Shifting sands and different look-outs?

Perspectives from TED Ageing Better in East Lindsey 2015-2021

T.E.D
Ageing Better in East Lindsey

2021

Thematic Bulletin 1: Embedding the Aims and Objectives of Ageing Better

About TED in East Lindsey

Talk, Eat, Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged 50 and over to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

Commencing in 2015 and originally running for 6 years until 2021, the programme has been extended to include a seventh year. TED in East Lindsey is one of fourteen 'local' programmes funded by Ageing Better. Nationally the £87 million programme has a specific focus on the experiences of people who are aged 50 and above in relation to tackling loneliness and social isolation and creating 'togetherness' through a range of activities and initiatives.

COMMUNITY FUND

YMCA LINCOLNSHIRE

TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by YMCA Lincolnshire

TED is grounded in the experiences of stakeholders in the district including people aged 50 and over, but the programme also recognises the wider international and national strategy and policy contexts. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the 'TED service offer' was characterised by three distinct strands of activity:

1. **The creation and facilitation of Friendship Groups** which grew from the initial 'Teas with TED' meetings. These Friendship Groups are established and supported with a paid Community Officer with a view to becoming self-sustaining past the lifetime of the current funding for TED. These groups recruit and draw on a significant number of volunteers

2. **The promotion of Age Friendliness in Businesses via the Age-friendly Business Award.** Over 120 businesses in the district now hold the award, which recognises the efforts of businesses in acknowledging the role of age and ageing in how they design, deliver and sustain their services and products

3. **Diverse projects delivered by 'specialist' Delivery Partners.** These projects range from a focus on Digital Inclusion, to activities for Male Carers, Citizen's Advice and Food, Health and Wellbeing projects

As a result of the pandemic and social distancing, the programme as a whole diversified to include forms of engagement and belonging that can be captured in a shift from 'getting out and getting together' to 'connecting despite distance'.

In this series of bulletins taken from a more detailed report we reflect on over 6 years of learning from TED. Our partners, the University of Lincoln International Business School and Rose Regeneration have reported on research which the programme commissioned for a period of 2 years. Their detailed final evaluation report in line with HM Treasury's Magenta Book, features process, impact and economic components: collecting quantitative and qualitative data utilising mixed-methods approaches (University of Lincoln and Rose Regeneration, forthcoming). In contrast, this bulletin reflects on learning reports and case studies the programme has produced to date. It does so by principally detailing core ways, or 'shifting sands', in how we both think about, and engage with, ageing populations from different perspectives (or lookouts). Other bulletins in this series include:

• Challenging Stereotypes and Changing the Narrative
• Working With Communities Collaboratively
• Enhancing Togetherness Through 'Grassroots Best Practice'
• Shifting to Sustainability? Maximising Resource and Harnessing Participation

Before turning to each of these thematic areas some headline characteristics about East Lindsey can be noted to give context to the findings of this report.

About East Lindsey: Rurality, sparsity and coastal populations

East Lindsey is a rural area that contains a number of towns, but also has a significantly sparse population made up of smaller towns, villages, hamlets and individual dwellings. A substantial part of the District comprises of coastline and The Wolds, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It has an ageing population which is significantly disproportionately higher than the national average. Challenges for the population include: pockets of high deprivation in a national context, access to and use of (affordable) transport, access to other public services, leisure and town 'hubs', issues with internet connectivity and mobile phone signal in a number of areas, and an inward migration of people that move into the district to retire. This includes a substantial number who present with and/or develop health issues or transport needs.

For this bulletin's thematic shift (as with others) we start with an overview of its key dimensions or characteristics.

