank you for the opportunity (Rialto, P4)

Caregivers emphasised the positive impact on wellbeing, noting how shared outings helped keep minds active and spirits lifted:

We take every chance we can to get out and do something stimulating. It helps keep her mind active (Rialto, Interview 3)

Many attendees reflected on the respectful and inclusive tone of the events, something not always present in other community spaces:

It was fantastic for me to be able to bring Mum to something like this – it felt very safe for her. Thank you so much for doing this for the dementia community – it's so valuable to keep her involved on the community (The Vic, P4)

Auckland Council really looks after seniors (Reading, P8)

It was amazing to be honoured ... It's usually only sports people being catered to and looked up to (Rialto, P16)

There was also warm recognition of the staff and volunteers who created such a welcoming atmosphere, alongside calls for stronger institutional backing:

It's really good when people take these initiatives ... because we're living in a world that's pretty destitute in some ways ... [we] find that people help us [but the] structures within which they're working, not so. It's horrifying, really ... I don't think they've listened to, [they're] ripped off, underpaid and exploited ... when they give up, we've got nothing (Rialto, Interview 3)

Summary

Attendees across all three dementia-friendly film screenings consistently highlighted the warmth and attentiveness of staff and volunteers, which made them feel genuinely welcomed. Many valued the safe, inclusive atmosphere that encouraged social connection and a sense of belonging.

Nostalgic and uplifting film choices, opportunities to meet others, and thoughtful touches such as breaks and refreshments contributed to a meaningful, celebratory experience rather than a simple outing. Feedback cards and interviews provided insight into why these events matter, showing how small acts of care — like assistance with seating or shared morning tea — can foster dignity, reduce stigma, and create joy.

They also identified areas for improvement, particularly around venue accessibility, communication, and film variety. Together, these reflections underscore the value of the pilot and highlight opportunities to expand inclusive, culturally enriching experiences for people living with dementia and their whānau.

4.2.2 Suggestions for improvement

While the events were overwhelmingly well received, participants across all three events offered valuable suggestions to further enhance the experience. These comments reflect both the complexity of running inclusive community events and the high level of care and attention that dementia-friendly initiatives require. Suggestions clustered around several key areas, including venue accessibility, communication, content selection, and logistical support.

Accessibility and physical comfort

While venues were generally appreciated for their welcoming atmosphere, several practical challenges affected comfort and mobility, particularly for those using walkers or wheelchairs. Key issues included small or slow lifts, narrow aisles, limited legroom, cold temperatures, and hard-to-locate accessible toilets:

Access could be better ... lifts are too small and weight sensitive (Rialto, P7)

Getting to the seats and having leg room could be better (Rialto, P11)

You saw the people with walkers. It wasn't really user friendly. They have a panic attack and they don't want to get up because they [have to] walk us all the way down the front ... and they can't get up on their own ... if they want to go to the bathroom or whatever during the film, it's very awkward (The Vic, Interview 1)

It was tough moving around with my walker. Sometimes I felt stuck or worried about blocking others (The Vic, Interview 1)

It's too cold. Someone could catch pneumonia (Reading, P5)

At Rialto, lift capacity was a particular barrier, creating delays when multiple attendees needed mobility support:

The doors on the elevator kept closing before we had a chance to get inside [which delayed the group's arrival] (Rialto, P6)

The lifts would only take one wheelchair and one walker and three people. So need people to get there (Rialto, Interview 2)

Bathrooms were another common concern, especially when located on different levels or poorly signposted:

Yeah, it was just finding them [toilets]. You have to go up here and down there, and once you're up on the cinema floor, then you've got to come down and then go back one lift to the cinemas up the top (Rialto, Interview 2)

Toilets on the same level as the movie screen would be great (Rialto, P4)

Attendees suggested prioritising venues with:

- Wide aisles and flat, non-slip flooring
- Heating and good ventilation
- Accessible toilets on the same level as the screening room
- Clear signage and proactive staff assistance
- Adequate space between seats

Creating environments that reduce stress and support ease of movement is essential to delivering truly inclusive, dementia-friendly events.

A small number of attendees noted that technical elements, such as audio and lighting, impacted their comfort and enjoyment with one attendee requesting “better lighting during the movie” (Rialto, P11).

