

# Age Friendly

## – learning from Ageing Better

### Introduction

Ageing Better is a test and learn programme. It is collecting information and insights from across 14 partnerships to identify learning that will be useful for other programmes and organisations delivering activities aimed at reducing social isolation in people aged 50+.

We have grouped our national learning around Ageing Better into three themes:

- **CONTEXT** - We know from Ageing Better that the reasons for social isolation are many and varied and happen for a myriad of reasons including macro issues such as inequalities and deprivation as well as personal circumstances. These often occur in combination meaning people's situations are complex.
- **CONNECTIONS** - The people who are most socially isolated (where isolation is entrenched and embedded) will need some level of one-to-one support to help address their isolation
- **ECOSYSTEM** - The Ecosystem is fundamental to addressing social isolation as it is the space where individuals connect with the community. It works preventatively to keep people socially connected and steps in when social isolation occurs. It includes interventions that people 'need'; activities and groups people 'want' to engage with; opportunities and provision for people to set up their own groups and community development, that includes age friendly activity

This paper focuses on our learning around Age Friendly activity. It fits into our national learning in the following way:

Developing the ecosystem - helping to create an Age Friendly environment

It is based on the learning and insights from seven Ageing Better areas Bristol, Cheshire, East Lindsey, Isle of Wight, Leeds, Sheffield and Torbay who attended a workshop to explore this theme.

At the end of this report we provide links to specific learning reports from Ageing Better areas on this topic.

## Age Friendly

The Age Friendly Communities Framework was developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The aim of an Age Friendly Community is defined by the Centre for Ageing Better<sup>1</sup> as *“a place where people of all ages are able to live healthy and active later lives. These places make it possible for people to continue to stay in their homes, participate in the activities they value and contribute to their communities for as long as possible.”*

Age Friendly Communities actively involve older people and bring together the voluntary, public and private sector to work alongside communities to help make changes to the physical and social environment. WHO has identified eight domains for Age Friendly communities. These are:

- Outdoor spaces and building
- Transport
- Housing
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community support and health service

Communities can gain Age Friendly Community status by gaining commitment from local political leadership, undertaking baseline assessments of the community and developing an action plan.

Across Ageing Better, Age Friendly has become an increasingly important area of work. Age Friendly has the potential to be a local vehicle for retaining the engagement of older people as well as for holding and sharing the knowledge and learning which Ageing Better has developed. At this stage of Ageing Better (year 6) there are both areas who have already achieved Age Friendly status and those currently working towards achieving it.

We heard that there was a mix of approaches in deciding how to pursue Age Friendly status:

- Ageing Better was building on an existing platform - in some areas there was a long-standing commitment to become an Age Friendly Community and they were already part of the WHO network. This was the case for Time to Shine in Leeds where Ageing Better was adding to the work already planned across the city
- Becoming an Age Friendly Community was part of the early Ageing Better planning - in some areas gaining the Age Friendly status was built into the project plan. Both Bristol Ageing Better and Age Friendly Island (Isle of Wight, IOW) took this approach

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-communities>

- Becoming an Age Friendly Community became part of the legacy planning for Ageing Better - in some areas the decision to become an Age Friendly Community emerged later in the Programme and went on to link into the planning that was done around legacy. In these areas a commitment was made to work towards gaining Age Friendly status. This is the case in Brightlife (Cheshire) and in T.E.D (East Lindsey)

Our learning from Ageing Better is that for those areas working towards Age Friendly status or having already achieved Age Friendly status, the process can really act as a catalyst and focus to help bring together the voluntary and public sector and wider communities. This helps bring partners together to work towards a common goal.

We have found, however, that Age Friendly is not without its challenges. Although most areas were successful in achieving letters of support from political leadership there was then a perception, that Age Friendly was “complete”. Ageing Better was able to help keep Age Friendly on the agenda and drive Age Friendly activity as it provided a resource to help deliver elements of the subsequent plan. We found it was important to continually prove the worth of Age Friendly activities. This was particularly important where a local authority had shifting priorities and there was as a result a need to keep Age Friendly on the agenda and to champion its worth.

