Greater than the sum of its parts: Creating a cohesive programme

A Time to Shine Report
October 2021

About Time to Shine

Led by Leeds Older People's Forum, Time to Shine is one of fourteen areas which form Ageing Better; an ambitious, large scale programme funded and developed by The National Lottery Community Fund. Ageing Better aims to improve the lives of people aged 50 and over by reducing social isolation and loneliness.

"By coming together in partnership, we're stronger than our individual voice [..] People feel part of something which is much bigger and has a bigger voice in the city, rather than just trying to work on something on your own. It brings you together, and that opportunity to share resources."

Introduction

This learning report outlines the development of Time to Shine into a programme which had wider benefits beyond the original remit of supporting older people. This growth was organic; sometimes spontaneous and sometimes nudged along as a result of input or investment by the programme team. The aim of the report is to acknowledge the wider impact of taking a programme approach instead of creating a traditional funder / client relationship, and to share the process, challenges and outcomes. An associated toolkit details practical learning points for key elements of the programme. The purpose of the report and toolkit is to help others interested in creating a similar programme approach with the aim of improving outcomes and creating an environment in which collaboration, learning and creativity can flourish.

Evidence

From the outset the National Lottery Community Fund encouraged Ageing Better programmes to be innovative, ambitious and imaginative in their thinking about how to reduce loneliness and social isolation. Applicants were invited to use the opportunity of funding to try out new ideas and approaches, while also rigorously evaluating, learning and adapting practice and policy in response. As a result 'test and learn' is a key element of Time to Shine and the programme team has gathered case studies, quotes, insight and and anecdotes since the programme began. Delivery partners submit quarterly monitoring reports focused on learning and legacy. They also take part in regular contract meetings and attend sessions to share their learning with the programme team, the local evaluation team and other partners. All this evidence, plus the original funding bid and input from programme staff, Trustees and members of the core partnership board, has informed this report.

"I've been working more closely with colleagues who are working on different projects across Leeds. I've had the opportunity to network and build new links through various Time to Shine events and this has been really useful. Working with Time to Shine has enabled us to get to know our peers working in the community, build links, work in partnership with other organisations and strengthen relationships."

Context

In the project planning stages of Time to Shine for the application to the National Lottery Community Fund, consultation and collaboration were of paramount importance. Commissioning strands and governance arrangements were set out in the initial bid but the concept of developing a cohesive programme had not emerged at that stage. The focus of the bid was very firmly on local organisations understanding and addressing older people's needs to reduce social isolation and loneliness across the city.

Strategic partners involved during the planning stages worked well together to understand the local context, issues and opportunities. One of the four Time to Shine outcomes was that 'Our wider partnership expands each year and works better together to coordinate services and support for isolated older people'. Time to Shine was seen as an opportunity to help develop, fund and bring additional resources into the third sector in Leeds. The strategic partners decided the best way to do this was to commission a diverse range of projects from a large number of local organisations, large and small, sharing Time to Shine funding out across the city. This approach laid the foundations for a cohesive programme and was, in hindsight, instrumental in the success of Time to Shine. A test and learn approach was also embedded, coproduction was woven into the fabric of the programme and delivery partners were selected for their expertise and insight. Even with these essential ingredients in place there was, however, still the possibility that Time to Shine could just become an unwieldy collection of disparate projects.

Time to Shine is a large multi-year, multi-million pound programme. Between April 2015 and March 2021 the programme commissioned 105 different projects in 72 different third sector organisations and reached over 20,000 people. This learning report is divided into sections to highlight some of the key ingredients which helped to create a cohesive programme. Delivery partners are quoted throughout and the report starts by exploring the firm foundations created during the planning stages. Next it shows how Time to Shine fostered the spirit of collaboration amongst the commissioned projects, identifies some of the challenges and outlines the practical actions which helped to develop a sense of community. It ends with a case study and a summary of the perceived outcomes for delivery partners, the Time to Shine programme team and the third sector in Leeds.

Setting firm foundations during the planning stages

From the outset Ageing Better's funding parameters were not restrictive, nor prescriptive. Test and learn, co-production, older people in the lead, research and evaluation were the criteria set by the funder, setting the ethos for the programme. Ageing Better encouraged organisations to come together to identify local issues and to propose innovative solutions.

An immense amount of consultation and research went into the development of the vision and strategy for Time to Shine during the planning stages. 656 older people and carers and 207 workers and volunteers were consulted to identify the triggers for social isolation, the needs of those currently experiencing (or at risk of) social isolation and the best approaches for tackling the issues in Leeds. As a result Time to Shine was rooted in Leeds, growing out of the knowledge and insights of local people and organisations. A wide range of projects with specific focus on the most marginalised communities were commissioned. This local input helped Time to Shine to look and feel different to other Ageing Better programmes around the country, some of which chose to focus more on commissioning a small number of organsaions for the full six years, or on financial resilience, mental health services or asset-based community development.

This freedom to experiment coupled with the scale of grant - £6million over 6 years - presented a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the city that people already had a vested interest in and wanted to be part of. People, from senior management to frontline staff, were hooked in and this created a catalyst for good partnership working. The bid generated excitement and energy and provided a focus for work which was facilitated (not dictated) by Leeds Older People's Forum. If the bid was successful, there was a commitment to distributing as much funding as possible to third sector organisations, large and small, across the city. As people worked together for a common goal the relationships developed and commitment to the programme grew.