Small adjustments, such as testing sound in advance and maintaining warm, low lighting, can make a significant difference for attendees with sensory sensitivities.

Transport

Transport between attendees’ residence and the cinema was not provided as part of the event, although several attendees came from retirement villages or care homes that provided their own transport.

For others, transport remained a barrier, even though the events were free. Those without access to free transport often suggested it be provided for future events.

Providing transport would be great (Reading, P6)

Free seats or transport paid for by the village (Rialto, P15)

Expanding transport support, potentially through partnerships with transport providers, rest homes, or caregivers, could improve accessibility, especially for attendees with limited mobility or those living in more isolated areas.

Communication

Attendees emphasised the importance of announcements about practicalities like intermissions, toilet locations, and event timing. The Vic, the first of the screenings, did not feature such an announcement and this caused some confusion.

When you had the intermission, there was no warning ... a lot of them thought it was over. And they all got up and thought they were going ... It just sort of stopped halfway through (The Vic, Interview 1)

Toilet announcement 10–15 mins before film for incontinence sufferers [was required] (The Vic, P13)

Feedback from the first screening prompted clear announcements to be made at the start of each subsequent event.

While maps and signage were available, these were not always sufficient, particularly in complex or unfamiliar spaces:

Map was confusing ... good to have a path to the venue (Reading, P4)

These reflections emphasise the importance of clear, repeated verbal cues and simplified visual guides to aid navigation and reduce anxiety, particularly for those with cognitive or sensory impairments.

Film selection, variety, sensitivity, and relevance

As discussed in the previous section, reactions to the films were mixed. While most attendees enjoyed the nostalgic and entertaining elements, others called for greater variety in film genres, especially light-hearted options like comedies that help maintain attention and uplift mood. Others cautioned against choices that felt overly simplistic or stereotyped as films “for older people.” There was a strong emphasis on avoiding content that feels patronising, with attendees stressing the importance of films that respect their emotional depth and life experience.

Try and get some humour in ... to try and waken them up, because that's what [people living with dementia] need ... something to catch the eye and something to make them sit up and think I'm not missing something (The Vic, Interview 1)

[Some films] wouldn't grab my mind (Rialto, Interview 3)

It's important, I think, to avoid a film that ... looks ... to the taste of the older generation that you easily slip into a patronizing thing there ... I think this [film] actually ran that danger. Yes, I think that you probably have to take some risk there ... it's a delicate balance to get there, and everyone's experiences at different stages [of dementia], but also their life experiences are different. And your expectations of the film (Rialto, Interview 3)

A Chinese-language film screening or translations was also suggested.

Could be better if it provides different languages which suits different nationality e.g. Mandarin (Rialto, P12)

The use of subtitles drew mixed feedback². While some thought they would be helpful for following dialogue, others felt they could be distracting, especially during musicals:

I think it would be useful [to have] subtitles ... the Chinese films we do, each of them will have subtitles because it helps them ... and with hearing aids and stuff (Rialto, Interview 2)

It would drive me bonkers (Rialto, Interview 2)

Attendees offered a range of suggestions for future programming, including sing-alongs, nature or animal documentaries, and a broader mix of genres. This feedback highlights the importance of selecting films that not only support cognitive and sensory needs but also respect the diverse interests and preferences of the audience.

Together, this feedback underscores the importance of thoughtful, diverse, and audience-informed programming that recognises attendees' varied interests, needs, and capacities, including selecting films that are engaging without being overwhelming, familiar without being repetitive, and sensitive to sensory needs.

Food and hospitality

As discussed previously, refreshments were a well-received part of the screenings, adding to the welcoming and celebratory feel of the events. However, several attendees offered practical suggestions to enhance the experience, particularly around food quality, presentation, and dietary variety:

Butter is too hard (Reading, P6)

Some healthier food [like] fruit pieces or dried fruit (Rialto, P16)

Though seemingly minor, these comments reflect the detail and care participants notice, and highlight how small improvements can further support comfort, inclusion, and dignity in dementia-friendly settings.

