



# CO-PRODUCTION

Involving older people in the design and delivery of services

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# WHAT IS CO-PRODUCTION?

Co-production is involving people with lived experience of the issue or aim a project or organisation is working on. For example, in the case of the Ageless Thanet project, which aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness in people over the age of 50, this means involving people of that age who have experienced isolation or loneliness.

It is about designing and delivering services with people of lived experience in equal partnership, "doing with", rather than "doing for or too".

There are many benefits of taking this approach, such as increasing your impact as an organisation. Involving people who have experience of the issues that you are trying to tackle can also help you deliver services that are more effective and more likely to make a difference.

At Ageless Thanet we have involved older people in shaping the project in a variety of different ways.

Here are four reasons why co-production works for us:

Ensuring that older people's voices are heard gives us a wider impact

Involving older people in the project keeps us accountable

Listening to what older people want and need ensures more people want to get involved

It builds relationships and trust with the community

In this report we will share some of the key examples of how we have done this, the impact it has had, and most importantly what we have learnt from it.

# THE AGELESS THANET CLUB

The concept of the Ageless Thanet Club was born prior to the project starting, at consultation meetings with older residents.

These meetings were held to ensure that older people's ideas were reflected in the funding application for the project.

People wanted somewhere they could meet on a regular basis, where they could do a variety of activities of their choosing.

Once the project was underway we held more steering group meetings, giving people the opportunity to bring this idea to life. It was key that we listened to what older people wanted and supported them in the early stages to make this sustainable.

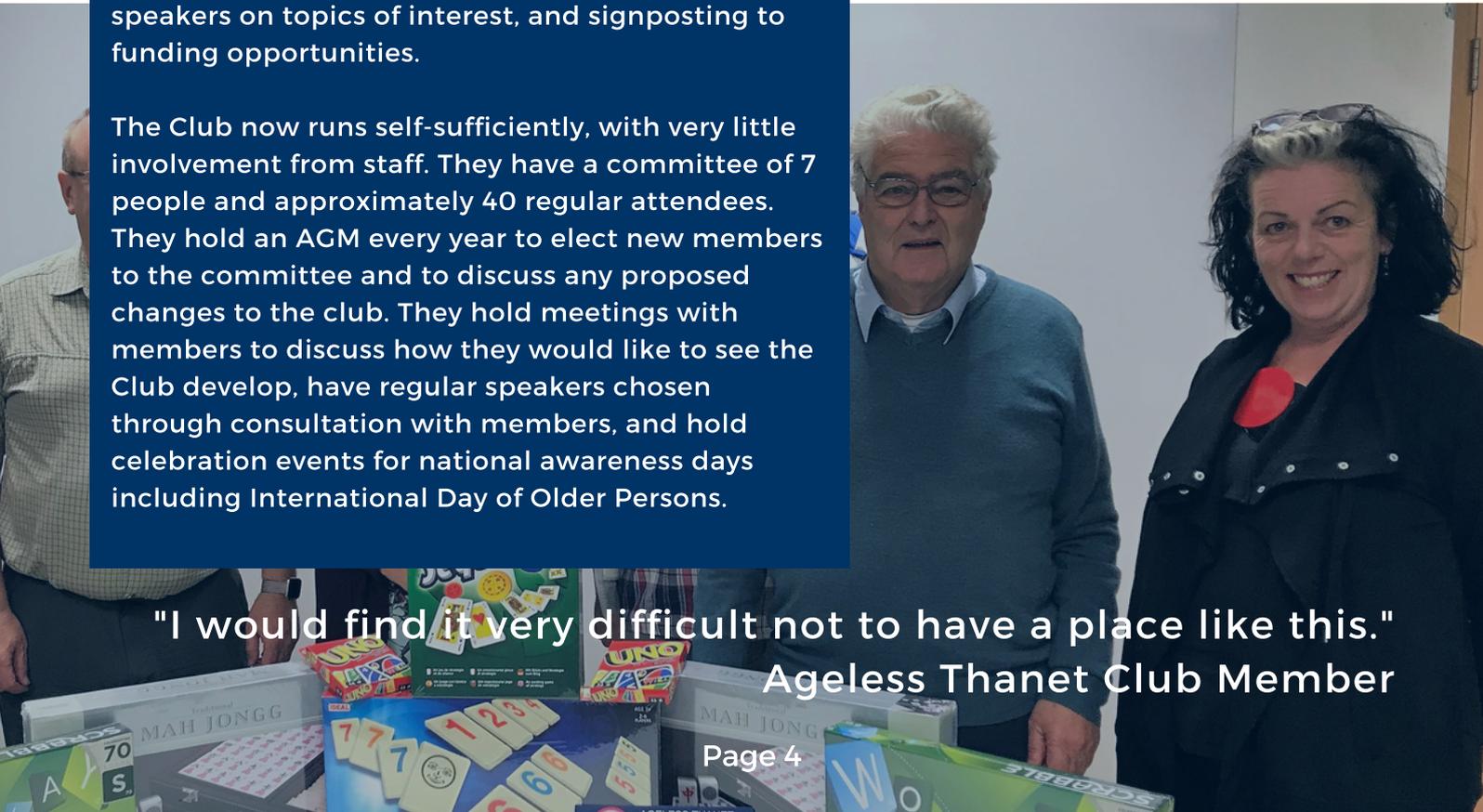
With support from Ageless Thanet, volunteers were actively encouraged to take ownership and shape how they wanted the Club to operate.

