



Serving up confidence and staying active in later life at Lovat Fields Retirement Village

Themes: older adults, physical wellbeing

Lovat Fields Retirement Village in Milton Keynes, part of the ExtraCare portfolio, provides various facilities and social opportunities to residents. The wellbeing services team supports residents physically and mentally to stay active and resilient, helping them to get involved in activities to benefit their physical and mental health – all to keep them well and living a happy, healthy life. A weekly table tennis session has been introduced at Lovat Fields, with residents experiencing the benefits the sport has to offer.

Background

After reading about research into the benefits of table tennis for people with long term health conditions, particularly those with Parkinson's, Wellbeing Lead for ExtraCare Lisa O'Shea reached out to Table Tennis England seeking support to begin a table tennis session at Lovat Fields.

A 10-week pilot was established on site, which included the provision of a table tennis package through the Ping in the Community scheme, activator training for staff and linking with local coach Stephen Baggaley to deliver the sessions. Stephen has a vast amount of coaching experience, from coaching at the highest levels of the WTT Tour through to running sessions for people with dementia and Parkinson's.

The pilot sessions attracted approximately 12 participants to each session. Lovat Fields have seen the benefits the activity brings to residents, and the sessions have continued to become a part of the weekly timetable of activities available.

The Project

Table tennis sessions take place on a Monday and offer a low impact activity for residents, which focuses on enjoyment, basic table tennis skills, and safety tips due to the age of the participants – for example staying close to the table in case they lose balance.

There is also a Thursday activity for those seeking more advanced activity and competitive opportunities. Several of the participants from the Monday session have joined the self named 'professional group' after building confidence and having a desire to improve their skills against more advanced players.



The Impact

Jan

Jan first picked up a table tennis bat as a young probation officer playing against juveniles. Fast forward 50 years and she restarted her table tennis journey at Lovat Fields in spring 2026, attending both the Monday and Thursday sessions.

*"It's good to have something that makes me feel I'm getting a skill back. At my age you're losing skills and things you could do in the past. To be able to begin to get back to something like this is a real boost".
"It's good fun as well and I enjoy meeting people and it's not too physically demanding".*

Yvonne

Yvonne previously played table tennis at the Open University; however, the group closed after COVID-19 and Yvonne took the opportunity to play at Lovat Fields.

"When you retire your days have no structure anymore, so knowing I've always got table tennis here adds some structure to the week. I'm getting active, getting hand-eye coordination, the companionship. It's something I look forward to and I wouldn't miss it".

Ian

Ian began table tennis in spring 2026 at the start of the pilot and now plays in the Monday and Thursday sessions. Ian has a hole in his heart, underdeveloped lungs and a twisted spine and notes the positive impact table tennis has had for him

"It's gentle exercise, which is good for people with disabilities. The sessions are a lot of fun, a good social activity and a great confidence builder – you feel you can do things again and be active. The heart and lung specialists are very happy I'm more active through table tennis".

Vanita

Vanita was a full-time carer for her husband after he suffered a stroke. Now that her husband has 24/7 carers provided, Vanita is looking to make more time for herself.

"I have never played table tennis before, coming here to learn something new and getting a little bit better gives me the confidence I can do it. I had a knee replacement a year ago and have arthritis, being active with table tennis helps ease the pain I often feel".



Lisa

Lisa reflects on how introducing the facilitated coaching sessions has allowed Lovat Fields to provide an inclusive activity for all residents, regardless of their physical abilities;

"We've always had table tennis in the villages, but we've typically had people who are more active take part. We need to be mindful that people are living for longer and with long term health conditions, and we need to have physical activities for everybody, not just those who are more physically able, but also including those who may have physical or mental impairments. They need to be part of the journey to keep active and resilient, these table tennis sessions have allowed us to do just that".

Sonya

Sonya's role as Wellbeing Advisor at Lovat Fields involves her providing advice and services to residents to aid their wellbeing – with table tennis playing its role in improving health and wellbeing;

"It's given the residents great confidence and skills, I like seeing the group improving, enjoying themselves and having fun. Residents are seeing an impact in their fitness, particularly Ian who suffers from cardiovascular and respiratory issues, as well as benefitting from the social aspect of the sessions".

Stephen

Despite working with a wide range of groups across all levels of the sport, Stephen considers himself privileged to work with this group and notes how it's the small impacts that make a big difference;

"It gives me a lot of job satisfaction to do a lot of different things. The joy on people's faces is the same for whichever age group you work with – whether its two 8-year-olds in their first rally or an 80-year-old picking up a bat again after many years. The sport is equally valuable at this stage of life, even one session per week can re-activate your mind and give you a purpose. I see happier people at the end of a session, I see people growing friendships and meeting new people. Sometimes they're playing the sport for the first time in a different chapter of their life, it makes them feel valued. As a coach, you only need to see that every now and then to think what you're doing is beneficial."