Promotion and outreach

Promotion of the free screenings was extensive, including invitations sent to Dementia NZ's mailing list and a strong social media presence. Unaware of these efforts or of the high number of registrations, which exceeded actual attendance on the day, some attendees suggested more proactive promotion or emphasising that the events were free, not realising these measures had already been implemented. This highlights a gap between outreach efforts and participant awareness.

Consider how to spread the word about the event. If you're in the loop, that's great but if you're not, how do we reach you? Maybe try Facebook (Reading, P8)

Suggest wider publication - rest homes, retirement villages (The Vic, P7)

If you said free movie ... you're gonna get a lot of interest from residents ... but also you might get a lot more in other places, making this whole thing worthwhile (Rialto, Interview 2)

² The screenings did not have subtitles, but several attendees commented on their potential value.

More people. Let people know about this event. Advertise it more (The Vic, P14)

Some attendees suggested framing the events more broadly, rather than solely as “dementia-friendly” screenings.

Maybe have a working title ‘dementia-friendly’ but call it something else on the day (Rialto, P3)

A more inclusive approach could help reduce stigma and attract a wider audience, including older adults and caregivers who may not engage with dementia-specific services. However, broadening the framing could also shift the focus of the event significantly.

It was also suggested that culturally tailored outreach was appropriate, such as translated flyers, to better reflect the ethnic diversity of Auckland’s older population.

Together, these insights point to the need for dementia-aware but inclusive communications, diverse outreach strategies, and clear messaging that reduces stigma, affirms dignity, and invites wider community engagement.

Satisfaction, continuity, and future opportunities

Notably, the suggestions made were minor and overall attendees expressed high levels of satisfaction with the events, with many saying there was nothing they would change. These affirming responses speak to the success of the pilot and the care that underpinned its development and delivery:

Everything was perfect. Congratulations — well done (The Vic, P9)

There is nothing I can think of [to improve]. We believe the event went smoothly and was very welcoming (The Vic, P12)

We can’t think of any way of improving such a success (Reading, P9)

No room for improvement. Getting people of a certain age out. A total plus (The Vic, P11)

Looking ahead, attendees showed strong enthusiasm for making the screenings a regular offering. For many, the events created rare opportunities for connection, enjoyment, and community participation:

Could we have a regular 1/4 or a biannual event so that we can look forward [to it] for weeks or months ahead. Sometimes half the fun [is looking forward to something] (Rialto, P16)

Different activities and wider variety of films (Rialto, P12)

Summary

Attendees’ feedback shows that cultural participation can be deeply meaningful for people living with dementia and their carers when events are designed with empathy, flexibility, and inclusion. What participants valued most was not just the film, but feeling welcomed, respected, and able to participate with dignity.

Small details—such as warm greetings, clear announcements, and comfortable seating—had a major impact on attendees’ sense of safety and enjoyment, while logistical challenges like inaccessible

bathrooms undermined confidence and inclusion. Many attendees also offered thoughtful suggestions for improvement, often framed alongside praise for the overall experience. Even when issues arose, the strong sense of care and community encouraged constructive engagement.

Together, these insights show that successful dementia-friendly programming depends on the cumulative effect of small, thoughtful choices that help people feel seen, safe, and connected. They also highlight the value of dementia-friendly cultural initiatives more broadly, and the potential to expand the model with greater frequency and variety, strengthening inclusion and wellbeing in everyday community life.

4.3 Cinema staff reflections

A short survey was conducted with cinema staff (n=4) involved in delivering the dementia-friendly film screenings to gather reflections on training, event delivery, and opportunities for improvement. While response numbers were limited, the feedback provides valuable operational insights from the venue perspective.

Training and preparedness

All cinema staff who participated in one of the events were asked to complete a short, free online training course provided by Dementia NZ. The training was designed to “raise awareness, increase understanding, grow inclusion and acceptance, and reduce stigma and discrimination [by providing] simple actions that will help those with dementia make wareware to live their best possible lives³.”