The support from staff included: helping them to set up a committee and becoming a constituted group, governance advice, promotion, connecting with other organisations in the district by arranging speakers on topics of interest, and signposting to funding opportunities.

The Club now runs self-sufficiently, with very little involvement from staff. They have a committee of 7 people and approximately 40 regular attendees. They hold an AGM every year to elect new members to the committee and to discuss any proposed changes to the club. They hold meetings with members to discuss how they would like to see the Club develop, have regular speakers chosen through consultation with members, and hold celebration events for national awareness days including International Day of Older Persons.

## Key Learning

- Consultation with your audience is key
- Equipping people with the necessary tools and knowledge enables sustainability
- Co-production offers members a sense of ownership which builds confidence
- It allows us to recognise people's skills and expand their capabilities
- Once the committee was formed, it was still useful to have staff on hand to offer advice and support where needed
- Responsibility encourages team work and peer support



"I would find it very difficult not to have a place like this."  
Ageless Thanet Club Member

# AGELESS THANET CLUB



## PAM

Pam moved to Thanet in 2017 after caring for her Mum who had recently passed away. She didn't have any friends or family in Thanet, and decided to go along to the consultation talks about what is now known as the Ageless Thanet Club.

Pam was one of the founding members who started the Club and has been volunteering as Club Secretary. Pam says that through volunteering she has made lots of friends.

## WHAT DOES PAM SAY?

"The first thing I got involved with was finding a location where we could just have a casual club of like-minded people. We thought about having games brought along. Some people donated games, and then I applied for funding to get new games. The funding came from the Ageless Thanet Community Fund.

Ageless Thanet has connections and tendrils with so many other things - it's so trusted and relied upon to be the place for over 50's activities in Thanet. If I hadn't got involved with Ageless Thanet I would have moved here, and would be wandering around aimlessly with my dog, looking for other dog walkers to talk to. I wouldn't have the regime, my rota for the week."



# LGBT 50+ GROUP

The LGBT 50+ Group developed in a similar way to the Ageless Thanet Club. We held focus groups with older LGBT residents to find out how we could support them and what they would like to get involved in, which led to the initial group forming.

One big element of the co-production with this group was the design of marketing material. It was agreed by the group that it was incredibly important to convey the right tone and message due to some of the fears that older LGBT people have, such as not being accepted.

This resulted in an LGBT 50+ launch event being held in conjunction with Ageless Thanet, where over 30 older LGBT local people attended. This generated further interest in the group and allowed them to look at the next steps, which consisted of forming a committee and becoming a constituted group which would enable them to apply for funding.

The group were successful in applying to the Community Fund. This allowed them to promote the group at Margate Pride, which was an incredibly positive experience for the group and resulted in new members joining.

They have become a lot more confident in their abilities and have set up a closed Facebook group, have built connections with other local organisations, run regular coffee mornings, social strolls and events independently of Ageless Thanet.

## Key Learning

- Due to the discrimination faced by many of the LGBT 50+ community throughout their lives, it was incredibly important for them to be involved in designing this group. They had to be certain that this would be a place where they could feel safe and accepted for it to be a success. Previously when participating in other groups and activities, they felt that they weren't able to truly be themselves, and avoided opening up.
- By working with the group on their marketing material, this meant that the launch event had a bigger impact



# 60

There are now 60 members  
of the LGBT 50+ Group

# LGBT 50+ GROUP

## ROGER



Roger met Ageless Thanet at an LGBT event in Newington, Ramsgate and decided to get involved with setting up the 50+ LGBT Group.

Roger says that a number of attempts had been made in the past to set up a similar group, but had been unsuccessful due to various reasons. It became clear through holding the over 50's LGBT focus groups that the 50+ LGBT community had distinct needs that were not being addressed.