We identified a wide range of tools and techniques for helping to evidence the worth of Age Friendly activities. However, we also recognized that evidencing success with some Age Friendly activities could be a considerable challenge. Where we were able to demonstrate achievements, we heard that areas had made use of tools including:

- Telling the story - keeping a record of all the activities undertaken and the feedback and insight provided as the Age Friendly activities developed. It also helped to build personal relationships with key stakeholders to keep them informed of the activity and successes happening under the Age Friendly umbrella and areas they were particularly interested in
- Evaluating after the event - going back to organisations (both public, voluntary and private) after they have engaged to identify the practical changes they had been able to embed
- Looking at satisfaction measures - working with private sector organisations to measure changes in customer satisfaction as Age Friendly measures are introduced
- Looking more widely at the data - creating a baseline and then exploring changes in some of the key indicators of healthy, active later lives. This could include looking at the rates of falls and people in independent living

Across Ageing Better we also found it was valuable to embed the Age Friendly Communities agenda in a wider network of local plans and strategies which helps gain wider “buy-in”. This was successfully done in Leeds where Age Friendly was part of the stated ambition for the Health and Wellbeing strategy.

We also heard that it is important to “translate” the Age Friendly domains into meaningful and practical aims linked to the place being worked within and with an understanding for the local context. Communicating is key as to some people the domains can appear too big to be able to practically relate to.

**Key Message:** Age Friendly Communities can act as a bridge between the voluntary, public, private and community sectors and provide them with a shared focus. Ageing Better has provided areas with an opportunity to resource and show the worth of Age Friendly activities and to help keep them on the agenda.

Progressing Age Friendly activity benefits from a champion who can help keep Age Friendly on the agenda regardless of shifting political priorities.

## Involving older people

A key part of gaining Age Friendly Community status is the clear involvement of older people throughout the process. Ageing Better was able to support and develop existing and new forums that helped facilitate this. Cheshire, for example, developed an Age Friendly toolkit designed and tested by their Older People's Alliance for use with providers.

We found it was important to make sure participants felt that they had been listened to and that their voice had been heard. Age Friendly Island (IOW) helped achieve this by establishing task and finish groups on specific topics and issues. This helped ensure there was a tight focus on a piece of work and actions and activities were not left too open ended.

We learned it was important to translate some of the jargon used in Age Friendly to make it accessible to the groups. Time to Shine (Leeds) achieved this by reducing the number of WHO domains to help make their work more manageable and accessible. This also helped ensure responsibilities for the different domains were coordinated. It allowed the Local Authority to lead on the transport and housing domains leaving the community to focus on the areas where they could have most influence.

We also learned it was important to manage expectations of the forums. It was important to highlight how long it could take for change on this scale to happen. But it was also important for the forums to make and be made aware of tangible changes being made. We found it was easy to lose people if the work was too big to relate to or too detailed to notice. However, that is not to say the ambitions of the forums cannot be ambitious or substantial. Ageing Well Torbay have formed an older people's Assembly who will continue to lead on the Age Friendly Community work once Ageing Better funding comes to an end.

One of the aims of Ageing Better nationally has been to ensure that people aged 50 and over are "actively involved in their communities, with their views and participation valued more highly" and Age Friendly provides a meaningful, practical evolution for the work many Ageing Better areas have undertaken in supporting the development of assemblies and forums of people aged over 50.

**Key Message:** Age Friendly Communities actively involve older people. The forums should be structured to ensure there is the opportunity for older people to take positive local action. It also helps to organise and manage the domains so responsibility is split between different stakeholders.

## Activities and actions

Across Ageing Better, the forums and staff involved in Age Friendly Community activities have had a large number of notable successes.

We learned from Ageing Better there was often a need to reach out into the public and private sectors to better raise awareness of issues associated with ageing and to provide appropriate training to them. In several areas this has focused on providing training to bus or other transport operators. Age Friendly Island (IOW) developed an Age Friendly training course. This could be "tailored" to the organisation receiving

the training and covers both the physical and psychological aspects of ageing. They also helped raise awareness of some of the practical challenges people face as they age.