Although one respondent questioned the relevance of the training for staff with only brief interactions with attendees, most found it useful in increasing their awareness and confidence to support people living with dementia. It was particularly helpful in understanding behavioural differences and adapting communication styles. As one staff member noted:

[The training was helpful for] raising awareness towards people with dementia in general, but in particular it was a reminder to adapt to each person's needs, speak clearly, be patient, be friendly and welcoming.⁴

A few staff described the training as somewhat repetitive, but this was not seen as a drawback. In fact, two acknowledged that repetition reinforced key principles:

The repetitiveness of the material, but then I thought this could have been to drive the point home

Overall, staff felt the training prepared them to respond with patience and empathy. As one reflected:

It gave us a good foundation—especially around being calm and respectful when people might seem confused or overwhelmed

³ See: <https://dementialearningcentre.org.nz/alzheimersnz/3544-dementia-friends>

⁴ Cinemas have not been identified due to low response numbers.

On-the-day experience and support

The social environment was perceived to be a key strength of the event, with morning tea and post-film mingling helping to foster a relaxed, inclusive atmosphere.

[The] reception, mix and mingle and morning tea made everyone comfortable

Staff members were asked whether there was adequate support from event organisers, including coordinators, volunteers, and Auckland Council staff. Without exception, staff reported feeling very well supported throughout the process.

The organisers were very organised and friendly and helpful

Staff noted that trained staff familiar with people with dementia made a particular difference, as well as the number and commitment of volunteers.

Trained organiser staff there [who were] familiar with people with dementia. I felt well supported

Volunteers/council staff helping out. There were 7 for about 60 customers

This support was evident not only during the events themselves but also throughout the planning process, contributing to a sense of preparedness and shared purpose. As one staff member reflected:

[The] planning beforehand and running of event, expectations from all sides were clearly communicated and implemented

Overall, the combination of knowledgeable organisers, attentive volunteers, and clear communication helped staff feel confident and supported in delivering a positive experience for attendees living with dementia.

Learnings and areas for improvement

There was strong consensus that the accessibility features introduced at each screening, such as dimmed lights, accessible entrances, and additional staff assistance, were effective. As one staff member observed:

Great initiative, really looking at the needs for customers who might be overlooked, just takes a bit of understanding and adaption (dimmed lights, accessible entrance, assistance there if needed etc); would be a good initiative to offer on a regular basis

Practical suggestions for improvement focused on enhancing navigation and reducing attendee anxiety. These included better signage inside and outside the venue, keeping doors open for easier wayfinding, and maintaining low lighting levels. Cinema staff also recommended avoiding scheduling conflicts with other screenings to minimise noise and crowding:

We'd aim to have earlier (or later) and no other sessions anytime close to the same start time (we had a bit of a gap but needed more)

Several staff members noted that attendance numbers fell short of the registration cap and suggested extending the registration period, overbooking to account for no-shows, or introducing a small booking fee to encourage attendance.

*Registration link was closed off too early; there would have been space to host more people
More people at the screening; registration was limited to 100 but they did not all show up.
Perhaps invite 30% more people and charge a small booking fee which in our experience
improves attendee rates. This works*

While the event coordinator extended the registration period and intentionally overbooked by around 30 per cent, this was ultimately not enough to fill each venue. Notably, cinemas were paid a pre-agreed amount regardless of final attendance, suggesting staff feedback reflected a genuine desire for more people to benefit from the experience rather than concerns about profitability.

Some staff reported feeling underprepared for the volume of wheelchairs and walkers, particularly at the Rialto where the number of attendees requiring mobility aids exceeded what had been registered:

Better communication about wheelchairs and walkers. No cinema really has the capacity for large numbers of these

This discrepancy highlights the ongoing challenge of ensuring accurate registration information to support effective planning and a smooth experience for all attendees.

Commitment to future events

Attendees were asked whether they would consider offering dementia-friendly film screenings in the future. All cinema managers said they would, and some were already thinking about similar events:

We are looking at offering accessible screenings for elderly people, people with hearing difficulties or other, by showing films with subtitles and dimmed light; seeing if there is interest at the moment

Others were willing in principle, but noted the importance of having a partner, such as Auckland Council, to support communication and logistics.

We would like to work more with Auckland Council in providing special screenings

We would need a partner to work with that has a communication channel to this audience

We have a few regular customers who come with friends and family to normal sessions with friends and families without issue. I'd be concerned that we would struggle to provide anything like the level of support that was needed if we had a similar screening without council/volunteers support

Summary

Cinema staff offered thoughtful reflections on the dementia-friendly screenings, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Although based on a small sample, feedback revealed a strong commitment to accessibility and a willingness to adapt.

