

The care-home residents proving it's never too late to learn a new language

When an advertisement for French classes appeared in Dundonald House Care Home, Mari Dougan was surprised her parents wanted to go. Dougan's mum, Patricia, has lived at the home for two years and has had dementia for nine years. She has lost most of her speech. But the course was something she and her husband could do together and the whole family has noticed a change in her.

What was the advertisement for?

How long has Dougan's mum Patricia lived at the Care Home?

What is wrong with Patricia?

How long has she had dementia?

What has happened to her?

Have these classes had an effect on Patricia's dementia?

"I think Dad decided he'd take Mum just for her benefit," says Dougan. "But he loved it just as much as she did. After they did the French course, they did Italian. Mum knows she's there and she sometimes answers with a word or two – that's amazing. She's much more active since she started the classes."

Why did Dougan's dad go to the French classes?

After studying French what did they learn next?

What has been another effect on Patricia's dementia?

Courses in French, Italian, German and Spanish last for ten weeks for an hour a week. The classes are the idea of Robbie Norval, who started Lingo Flamingo in 2015 to give lessons to older adults. Lingo Flamingo employs 35 teachers who work in care homes and community centres in Scotland. So far, it has worked with more than 800 people.

How many courses are available?

How long do the course last for?

What is the length of the class?

Who had the idea for these classes in the first place?

What did he start in 2015?

How many people work for his company?

Where do these teachers work?

How many people have they taught?

Working with Thomas Bak, a psychologist from Edinburgh University, has been important. Bak's research into dementia over 20 years has found that people who are bilingual get dementia up to four years later than those who are monolingual.

Who is Thomas Bak?

What has he been researching and for how long?

What has he found out about people who are bilingual?

Even for people who aren't bilingual, learning a language in later life has benefits, Bak says. He has found improvements in attention, fluency and memory among older adults. He believes it is never too late to learn a language. "In fact, it becomes more important with age," he says.

What 3 benefits are there in learning a language according to Bak?

What does he believe?

Is it more or less important with age?

Bak adds that what is really good about language learning is the variety of tasks you have to do. "You have to learn to tell the difference between different sounds. You have to learn new ideas that might be very different from your mother tongue. You have to learn grammar and how to use words in a conversation," he says. Bak says doing a Sudoku puzzle is not as useful – it is like going to the gym and spending all your time on a single machine.

What else does Bak say is good about learning a language?

What does he say is less useful?

What analogy does he use?

"We've also found learning a language really increases wellbeing and self-confidence," Bak says. "If an adult with dementia can learn a couple of words, they think to themselves, 'I can learn new things.' They don't fear dementia as much. They realize they're not forgetting everything, which is a really important message."

What other benefits are there of learning a language?

What does learning a language mean for people who are suffering dementia?

What message are they getting?