

Shifting sands and different look-outs?

Perspectives from TED Ageing

Better in East Lindsey 2015-2021



2021



Thematic Bulletin 2: Challenging Stereotypes and Changing the Narrative

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.



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:

- Embedding Strategy: The Aims and Objectives of Ageing Better
- Working With Communities Collaboratively
- Enhancing Togetherness Through 'Grassroots Best Practice'
- Shifting to Sustainability? Maximizing 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 as 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.

Challenging Stereotypes and Changing the Narrative – Key Dimensions

- Loneliness and isolation – language as a barrier to participation
- Stereotypes of ageing – diversities, identities, relatability and 'meaning'
- Vibrancy not vulnerability (people, services, activities)

To start with the exploration of this theme we can use the example of Roger's story to illustrate wider findings.

Roger's Sporting Memories Story:

Roger is in his late 80's, living on his own but has some mobility issues. Apart from seeing his son each week he was receiving mainly female visitors who were providing him with some support. When the Learning and Evaluation Officer spoke with Roger on the phone, it became apparent that he would like some contact with other men with similar interests in sports so Magna Vitae were approached. He was not 'online' so Magna Vitae gave him a call and mailed him the weekly Sporting Pinks newsletter. They asked Roger if he would like to give the Sporting Memories quiz a try using conference call. He was included on the weekly quiz, with a small group of men the facilitator matched him with. The facilitator explained: "I wasn't sure how he would engage on the conference phone sessions, but he seemed to come alive and when he realised there was an 84 year old also originally from Sheffield it gave lots to talk about. Each question in the quiz acts like a memory trigger and he was sharing several stories which the group enjoyed hearing about.

He would often come out with some amazing fact or come out with names and places from years ago. He told me the sessions were enjoyable and he looked forward to them each week. During our chats I found out he had played for the youth side of Sheffield United which was called Oak Folds, which would have been around 1947. He told me how they would play in the old football shirts". Subsequently Magna Vitae were able to link him with somebody who was in the same youth side and had gone on to become a professional footballer.



Whilst Roger was not online, there were options to share his experiences via social media also – extending his networks and communities of interest.

“I went over to meet the gentleman (with social distancing) which he really appreciated, and I completed a short video interview with him of his sporting memories. This is something we may use in our ‘throwback Thursdays’ on our Facebook community site as part of our sporting memories sessions... Although he isn’t getting out for these sessions he is benefitting from this regular input... He tells me it has been a big help to him and prevents him from just thinking about being lonely. He said the questions and conversations bring up some great memories and the positive effect lasts for days” (Magna Vitae, project case study)

Roger’s story exemplifies a number of issues in this theme, **the first issue involves a shift to understanding the subjective nature of loneliness and togetherness**. Objectively Roger was not completely socially isolated, having visits from a family member and engagement with people providing forms of domiciliary support. However, his experience highlights **there is a demand for access to communities of interest and services that extend beyond ‘getting together’ in coffee morning settings**. His experience during the pandemic highlights that **‘doing together’ was an important ingredient, as were sharing identities and interests**. This case study reaffirms the rationale for commissioning projects such as the CHAPS (Community Health Activity Projects) project (facilitated by Magna Vitae), and Men Do (facilitated by Carer’s First). Both were a test and learn response to the under-participation of men and male carers respectively that came from Common Measurement Framework analysis early in the programme life-course.

Identifying services according to vulnerabilities like loneliness and social isolation were therefore limited in reach. Furthermore they were potentially exclusive ways of engaging some people but not others. In Roger’s case, like wider programme stakeholders, a positively focused approach to activities and services ‘reached out’ rather than rendered people and groups as ‘hard to reach’. **Conveying inclusive language alongside engaging service offers are important levers in creating services focussed on ‘togetherness’ rather than ‘loneliness’ and ‘social isolation’.**

For Roger this positive language was grounded in his interest in football and working class camaraderie, a result of being matched to a provider who could make links with peer groups that, in turn, could develop and grow other networks. In our learning reports on resilience and digital inclusion activities were a focal point, providing a collaborative community resource which bring people together and develop relationships. This demonstrates **‘Teas with TED’ remain a key part of programme legacy, bringing people together through group and place-based meetings (‘getting out, getting together’)**. However, as also indicated, **‘doing together’ plays a significant role in challenging ideas of a homogeneous ‘ageing population’.**



