

Shifting sands and different look-outs?

Perspectives from TED Ageing

Better in East Lindsey 2015-2021



2021

Thematic Bulletin 4: Enhancing Togetherness Through 'Grassroots Best Practice'

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 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.



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

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
- Challenging Stereotypes and Changing the Narrative
- Working with Communities Collaboratively
- 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.

Enhancing Togetherness Through Establishing 'Grassroots Best Practice' – Key Dimensions

- Boots on the ground? The role of brokering relationships
- Capturing, developing and managing knowledge
- Principles for future engagement

In other thematic bulletins we give examples of commentary from people aged 50 and over, 'volunteers', delivery partners, TED team members at YMCA Lincolnshire, Age-friendly Businesses and wider stakeholders. Here examples of work have been cited that can be considered 'grassroots best practice'. In the following discussion we explore this as part of another shift in the programmes approach, accompanied too by a changing lookout. In the early stages of project, the programme engaged with peer review, in the form of people age 50 and over volunteering to be part of a 'Scrutiny Group'. This group had strategic level oversight, monitoring programme developments and taking decisions on services to be commissioned.

As part of 'test and learn' the approach was reflected on. 'Changing the narrative' of ageing people, stereotypes and services coincided with a change in strategic focus. The language of 'scrutiny' proved problematic for framing constructive peer contributions and was limited in representing positive characteristics of ageing populations and community assets. Co-design and coproduction continued to be a core part of the programme but emphasis was placed on doing 'ground work' which represented the interests of community members not recognised in the scrutiny panel and engaged with people who were sometimes stereotyped and portrayed as difficult to engage or, using good intentions, labelled as being 'marginalised'.

In this theme we explore the principles of this shift. It builds on ideas of activities as a key enabler of coproduction by looking at how, following initial engagement and dedicated resource, the programme has generated 'reach' through practices rather than strategic level driven initiatives. This can be thought of simplistically as 'bottom-up' innovation in contrast to 'top-down'. It is important to state that strategic level initiatives have clearly shaped the TED programme too, and there has been a blend of activity across a 'bottom-up'/'top-down' spectrum.

Experiencing 'what works' for some groups or communities has required dedicated time, networking with gatekeepers and existing resources prior to identifying and collaborating with people in different community settings (including via digital and 'distanced' means). Similarly the reverse of this process is also possible: that direct engagement with a 'target population' leads to additional networks, partnership work and forming of 'person-centred' approaches.



This blend was alluded to in evidence to the All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Loneliness in 2020:

“We also have established relationships with, and understand, other service providers in meeting the diverse needs of people in East Lindsey and Lincolnshire. These understandings provide scope for addressing unmet need and coordinating approaches... avoiding duplication of provision and ensuring funding is targeted and maximised. More recently our relationships have extended to include TED staff being involved in the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum. This has been particularly valuable, and has enabled us to contribute TED insight and learning whilst representing the perspectives of people aged 50 and over in our communities.” (Director of Communities, YMCA Lincolnshire, July 2020)

‘Boots on the ground’ therefore is at the core of how to develop understandings of people, places and wider communities. This can be seen in pre-COVID-19 services, but also during the pandemic when the team created telephone befriending services. One of the befrienders remarked about a process of ‘ways of knowing’ that was present in all services:

“You get to know personalities, some have medical issues, you become aware, you are upbeat with people to try and shape conversations” (ConnecTED befriender)

Examples were provided by delivery partners, particularly in relation to group activity:

“With the (Sporting Memories) telephone quiz groups I try to keep numbers at about three or four as I think it improves participation and makes it easier for the running of the session. In one of the groups I hadn’t realised that all the individuals had a memory problem... One of them does have a form of dementia so he takes part on speaker phone with his wife with him, the next chap told me his memory wasn’t very good due to a medication he’d taken years ago and the third chap was a bit nervous saying his memory wasn’t very good and maybe the group wasn’t for him. So, as I explained to him about everyone else in the group had a memory issue it really encouraged him that he was in a safe environment and he was then happy to take part” (Magna Vitae, CHAPS project good news story)

Age-friendly Businesses (AfB’s) were another example of this programme-wide trend and this was key to businesses maintaining trade and resilience. Our research partners Rose Regeneration found that AfB’s were generally extremely resilient during the early stages of the pandemic, somewhat countering national research by the Centre for Towns (2020). **It might be said that businesses and communities in East Lindsey have prior experience of austerity and independence comes from knowing client-bases and communities so services and products can be adapted.** This continues to be recognised in the Award’s appeal to community spirit.

‘Ways of knowing’ has strategic resonance. Capturing this knowledge of groups and individuals, in-part, forms fast changing (and ‘unfinished’) evidence-bases on ageing populations. Comments from a senior leadership figure at a PMG meeting mirrored this:

“Over time you build up that knowledge, it just feels like there’s an opportunity now not to lose some of that work that’s happened as the funding changes but the demand is still there” (PMG member, October 2020).



The shift has also included best practice in working with ageing people in ‘person-centred’ ways, linking up aspects of TED’s service offers. Hence, knowledge developments were symbolic of a wider transition of working with ageing populations that included multiple delivery partners and programme stakeholders (and, indeed, agencies and individuals who were not formally identified as these, but came to engage with TED over the life-course of Ageing Better). These ‘informal’, ‘natural’ relationships were a core feature:

“Whilst I was phoning one of the participants from the Fitness Food and Friends group she asked if I would give a call to an older man she knew from her church. He had recently lost his wife and was depressed, didn’t have any family and no one was calling him. So, I gave him a ring which he was very pleased about and gave him the bereavement number and the number for the Wellbeing team. I asked he if would like me to phone him again and he said he would really like that. I’ve therefore added him to our Fitness Food and Friends list so that we can encourage and support him”
(Magna Vitae, project feedback)

“I was able to have a chat with the media officer for (a social landlord) this week with regards to what our project is doing and how it could be of benefit to (their) tenants. This was really positive and has led sharing items from our community Facebook page and the live quiz Magna Vitae (MV) are doing this week. The new MV webpage on ‘looking after ourselves and others’ during the lock down period has also been sent out to all participants on email which has been met really positively. I’ve had encouraging comments that it’s great to have all the information in one place.”
(Magna Vitae, monitoring data)

“you need to know your people, we know them quite intimately, if they are not very well we keep an eye on them... more friends than people... just get to know your people... the best thing is to go and see them, it’s difficult not to see them (during the first lockdown)”
(Friendship Group Chair, Inland market town)

Collectively the dimensions of this theme identify principles that can inform future planning and aspects of sustainability beyond the current lifetime of Ageing Better funding. Capturing the impact of ‘grassroots’ activity is challenging and reiterates the complexities of engagement with communities broadly. In these settings maximising resource and harnessing ongoing participation are two interrelating factors that chime with other thematic bulletins.

Key Findings:

- **Building the evidence base (or bases) requires a ‘grassroots interface’.** There is potential to continuing maintaining this through the established mechanisms resulting from TED – these include the PMG and delivery partner meetings. Though these include sometimes informal discussions they do provide established, tested, forums where sharing knowledge, joint work and best practice (as well as exploring solutions) takes place.



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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