

## Learning Snapshot: Groups

Ageing Better is a test and learn programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

We collect information and insights from across 14 partnerships and use this learning to support service deliverers, funders and policy makers working to reduce social isolation in people aged 50+.

This learning snapshot details key findings and recommendations when working with ‘Groups’ to support people aged over 50.

You can use it as a summary of the full [learning report](#) to share practical tools with colleagues and in teams, or include in your own presentations and briefings.

<p><b>1. Why focus on Groups?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups offer active participation in some form of shared social experience. The evidence suggests that this can reduce social isolation and loneliness and “buffer” against some of the associated risk factors such as bereavement and ill health.</li> <li>• Group activities can deliver regular social connection, purpose and structure.</li> <li>• Groups are an important exit route and connector into other things, particularly for people being supported to manage their own social isolation and loneliness.</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. What are the challenges?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer-led groups may need specific support from paid staff around practical elements such as funding, resourcing, active listening or skills development.</li> <li>• People with shared experiences (e.g. carers or people living with dementia), benefit from group connections, but the demands on their time can make setting up and running their own groups difficult.</li> <li>• Using the right language when promoting a group to grow membership and to welcome new people can be a challenge.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. So what can we do with this learning?</b> Groups can be started by volunteers or by paid staff and anyone can be supported to start a group. Different levels of professional support are needed for groups as they establish and throughout their lifecycle.</p> <p><b>Test and learn from services in your area:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow time for developing groups to establish and grow - group dynamics can be negatively affected by rapid growth.</li> <li>• Provide professional support to groups on practical issues such as funding, sharing data, hiring space and identifying roles.</li> <li>• Identify and share roles that complement and build on people’s strengths - such as cooking, facilitating and logistics.</li> <li>• Help groups connect into wider support structures to grow membership.</li> <li>• Host drop-in or welcome sessions for new members to reduce some barriers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. How can we work well with Groups?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support people aged 50+ to be active leaders in the design, organisation and running of groups and group activities.</li> <li>• Help people access funding, space and skills support to make groups more stable, open to new members, and more welcoming to a wider range of people.</li> <li>• Identify local gaps and needs and use paid staff and community development approaches to support people to provide targeted, relevant and engaging activities.</li> <li>• Understand and utilise the role of ‘facilitators’ (whether volunteers or paid staff) to help groups function well.</li> <li>• Utilise groups led by paid staff to manage more complex referrals from social prescribing projects or adult social care.</li> <li>• Recognise the critical role paid staff play in growing the reach of groups when community volunteers aren’t available.</li> </ul>