Staff felt well-supported by organisers and volunteers and valued contributing to an inclusive community event. The training was widely appreciated for building awareness and empathy, even if some questioned its relevance for brief customer interactions. Practical challenges, such as managing mobility aids and uneven attendance, highlighted the need for clear communication and responsive planning.

The screenings' success lay not only in accessible logistics but also in the warm, social atmosphere created for attendees. Cinema staff expressed interest in continuing dementia-friendly programming, noting that sustained partnerships and targeted outreach would be critical to future events.

Taken together, observations, feedback forms, interviews, and survey responses provide practical guidance for refining dementia-friendly screenings. They underscore the value of inclusive, flexible planning that meets diverse participant needs and ensures everyone feels welcome, supported, and part of the community.

5 Strengths, challenges and recommendations

This section summarises the programme’s key strengths, outlines the challenges encountered, and concludes with recommendations for future events.

5.1 Strengths

Feedback from attendees, caregivers, event organisers, and cinema staff highlights a number of important strengths of the initiative:

- **Social connection and enjoyment:** Many participants reported a sense of enjoyment, uplifted mood, and increased social interaction. The screenings offered a rare opportunity to connect with others in a relaxed and stigma-free environment, helping to reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Welcoming and inclusive atmosphere:** Small but thoughtful adjustments, such as softer lighting, refreshments, and the acceptance of non-traditional behaviours, created a setting where people living with dementia felt comfortable and respected.
- **Supportive staffing and volunteers:** The presence of trained staff and volunteers was key to the success of the screenings. Attendees appreciated the attentiveness and calm demeanour of those providing support, which helped them feel safe and valued.
- **Engaging film choices:** Films that were nostalgic, light-hearted, or musical in nature resonated well with audiences. Predictable narratives helped maintain attention and comfort, particularly for those with cognitive or sensory sensitivities.

5.2 Challenges

Despite the overwhelmingly positive feedback, the evaluation identified several challenges that impacted delivery and accessibility:

- **Venue accessibility:** Some venues presented physical barriers, such as narrow aisles, stairs without ramps, limited lift access, or unclear signage. These factors created a level of stress for attendees with mobility aids and their caregivers.
- **Communication gaps:** Some attendees were confused by aspects of the event, such as unexpected breaks or unclear instructions. Others found the “dementia-friendly” label off-putting, particularly those who were undiagnosed or didn’t identify with the term.
- **Transport logistics:** Travel to the screenings posed challenges for some attendees.
- **Balancing film selection:** While many appreciated the nostalgic content, others expressed interest in more variety, including more contemporary or humorous films. Managing length and pacing to suit diverse needs was also a challenge.
- **Managing scale and demand:** Screenings were under-attended despite registrations, highlighting the challenge of balancing broad outreach with accurately predicting final turnout. Finding the right approach to encourage participation while managing no-shows is essential.

- **Supporting caregivers:** Caregivers described emotional and logistical strain in ensuring their charges arrived on time and were prepared to participate, for example, by preparing health and safety plans for off-site activities and arranging suitable transport. While direct support may fall outside Auckland Council's remit, their needs and contributions merit intentional recognition and consideration in future planning.
- **Broader systemic barriers:** Some stakeholders expressed frustration about wider issues in the dementia care system, such as limited funding, workforce shortages, and fragmented services, which indirectly shaped the challenges experienced at community events.

These challenges offer valuable lessons for future planning and delivery.

