

The National Lottery Community Fund: Ageing Better

Addressing loneliness for those living in sheltered
housing, 22 July 2021

Insights Pack

The event

Our objectives were:

- To explore Ageing Better partnerships' **insights and practical learning** on tackling loneliness with those living in sheltered housing
- To collectively consider:
 - How to ensure people living in a sheltered housing community **feel connected**
 - How to involve people living in a sheltered housing community in **activities in shared spaces**
 - How to encourage people in a sheltered housing community to get involved in **external social activities** locally
- To help **connect organisations** with each other, allowing them to compare and contrast their learning, challenges and successes in building connected sheltered housing communities

Flow of the session

- Welcome and introductions
- Our speakers shared key learning from the programme
- We discussed challenges facing us and also shared our areas of success
- We shared our closing reflections

Click to see the event [slide deck](#)



Click to see the event [agenda](#)



Click to see the event [video recording](#)



Introduction by Ruth Bamford

Ruth Bamford from the National Lottery Community Fund introduced the event and explained the background to the Ageing Better programme:

- the overall aim of the programme is to **reduce isolation** in people aged over 50
- the programme is made up of **14 partnerships** across England, who each work locally with a wider range of other partners
- it is in the final year of a seven year 'test and learn' National Lottery funded strategic programme

Ruth explained that many partnerships have undertaken work in sheltered housing, while some sheltered schemes have a strong sense of community in others residents' social connections are weakened. The programme has worked to address loneliness and social isolation in a range of ways including developing a resource pack to help sheltered housing providers address isolation and loneliness, providing activities to help residents feel more connected and linking people living in sheltered housing with groups and activities outside of their homes.



“ There is no one Ageing Better model for partnerships to follow. Each partnership's model is unique to respond to their local context and community ”

Our speakers



Edyta Banczer

Programme Delivery Manager
Live Well, Age Better in
Sheffield

e.bancer@syha.co.uk

agebettersheff@syha.co.uk

[Website](#)



Claire Chivers

Learning and Monitoring Officer
Age UK, Bristol

[Website](#)



Joanne Stapleton

Outreach Manager
Ageing Better in Camden

joanne.stapleton@ageukcamden.org.uk

[Website](#)



Guest speaker perspectives



Edyta Bancer

Programme Delivery
Manager
Live Well, Age Better in
Sheffield

A perspective from a
housing association
working on projects with
local care homes and
sheltered housing
providers in Sheffield

Enrichment for the Elderly Together

Edyta introduced 'Enrichment for the Elderly Together' - a model that was developed by Age Better in Sheffield to support people moving to a care home or sheltered housing. The aim is to "humanise" the experience for both new residents and their friends and families.

The programme focuses on supporting connection between visitors and residents - the aim is to **connect visitors to the whole community of residents** and not just the person that they are visiting. Creating these connections helps residents to build relationships with each other that can sustain them when visitors have left.

Another part of the programme has been helping visitors **understand why residents behave in certain ways** - helping people to understand the behaviours associated with conditions such as dementia and help improve the experiences of visitors and residents.

She highlighted that **co-production** with care home and sheltered housing staff has been vital. Staff know the residents best and can share information when residents might not be able to themselves.

Guest speaker perspectives



Edyta Bancer

Programme Delivery
Manager
Live Well, Age Better in
Sheffield

Moments of Joy

Edyta also explained the “Moments of Joy” project which was developed in response to the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020. The project was co-produced by residents, carers and staff who worked together to identify **what brings people joy**.

The project focuses on **individual wellbeing** and used a ‘test and learn’ approach to see which activities work best for residents. Activities included dancing and gigs, which have made a huge difference to people’s lives.

A perspective from a
housing association
working on projects with
local care homes and
sheltered housing
providers in Sheffield

Guest speaker perspectives



Claire Chivers

Learning and Monitoring
Officer
Age UK, Bristol

A perspective on the
role of food in creating a
connected community in
sheltered housing in
Bristol

Your Food, Your Health Background

Claire introduced Your Food, Your Health - a two year project that used **food to build** connections within sheltered housing settings. Programme activities were based on residents' interests and included cooking and eating together, growing herbs and spices, and exploring food memories. 165 residents took part in the project, many of whom had never spoken to each other before.