Embedding Strategy: The Aims and Objectives of Ageing Better – Key Dimensions

- Dedicated resource in building capacity through developing relationships over time
- The policy/practice interfaces and policy stakeholder commitment
- The role of sharing experience as part of 'test and learn'
- Establishing systems and processes

Ageing Better has provided clear aims and objectives which have also been accompanied by the advantages of having dedicated resource and time to support the design and delivery of projects within the programme. A key characteristic has been the ability to draw on existing relationships in the communities which the YMCA Lincolnshire programme team, delivery partners, volunteers and Age-friendly Businesses had prior to TED commencing. However, **the role of resource has been important in facilitating the early design and delivery of services as well as wider programme 'start-up'. An example of this can be found in the grassroots work done to start and sustain Friendship Groups.** Early engagement featured 'Teas with TED' that provided a way of bringing people together for traditional 'coffee morning' style gatherings. 'Test and learn' was employed as a means of reflecting on emerging issues which could be addressed to ensure objectives of Ageing Better could be met. **'Reaching' communities and identifying potential barriers to engagement enabled modification of services 'on the ground'. Whilst some of this focused on 'practical' issues in working with ageing populations it has also covered emotional engagement:**

"It's having that confidence to turn up to a group session on your own; it's hard for some people."
(TED Community Officer)

The role of dedicated personnel to identify and act on issues served as a crucial linkage point for policy/strategy, programme management, service design and activities. Linking overarching programme management with dedicated staff built relationships in communities that engage and appreciate the challenges involved in reducing loneliness and isolation.

The Age-friendly Business Officer role is an example of how dedicated staff provides ongoing relationships with businesses and builds credibility of the Award. By June 2021 TED had presented the Award to over 120 businesses. Programme learning on resilience reinforces the importance of its relational nature, even when deprivation, structural inequalities and issues such as health impact on people experiences of ageing:

"One of the men described that only a year ago he was in a bad way with regards to his mental health and he said that there was no way he could have attended this group. He also said he had to re-learn a lot of things due to losing a lot of his memory. He commented on how he had enjoyed the session and he took part in many things and chatted with the others. He said: "I haven't been able to plan or look forward to anything for years, it was just day to day survival, but I will be honest with you that I am really looking forward to coming next week". (TED Delivery Partner, Magna Vitae, CHAPS project)

'I have never laughed so much in all my life. I have come to a few sessions now, at home I look after my cats and that's it really. I don't go out. I like to speak to the people here and have a laugh.' (TED Service User, Friendship Group)

Understanding the experiences of people aged 50 and over in the district remain essential to exploring ways in which to embed the strategic aims of the programme and give greater nuance on the diversities of ageing. This has been constant across changes in delivery as a result of COVID-19, including the role of developing telephone and digital service offers (be these as part of 'stand-alone' or part of 'blended' delivery approaches). For instance, following a review of Common Measurment Framework data and working with existing interest groups the TED programme commissioned LGBTQ+ consultancy which recognised the role of training delivery partners, volunteers and the YMCA Lincolnshire staff team. This awareness training was foreseen as having distinct benefits in terms of reaching and engaging with people and their particular identities in the district's rural and coastal communities. At the same time this gave added strategic 'reach' and relevance to people sometimes portrayed or perceived as being 'marginalised':

'Training, oh yes, very much so. I think loneliness is a killer. I don't think there's anything worse than when somebody is sad at home and the reason they are at home is because they're afraid to go out the front door. You know my friend that I mentioned before? It would be difficult to make her feel included, you know the person who has had a full (gender) transition. And you've got people who are at various [transition] stages and there are so many versions of gender. Training could help with that couldn't it, and it could bring ideas.' (Mike, Service User)

Yet dedicated resource does not only link to the contribution of lottery funding for staff from YMCA Lincolnshire, or the commissioning of delivery partner-led projects and engaging with the recruitment and development of volunteers for longer-term sustainability. TED and East Lindsey District Council (ELDC) have jointly funded the appointment of an Age-friendly Principal Officer as a lead for assessing and promoting the age-friendly community status of the district, harmonising and strengthening the outcomes of TED in the context of Centre for Ageing Better and World Health Organisation strategic contexts.

As well as Programme Management Group (PMG) meetings being chaired by an Assistant Director from ELDC, they are attended by a district and county councillor who holds the ELDC portfolio for Better Ageing (this lead figure also has wider links with YMCA Lincolnshire and other organisations undertaking community development work with relevance to ageing).