5.3 Recommendations

To build on the success of the initiative and address the issues identified, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Select accessible venues:** Prioritise cinemas that offer greater accessibility for people using wheelchairs or walkers. Continue pre-event walkthroughs to verify lift access, signage, seating arrangements, and facilities.
- **Continue clear and inclusive communication:** Maintain clear, easy-to-read pre-event information outlining parking arrangements, venue layout, schedule, and available support. Use multiple formats (print, email, phone) and continue testing language to ensure it remains inclusive and welcoming.
- **Maintain strong staffing and volunteer support:** Continue providing targeted, role-specific dementia awareness training for cinema staff, volunteers, and coordinators. Ensure adequate numbers of trained personnel are available on the day, with clearly defined responsibilities.
- **Sustain diverse film programming:** Continue offering a mix of familiar, nostalgic films alongside contemporary or humorous options. Maintain screenings at 90 minutes or less and include an intermission.
- **Consider transport options:** Explore partnering with transport providers to expand reach. If transport is offered, ensure vehicles can accommodate multiple mobility aids and that attendees receive clear instructions and contact information.
- **Targeted outreach and marketing:** Continue promoting the events specifically for people living with dementia and their caregivers. Use community networks, health services, retirement villages, and personal testimonials to ensure those most likely to benefit are reached.
- **Caregiver support (as appropriate):** Explore ways to provide information and space for caregivers to connect, and practical assistance where feasible.
- **Plan for sustainable growth:** As interest increases, consider piloting events in new locations or with a diversity of audiences. Collaborate with dementia-friendly organisations (not necessarily dementia-focused organisations) to co-deliver, co-host and/or co-fund events as capacity grows.

6 Conclusion

The Dementia-Friendly Film Screening initiative demonstrates how thoughtfully designed, inclusive community events can positively impact the wellbeing of people living with dementia, their caregivers, and whānau. By creating a safe, welcoming, and respectful space, the screenings offered participants opportunities to connect, enjoy familiar routines, and feel part of their community.

Evaluation findings highlight the initiative's strengths alongside practical challenges, particularly around accessibility and communication, that could be addressed to ensure ongoing success. With continued refinement, the programme can be further strengthened and expanded to reach more people while maintaining high-quality support.

This initiative exemplifies how small, community-driven changes can reduce stigma, foster social connection, and promote dignity. Its lessons extend beyond dementia-friendly screenings to other inclusive, age-friendly cultural programmes across Aotearoa and beyond.

Scaling initiatives like this could help reshape our understanding of ageing, dementia, and public life, not as separate spheres, but as interconnected. As the population ages, inclusive, low-barrier cultural spaces will be essential to reducing isolation, fostering connection, and supporting wellbeing. This pilot offers a compelling case for how modest, thoughtful adaptations can transform public spaces into places of joy, participation, and care.

Importantly, dementia-friendly practice is not a fixed checklist but an evolving, relational approach. It requires listening closely to those with lived experience and recognising that cultural inclusion is about more than access—it's about generating a sense of belonging.

7 References

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8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: Participant observation template

	Emotional (e.g. sad, happy, bored)	Physical (e.g. getting/appearing 'lost')	Interactions (e.g. with caregiver, staff/volunteers, attendees)
Arrival (e.g. finding the venue, tickets, snacks, bathrooms, toilets, challenges)			
Watching the film (e.g. reactions, engagement, etc.)			
Post-film social			

8.2 Appendix B: Feedback cards

<p>THANKS FOR COMING TO THE MOVIES!</p> <p>WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE.</p> <p>PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO FILL OUT THIS QUICK FEEDBACK CARD (ONE QUESTION ON EACH SIDE).</p> <p>YOUR RESPONSES WILL HELP US TO IMPROVE FUTURE EVENTS.</p> <p>What did you enjoy most about the event?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>THANKS FOR COMING TO THE MOVIES!</p> <p>WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE.</p> <p>PLEASE TAKE A MOMENT TO FILL OUT THIS QUICK FEEDBACK CARD (ONE QUESTION ON EACH SIDE).</p> <p>YOUR RESPONSES WILL HELP US TO IMPROVE FUTURE EVENTS.</p> <p>What do you think could be improved for future events?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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8.3 Appendix C: Interview schedule

Interview Schedule:

People Living with Dementia and their Caregivers

(modified to accommodate participant and group needs)

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. **Introductions**
2. **Ethics**
 - a. Reassure that participation is voluntary, responses will remain confidential, process for withdrawing, acquiring consent and permission to record

Section 1: Initial Expectations and Arrival (5 minutes)

1. **How did you feel about attending the film screening before the event?**
 - a. (Prompt if necessary: Were there any specific expectations, concerns, or excitement about attending?)
2. **Can you describe your experience when you arrived at the venue?**
 - a. (Prompt if needed: How easy or difficult was it to find your way in? Were you greeted warmly? Was the space clear and easy to navigate? How easy was it to get your snacks and find your seat?