We also found it important to link to other initiatives taking place, particularly those promoting Dementia Friendly activities or training. Time to Shine (Leeds) developed a link with the Leeds Directory which is an online list of businesses that have been screened as suitable to provide a service to older people. This uses a green tick to highlight those businesses that are identified as Age Friendly or Dementia Friendly.

The Age Friendly work has also included making smaller but practical changes in communities that help make the community more accessible to people as they age. Age Friendly Island (IOW) worked with a local supermarket to develop a slow till. This was piloted at Tesco, where they found customer satisfaction increased. Speaking to customers they found there was a perception among customers that staff had time for them. Bristol Ageing Better worked with volunteers to develop a toilet map, which helped identify those businesses willing to make their toilets available and so increasingly people's confidence to travel into town.

T.E.D (East Lindsey) and Bristol Ageing Better have also worked closely with businesses. This has helped raise awareness of the value of the ageing population. In T.E.D the success of their Age Friendly Business initiative has led to the "twinning" of some of their Friendship Groups being located in Age Friendly businesses. Their work with a local shopping centre has resulted in all the retail premises achieving Age Friendly Business awards as well as the introduction of "Banter Benches" where people are encouraged to sit and talk to each other.

Brightlife (Cheshire) through its Social Butterflies initiative encouraged people to get together and have some fun by taking part in a spectacular art project. Community groups, schools, clubs, local businesses and individuals were invited to create decorative butterflies out of wool, paint, wood, wire, flowers or metal and display them (in classrooms, shop windows, parks, gardens and community centres) to show their commitment to being Age-friendly. The butterfly is a symbol of change and transformation and represents the joy and pleasure to be had by staying connected and active in later life.

We also found in Ageing Better there was considerable scope for celebrating success around Age Friendly. Age Better Sheffield held an awards evening to celebrate the contribution of people to ageing in the community whilst Bristol Ageing Better run a Neighbourhood Networks award. This provides a recognition award to communities who identify three positive steps they can take to create an Age Friendly community.

**Key Message:** Age Friendly activities can reach a wide range of different sections of the community. This can include small but practical community changes such as seating or toilet maps. It can also include engaging with the private sector. This includes helping to promote businesses that are already Age Friendly and providing training to help businesses and organisations think in a more Age Friendly way. We also found value in celebrating the work individuals and communities do in making places more Age Friendly

### What next?

Age Friendly Communities will continue well beyond the lifetime of Ageing Better. The Age Friendly concept is a powerful one, however it does not come with any resource. Although this can be beneficial as it shows places what they can achieve with less siloed thinking, it also means action around Age Friendly can lack focus or driver. It is such a large concept which can involve so many people that there can be

a danger that it leads to nothing clear happening as a result.

Ageing Better has been able to provide a resource that has allowed areas to have a clear focus and action plan. This resource has helped accelerate the activity around Age Friendly and helped to bring partners to the table. It has also meant Ageing Better areas with Age Friendly status have been able to carry practical activities in communities that help act as a beacon for why Age Friendly should be a priority in all communities.

Our key learning from Ageing Better is that Age Friendly Communities create an opportunity and focus for a clear partnership between the public, voluntary and private sectors. It helps to bring different groups and organisations together around a common purpose.

In order to be successful Age Friendly Communities need:

- Strategic leadership - a champion in the Local Authority or other lead organisation who will push for action across different departments and encourage political leadership
- Voluntary sector champion - a leader in the voluntary sector, ideally an existing trusted brand who can hold the strategic leadership to account and champion the need for Age Friendly
- Community engagement - a mechanism for engaging and reaching people in the community to guide Age Friendly activities but also to activate people in the community to make their own changes

### **Further information**

- Bristol - Make your Neighbourhood Age Friendly [Neighbourhoods Toolkit](#)
- Cheshire - [Social Butterflies Toolkit](#)  
[Age Friendly Toolkit](#)
- East Lindsey - [The Hildred's Banter Bench](#)
- Greater Manchester - [Age Friendly Communities in Practice](#)
- Isle of Wight - [Becoming an Age Friendly Island](#)
- Leeds - [How to become Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly](#)

More detail on our wider insights from across the Programme to date together with an overview summary of our learning to date are available at [Ageing Better](#)