After taking part in Margate Pride the group now has 60 members.

## WHAT DOES ROGER SAY?

"Following discussions with Ageless Thanet staff, support was offered to help establish a local older LGBT group. Older gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people not only face the challenges usually expected with the prospect of advancing years, but are also likely to encounter a whole raft of other issues related to their sexuality. Despite a significant proportion of the older population being LGBT, there is little awareness of their particular needs and concerns.

The group exists to promote the distinctive needs of this age group. It seeks to provide a safe space for older LGBTs to meet socially; to combat isolation experienced by many older LGBTs; to encourage activity which promotes physical, mental and emotional health; to discuss and organise action in areas of concern to older LGBTs; to provide a bridge between the different generations of LGBTs; to ensure that all members are supported when confronted by discrimination and prejudice of any form; and to liaise with other organisations in order to ensure that their own aims and activities promote inclusion and equality."



# GOVERNANCE PANEL

The Governance Panel is made up of strategic stakeholders such as Thanet District Council and Thanet Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), as well as an older person's board.

They have met on a regular basis since before the project began delivering, to make key decisions, and discuss important issues and changes within the project.

It is important that we have older people sitting on our governance panel so we can be held accountable and ensure that we are doing our best for the older people of Thanet.

The members of the older person's board has changed over the years, but consists of 6-8 representatives from the 50+ community, from a range of backgrounds. They all bring something different to the panel and are all really passionate about making a difference to the lives of older Thanet residents.

## Key Learning

- Being part of a panel empowers older residents to make a difference to local services
- It was important that we had a diverse panel to reflect the needs of the whole community
- It has been beneficial for the members of the panel to reuse skills learnt in their careers
- It instils a sense of pride in the project because older people are representing their communities
- Involving older people on our governance panel ensures that key decisions that are made reflect older people's views and best interests



# "I FEEL THAT I CAN CONTRIBUTE IN HELPING MAKE THANET A GREAT PLACE TO GROW OLDER"



## PAM

After being involved in a local senior citizen forum, Pam decided to join the Ageless Thanet governance panel. She had a long-standing career in nursing and wanted to give something back to local older people.

Not only does Pam volunteer as a governance panel member, she also volunteered to sit on the Community Fund panel and finance committee.

## WHAT DOES PAM SAY?

"Being part of the governance panel has taught me a lot about finance and the reality of delivering a project like Ageless Thanet. I've learnt bid writing skills and it has given me new challenges and opportunities. I have formed new friendships with different age groups and Ageless Thanet has helped me to get involved in other groups. Not long after joining the governance panel my husband passed away. The staff were incredibly supportive and being part of the panel helped me with the grieving process and gave me a new focus.

I am part of the governance panel, community funding panel and the finance committee. Ageless Thanet has a fantastic team who are always lovely and supportive and make me feel that my opinion is valued and I can help shape services. It allows me to feed into the project and represent local older people. As part of the community fund panel I have learnt about what services are available and the impact of what we have funded. It has made me think about the long-term impact of funding, sustainability and partnership working. I feel we have also made other groups look at services they can deliver for older people."



# MEN'S FOCUS GROUPS

Our interim evaluation reports showed a disproportionate gender breakdown, with significantly more women taking part in our Wellbeing Activities compared to men.

The Wellbeing Team decided that this needed specific focus, so held consultation meetings with local older men, to see if we needed to take a different approach to attract more men to our activities.