Services remain a key ingredient, that, at times change service users' own perceptions. For instance, TED members who accessed 'take over' gym sessions provided as part of the Magna Vitae-run CHAPS project for men commented:

'You know I didn't think I would find myself back in a gym again, not with my knees. Then I came here and what do you know I'm doing it again. I've even worked up to using the running machine...Arthritis in my knees, it's what getting old does to you. It's good here because we can use everything [all the facilities] and it's not busy and we can take our time about it. And there's people about to say hello and help you if you need it. Some [service users] just come and get on with it [their gym workout], but I like to say hello to people and see how their weeks gone and what they have been doing... There is a lift that I use sometimes to get up and down to the entrance if my knees are playing up. The sauna, I like going in there.' (Arthur, Service User)

'Now, I don't want to seem rude but sitting around drinking tea and coffee is just not for me. This [Platform 50 Men's Gym Takeover] is perfect really, just the job. It has to be things [activities] that people want to do and it has to come from the people. I used to do a lot of running'. (Frank, Service User)

Whilst projects designed for men may include activities that appeal to heteronormative and socio-economic group ideas of male identities and masculinities, Friendship Groups have evolved to include activities. Integrating guest speakers and commissioned partners at these groups provide features that create more accessible services. Friendship Groups and commissioned partners projects have mutually promoted each other. Examples include 'key speakers', digital skills training and Fitness, Food and Friends delivered at Friendship Group meetings. This is symbolic of wider cross-programme linkages. During COVID-19 changing service offers have identified ageing populations' diversities:

"Our group of learners all had very different needs, we were finding from talking to them those without devices wanted friendship and had very different needs to those with devices who were keen to try and connect with their families and friends, and wanted to try and be self-sufficient" (Lincs Digital, Delivery Partner Case Study during COVID-19)

The population make-up of the East Lindsey district is not characterised by great ethnic diversity in comparison to other urban parts of the country. In 2016 the 'State of the District' Report found:

"The population of East Lindsey is predominately white, with 98.4% of the population being classified as white. This is considerably higher than in the East Midlands (84.5%) and England (88.8%). Other ethnic groups are considerably smaller, with the mixed/multiple ethnic group category being the second largest (0.69%). This is in contrast to regional and national levels where the Asian/Asian British category is the second largest with 7.7% and 6.4% of the population respectively compared to 0.53% for East Lindsey." (ELDC, 2016: 3)



Yet forms of diversity are present in the widest sense. Services that understand, adapt, and ‘reach out’ to diverse populations aged 50 and over were a core feature of programme activity pre-COVID 19. Opportunities have been present and exist for working with ageing populations throughout the pandemic. Our learning has shown the idea of a homogeneous ‘ageing population’ can be potentially divisive and ‘exclusive’. Some of these dilemmas relate to ageist perceptions of ‘older people’ as being ‘passively vulnerable’. These additionally intersect with ideas on providing ‘types’ of services *for* ‘elderly people’ (sic) rather than co-producing *with* vibrant ageing populations.

Our research partners at the University of Lincoln International Business School and Rose Regeneration have shown through their interview fieldwork that people access the TED programme based not primarily on the premise of their vulnerability, age criteria or loneliness, but through the appeal of dynamic, vibrant projects, activities and relationships. These too reflect ageing people’s vibrancy by indicating the nature of their own curiosities, interests and personalities.

Key Findings:

- Opportunities can be explored to consider intergenerational projects in YMCA Lincolnshire, delivery partners and other stakeholders that build on TED. This includes its programme learning, networks and existing practices. Delivery partner insight (from Magna Vitae) has highlighted that this does not necessarily mean working solely with people at polar opposites of the ageing spectrum. Some of the networks TED have developed could provide opportunities for projects that have mutual mentoring components. The TED programme provides examples of how these relationships could be convened, promoted and established through utilising participatory approaches to design (with particular implications for specific identities that include LGBTQ+ and male populations). TED have learning and experience as a ‘whole programme’ and through the particular skills and profiles of individuals that can enhance these processes and organisational capacity



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](https://twitter.com/ted_EastLindsey)



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