Cumulatively these have been integral to building insight into ageing experiences in rural/coastal communities, at the same time as contributing to an ongoing (and 'unfinished') evidence-base. TED's written and oral submissions of evidence to an All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Loneliness during 2020 reflected on these strengths and the aligning of these to different programme aspects:

"Integrating ongoing research and learning with service design has been essential in allowing us to adapt our services to meet the needs of beneficiaries. In short, we have found that by innovating in evaluation and service delivery we have made contact with groups who would otherwise have been described as 'hard to reach' or 'marginalised'. These are crucial mechanisms in ensuring our knowledge of communities is timely and funding decisions remain informed over time. Through developing strategic and stakeholder relationships, we have been able to collate evidence that is disseminated at district, county and national levels resulting in a distinctive interface between 'grassroots' practice and community work on the one hand, and the development of strategy and policy on the other" (Director of Communities, YMCA Lincolnshire, oral submission, July 2020)

'Closing the loop', as depicted in the quote above, **has been a core component in promoting Ageing Better aims and objectives through various processes of identifying 'what works, for who, in what circumstances'. This is especially pertinent during definitive 'shifts' in delivery.** In the TED Learning Report on <u>Adaptation in 'the Sector'</u> project case studies completed by delivery partners highlighted abilities to communicate and work collaboratively, consequently providing 'wrap-around' and 'blended' service delivery when working with people aged 50 and over during challenges of COVID-19. This has been shaped somewhat paradoxically: brought about (in-part) through pressures on resources (time, staff/volunteer dedicated resource, financial challenges along with additional work from different 'new' ways of working) and the prospect of increasingly competitive, short-term funding landscapes. Yet, this has taken place whilst also trying to match levels of demand from members of the community.

'Closing the loop' takes place with multiple stakeholders, importantly with ageing people in diverse communities. Sharing of information in a test and learn framework has been facilitated by establishing dedicated platforms for this activity. Our PMG and Delivery Partner meetings were instilled from programme inception. These have evolved, for instance, from the programme having a 'scrutiny panel' of community representatives to the inclusion of people with lived experience in the PMG. Establishing these platforms gave opportunities to document activity in the programme. This extends to reflecting critically and capturing 'journeys of change'.

These 'mechanisms' were supported by establishing systems and processes. Combined, all dimensions of this shift contribute to embedding aims and objectives, but these dimensions were not static. For example, during COVID-19 and the development of the ConnecTED befriending phone service, referral forms were created and spreadsheets developed for places in the district so befriending call activity could be logged. Similarly, procedures and responsibilities for keeping minutes, notes and actions were established at the beginning of the programme.

Embedding strategic priorities, aims and objectives of the programme were not the only result of the cumulative effect of the dimensions in this theme. Firstly, they were instrumental in the programme changing narratives about the 'elderly' (sic), 'older people', 'loneliness' and 'social isolation'. This involved challenging stereotypes about ageing people, their activities, services and providers.

Secondly, these understandings enable TED to occupy a distinctive position at the interface of practice and policy, understanding and delivering to communities and representing ageing diversities at different levels. These states are not necessarily 'complete' but they do also facilitate the remaining shifts outlined in this series of bulletins, as well as a re-imagining of language in relation to loneliness, social isolation and ageing.

Key Findings:

- **Embedded aims and objectives give foundations for considering joint bids and searching out of further 'seed corn' grants that can continue to 'test and learn' about ageing populations, particularly in 'emerging' situations. These require contractual and logistical considerations if partnering to submit and manage bids, commissions and also establishing responsibilities. Ongoing sharing of aims, objectives as well as outcomes, alongside engaging a range of stakeholders remain important ways to clarify and secure 'buy in' to these approaches**

About East Lindsey

T.E.D.
Ageing Better in East Lindsey

East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 29% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED Programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness

- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities

- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have over 1800 registered TED members, and over 100 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Award.

Further information...
To find out more about TED or to get involved visit our website www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: @ted_EastLindsey