Barriers

She highlighted two main barriers that the project encountered:

1. sometimes project **workers could not gain access to sheltered living blocks**. Forming good relationships with staff members and others such as the local council was vital to ensuring keys could be accessed, however it is also important to talk to residents to address any security concerns
2. **communal rooms and equipment** in some places were in bad condition, and some did not have cooking facilities. However the project was able to negotiate having a lockable cupboard to store equipment

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A perspective on the
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Key Learning

Claire explained the lessons the project learnt about how to engage residents. **Effective ways to engage included:**

- door knocking
- forming relationships with wardens from the very beginning of the project
- understanding barriers to engagement (including health, family visits and historical social dynamics and negative views of external organisations)
- adapting activities to individual residents' needs and interests. For example one project created a regular newsletter in response to a request for better information about events and activities
- providing practical support to enable people to participate as much as they can

Claire explained that as residents came together more they started to share information together. While **food is a great hook for connecting people**, it is important to be flexible and responsive to people's different levels of interest and skill.

Guest speaker perspectives

Ageing
Better
in Camden



Jo Stapleton

Outreach Manager
Ageing Better in
Camden

A perspective on the
role of outreach in
building a connected
community in Camden

Ageing Better in Camden

Jo, from Ageing Better in Camden, introduced the work their outreach team had been doing in sheltered housing settings across Camden. The programme aimed to support people **already engaged** in activities as well as those who **do not take part** - most commonly older men.

Many people who the outreach team work with are at the beginning of a **long journey towards social connection**. Ageing Better in Camden aims to provide **stepping stones** from being totally disengaged to taking the first steps into connection. They found that in some sheltered housing communities, there can be a longstanding **culture of residents not interacting** day-to-day. Encouraging people to simply **speak to their neighbours** can help them to feel more like they're part of a community - it is not always about attending activities.

Jo highlighted that between March 2018 and March 2020, the outreach team engaged in 1,348 doorstep conversations and hosted 62 outreach events involving 630 residents.

Guest speaker perspectives

Ageing
Better
in Camden



Jo Stapleton

Outreach Manager
Ageing Better in
Camden

A perspective on the
role of outreach in
building a connected
community in Camden

Through the doorstep conversations and events, the team learnt a lot about people's **attitudes and feelings** through these events. Many people felt:

- that activities in sheltered housing were “not for them”
- that they're attended by certain or the same people
- that there was not much happening (even if this was not the case)

Ageing Better in Camden start by **sending a letter** to residents inviting them to an initial “pop up” event where they can informally meet the team and other residents. The letter is followed by **doorstep visits** to say hello and promote the pop-up. These visits are repeated to build relationships and rapport with residents, as well as to challenge perceptions that “nothing happens here”. It was also a great **opportunity to listen to and learn from** residents about their communities and any concerns they had.

The Outreach team found that it can take several visits to build people's trust to get involved. Once people got involved they worked with them to identify what they wanted to happen next - for example supporting them to arrange communal lunches.

Our speakers mentioned some useful resources...

Age Better in Sheffield

- [Ageing Better: Working with older people to reduce social isolation and loneliness. A guide for Housing Associations](#)

Bristol Ageing Better

- [Your Food, Your Health Project Report \(May 2021\)](#)

Ageing Better in Camden

- [Ageing Better in Camden: Our Outreach Project](#)
- [The Warm Welcome approach: a practitioner's guide. Creating a gateway for older people to a sense of belonging in the local community](#)
- ['It was a day of friendliness'. Older people's views on outreach in sheltered housing](#)

Additional resources

Learning from the Ageing Better programme

- [Working and engaging with older people living in Sheltered Housing – learning from Ageing Better](#)
 - [Learning snapshot - key messages](#)
- [Groups – learning from Ageing Better](#)
 - [Learning snapshot - key messages](#)
- [The Role of Food in Building Connections and Relationships](#)
 - [Learning snapshot - key messages](#)
- [Working and engaging with older men](#)
 - [Learning snapshot - key messages](#)
- [Spotlight on: Social Isolation and Supported Living. Ageing Better Middlesbrough](#)
- [Talk Eat Drink - The role that housing plays in reducing isolation and loneliness in East Lindsey](#)

Breakout discussions

What has your experience been of working with sheltered communities? What has been challenging?