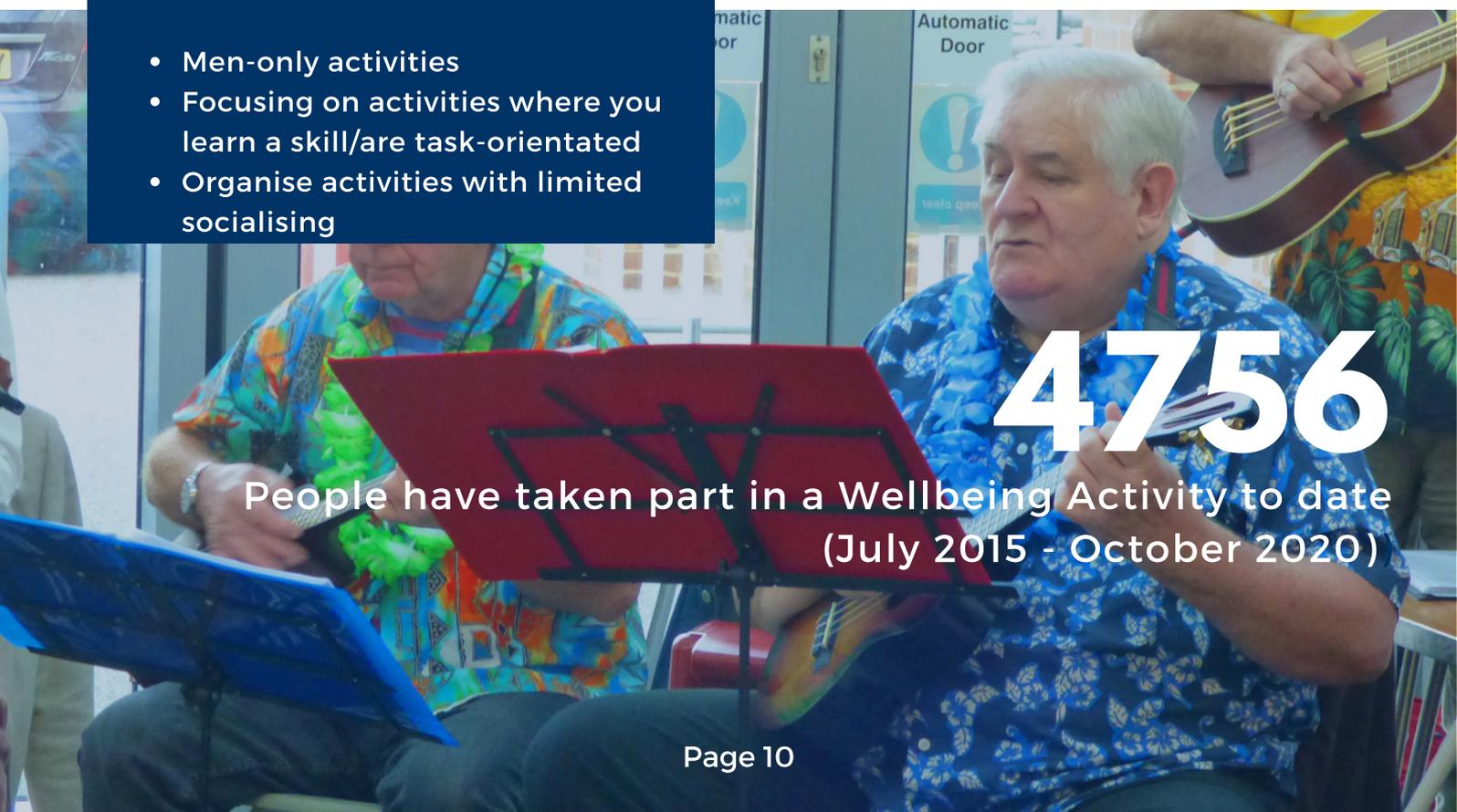
These focus groups were very productive, with people coming up with lots of useful ideas, many of which were implemented and successfully saw more men take up our activities.

Some of the suggestions we tested were:

- Men-only activities
- Focusing on activities where you learn a skill/are task-orientated
- Organise activities with limited socialising

## Key Learning

- Asking our target audience directly meant that we could get a true understanding of what they wanted
- By undertaking the focus groups, it meant that men were more open about their needs
- Requested activities were more about learning or having a separate focus to socialising
- It was really important that men felt listened to and that their voices were heard
- At the beginning of the project our brand marketing was pink, which discouraged men from taking part. By changing our brand's focus to our secondary colour, we saw more men get involved in our activities



# 4756

People have taken part in a Wellbeing Activity to date  
(July 2015 - October 2020)

# "AGELESS THANET HAS GIVEN ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN A NEW SKILL"

WELLBEING ACTIVITY PARTICIPANT



## EDDIE

I was depressed and found it difficult to meet people and leave the house. This depression started and built up over a two-year period. I was housebound after retiring from my job as a police officer doing forensic examinations. The last case I was on was an incredibly difficult one. This left me in a bad way and not wanting to leave the house.

## HOW HAS AGELESS THANET HELPED YOU?

I attended a Ukulele course with Ageless Thanet and, while I still battled with should I or shouldn't I go each week, I did. I now have more confidence in going out and leaving the house and have joined the Ukulele Club at the Ageless Thanet Feelgood Factory and I attend every Monday evening.



## WHAT HAS BEING INVOLVED WITH AGELESS THANET MEANT FOR YOU?

Everything! My depression is better and I'm happier in myself. My wife and family have seen improvements in the difference in my life since attending this Ageless Thanet Wellbeing Activity. I pick the Ukulele up and play at home. We even have Ukuleles for the grandchildren and play together when they visit.





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