Section 2: The Film Experience (10 minutes)

1. **How did you feel during the film?**
 - a. (Prompt if necessary: Were there any moments that particularly stood out? Did the film evoke any strong emotions?).
2. **What did you think about the film?**
 - a. (Prompt if necessary: Did you find the film interesting or enjoyable? Were there aspects of the film that you connected with? Etc.)
 - b. NOTE: this is not about comprehending the film.
3. **How did you find the environment during the film (e.g., lighting, sound, seating)?**
 - a. (Prompt: Did you feel comfortable? Did the atmosphere help you to enjoy the film? As you know, the environment was changed to reflect what you and others said in the workshop. Were those changes helpful or needed?)

Section 3: Post-Film Experience and Social Interaction (10 minutes)

1. **How did you feel after the film was finished?**
 - a. (Prompt: Were you excited, tired, or eager to discuss the film? Did you feel like you needed a break?)

2. **Can you tell me about your experience at the social event afterwards?**
 - a. (Prompt: Did you engage with others? Was it comfortable for you to socialise or talk about the film?)


Section 4: Reflections and Improvements (10 minutes)

1. **Looking back on the entire experience, what did you enjoy the most about the event?**
 - a. (Prompt: Was it the film, the atmosphere, the people, or something else?)
2. **What challenges or difficulties did you face during the event, if any?**
 - a. (Prompt: Were there any parts of the event that felt uncomfortable, confusing, or difficult to navigate?)
3. **What suggestions do you have for making the event better for people with dementia in the future?**
 - a. (Prompt: Is there anything you think could be improved in the space, film choice, staff support, or social interaction?)
4. **Would you recommend this event to others? Why or why not?**

Closing (5 minutes)

1. **Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience at the film screening?**
 - a. (Prompt: Anything that we haven't covered yet that you think is important?)
2. **Thank them for their time and valuable insights.**

8.4 Appendix D: Staff survey

<p>Dementia-Friendly Film Screening survey </p> <p><small>As someone who supported this event, we invite you to complete this short survey. Your responses will help us evaluate the success of the film screening and what we might do to improve future screenings. It should take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate, please complete the survey by 13 June. The completion of this survey is an indication of your consent to participate. Thank you!</small></p> <p>Training Experience</p> <p><small>The following questions are about the dementia friendly training you were invited to complete prior to the event.</small></p> <p>1. Did you complete the free online dementia-friendly training provided for staff?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Unsure</p> <p>2. How helpful did you find the training in preparing you to support attendees who are living with dementia? (Please select one)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Very helpful</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Somewhat helpful</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Neither helpful nor unhelpful</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Somewhat unhelpful</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Very unhelpful</p> <p>3. What aspects of the training did you find most helpful?</p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>4. What aspects of the training did you find least helpful?</p> <p><input type="text"/></p>	<p>Your experience at the event</p> <p><small>The following questions are about your experience on the day of the event</small></p> <p>5. During the event, did you encounter any challenges supporting attendees who are living with dementia? (Select all that apply)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No challenges encountered</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Communicating with attendees</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Assisting attendees with mobility or physical needs</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Dealing with distress or agitation from attendees</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Other (Please explain below)</p> <p>6. Please explain your response</p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>7. Was there adequate support from event organisers (event coordinators, volunteers, etc.) during the event? (Please select one)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Don't know</p> <p>8. Please explain your response (optional)</p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>9. What lessons (if any) did you learn about accessibility when hosting dementia-friendly events?</p> <p><input type="text"/></p>
<p>Reflection and feedback</p> <p><small>The final section is about your general reflections on the event and any additional feedback you would like to provide</small></p> <p>10. What do you think worked well at the event?</p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>11. What do you think could be improved for future events?</p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>12. Would you consider offering dementia-friendly film screenings for paying customers in the future?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Maybe</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Not applicable to my role</p> <p>13. Please explain your response</p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>14. Do you have any additional thoughts or reflections on your experience of supporting the event?</p> <p><input type="text"/></p>	

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