- A lack of **staff capacity** to support activities can leave responsibility with residents. This results in fewer external activities and prevents meaningful relationships between staff and residents
- **Cliques** are common, particularly when residents organise activities. This can exclude people and it can be hard to integrate new people from external communities
- **A lack of / poor facilities** can restrict the types of activities that take place (for example, communal rooms)
- **Funding** is a challenge, including for light-touch but time-intensive activities, such as door knocking, as well for providing appropriate staffing to run activities. Reduced and rotating staff instead of onsite wardens impacts on connections between staff and residents.
- **Covid-19** has stopped a lot of activities
- **Rural communities** face problems with WiFi when connecting online and also have transport issues

Breakout discussions

What has your experience been of working with sheltered communities? What has been helpful?

- **Learning from others** and understanding that, just because something did not work in one place, it does not mean that it will not work in another
- **Strong relationships** with wardens will be useful on many fronts, from getting into a property, to knowing the residents and offering insight into needs
- **Lockdown** has presented some **new opportunities**
 - Sheltered housing schemes have been more open to external support
 - Events taking place outdoors have made activities visible and encouraged passers by to take part
 - Some residents also started to actively seek activities
- **Establishing connections** with local communities and groups, and **having transport** to help people get there
- **Involving family** members in activities
- **Being aware** of tenant dynamics is important
- **Perseverance** is important - you might have to door knock a few times; it's important to create repeat opportunities to connect

Breakout discussions

What can you do to foster a good community to begin with?

- **Have communal spaces** such as gardens to make people feel more connected. Getting residents involved in planning and designing spaces such as gardens and lounges can help create community
- **Seek, promote and support residents to attend external activities.** E.g. national charity events (for example, Macmillan Coffee Mornings and Memory Walks) and local community activities
- **Organising internal activities,** such as quizzes and events around food
- **Organising activities outside of sheltered housing,** such as community walks and shopping trips
- **Engaging scheme staff** in promoting and supporting activities
- **Provide transport** to help residents get out and about
- **Establishing communication methods** such as door knocking and regular newsletters to promote activities
- **Promote inclusion** by ensuring there are a range of different ways to engage
- **Keep trying to engage** people - remaining positive even when facing negativity
- **Establish good relationships** with wardens and other sheltered housing staff members
- **Involve the wider community and family members**
- **Partner with other sheltered housing schemes** for learning and shared events and visits (for example, quizzes)

Breakout discussions

What can you do to turn things around where there is a negative culture / lack of community?

- **Be aware of cliques** and always work to **be inclusive**
- Remember that **some people are living complex lives** and are experiencing difficult things. They will need **extra support**
- **Be visible** by supporting and promoting activities wherever possible
- Have enough **staff capacity**
- **Understand individuals** and their needs
- **Establish activities** to connect people



Reflection of the breakout discussions

What is one key reflection/tip you'll take away from your breakout session?

There are **many ways to promote activities** and encourage attendance (for example, door knocking)

Having **events (such as quizzes) between different homes** is a great way to bring people together!

We have a lot of **the same challenges**

The idea of **bringing people together around national charity events**

Feeling **inspired and excited** to reconnect with my community

That a **database of shared learning** and 'good practice' projects would be helpful

There is great value in including and **inviting residents, even if they do not always come**

Using **food** to create connection

Having **activities on site** because of Covid has given an opportunity to build connections and encourage residents to gradually attend

The importance of **preventing certain residents from dominating** activities

Thank you and evaluation

Finally, **thank you** to everyone who could make it and for sharing your perspectives, particularly in the breakouts, and to our speakers, too.

If you have any questions about anything in this pack, further thoughts or comments on the priority areas, feel free to contact us at hello@kscopehealth.org.uk

Here's what our participants thought of the event...

100%

of participants would recommend an event like this to a colleague (18 responses)

***Interesting
and
Useful***

were the words most commonly used to describe the event

Feedback

- It was great to hear and access a variety of experiences and learning
- This event was interactive and so much knowledge and learning was shared. It was positive and uplifting.
- A good opportunity to hear what is going on around the country, share ideas and hear about different projects
- The event brought people with similar objectives together
- We also asked for how we could improve for next time, and got the following responses: the event went so quick. I would have preferred it to be longer; more time for discussion and to ask the speakers questions