"The Core and Wider partnership groups have been highly successful throughout the vision stage in ensuring key knowledge areas have been embedded in the development of Time to Shine. A vibrant mix of people has been assembled whose inspiring energy and commitment, demonstrated in project design, wider consultations with cross-sector partners and promoting the project, provides a robust platform for the future."

Excerpt from the Time to Shine vision and strategy document

Fostering the spirit of collaboration

"It's really nice to feel part of a whole team of projects that are benefitting older people in the city."

Once funding was secured delivery partners were commissioned to deliver the themes identified in the bid. Any new project brings a change in staffing or role and demands a steep learning curve. For some organisations there was continuity; the same people were involved in consultation, project planning and delivery. This was not always the case, and so some background knowledge was lost as new staff were taken on. The momentum from the earlier stages was diluted and new staff had to work hard to understand their project's remit and to build their own networks and allies.

The majority of programme team members were new to Leeds Older People's Forum and Time to Shine. The spirit of collaboration and mutual support grew organically within the team and this rippled across the programme building on the ethos created during the project planning stages. Conversations with delivery partners during quarterly contract meetings showed that the contract manager was interested in all aspects of a project, not just targets and outputs. For trust to be built it was important for delivery partners to see that the programme team was committed to working in partnership, not just paying lip service to it.

Within Time to Shine all delivery partners contributed to the same programme outcomes and targets using the same quarterly monitoring forms and same evaluation questionnaire. All staff had the same opportunities for training and support. Test and learn was reiterated at regular intervals and all these shared elements helped to create an awareness that each person was part of a bigger programme and that each individual was contributing to a common goal. Match funding between Time to Shine, Leeds Clinical Commissioning Groups and Leeds City Council enabled the creation of SWIFt, a large-scale project to support older people living with frailty. SWIFt further developed the relationship between Leeds Older People's Forum and Public Health and brought new partners into the Time to Shine programme.

Challenges

"**Different organisations and people bring their own priorities, personalities and opinions into the mix which can at times be a conflicting, confusing and difficult arena to navigate. However, the benefits that working together brings is worthwhile in the longer term as it results in better quality services and initiatives in which multiple perspectives have been considered. [It creates] a more 'joined up' approach so we avoid duplicating things, but we make sure we link relevant things together as our partners can help us to get the word out and engage with others.**"

In the early stages of the programme there was a noticeable reluctance on the part of delivery partners to collaborate closely with other delivery partners. Projects developed their own external networks in order to better refer, signpost and support the older people they worked with, but sharing information and resources between delivery partners was limited. Participants were not generally encouraged to try other Time to Shine projects, perhaps because there was confusion over who would collect the monitoring data or evaluation questionnaires. Monthly networking meetings were sometimes over - and sometimes under - subscribed and varied in their usefulness.

Time to Shine commissioned academics at the Centre for Loneliness Studies at the University of Sheffield to lead the local evaluation of the whole programme. The team conducted interviews, focus groups and research and produced a suite of evaluation reports. The following excerpts are from **Report 3: Process Evaluation** and outline some of the challenges of a collaborative approach.

"When asked to comment on some of the challenges of working alongside other TTS projects in partnership, stakeholders highlighted the need to complement what others were doing, avoid duplication and recognise that some may be working towards different priorities."

"Some delivery partners described feeling disconnected from the TTS programme, particularly where the project was embedded within an existing organisation with its own infrastructure. This sometimes meant there were competing interests which prevented projects from sharing referrals or working together to recruit volunteers."

"Some also highlighted the need to build in additional time for networking, attending TTS events and partnership working with other TTS projects. This was often a challenge where project workers worked on their project part-time, and had not built in enough time to undertake this as part of their daily role."

As time went on the programme team developed confidence and a clearer idea of how to help to foster a sense of common purpose amongst delivery partners within the programme.

Practical actions taken to help develop a sense of community

"We realised from Time to Shine that working as a consortium can also reap benefits and now we use LGBT Forum's network to send out our new summarised newsletter and we joined forces with LGBTQ Consortium to raise funds to have more joint activities outside the regular Zoom format."

The first round of Time to Shine projects came to an end in early 2018 and a new set of projects were commissioned for the latter part of the programme. Some delivery partners were new to the programme and others had been involved since the beginning, albeit on a different project. Over time the programme team introduced a range of actions and activities, focused on a particular purpose but often with a secondary aim of helping partners to bond and to recognise their part in a wider programme. Some were explicitly designed to embed the programme approach and others were a happy accident, only noted as important on reflection.

The actions and activities are listed below. Some are considered in more detail in an accompanying toolkit which shares learning and experience on what worked well, the challenges, outcomes and key learning points. This information provides a useful summary for people who want to create a cohesive programme. It is also useful for people who want to develop similar stand-alone activities within their own organisations.

"I feel that Time to Shine has enabled me to develop my practice with older people, as I continue to adapt my skills and utilise them with new ways of working. Having the opportunity to attend the Action Learning Sets gave me insight into how other project workers deal with difficult issues and situations within their own projects."

Action Learning Sets
Staff from different Time to Shine projects were brought together as mixed groups (sets) to meet regularly and explore work related issues through a process of open questioning, reflection and peer support. Attendees appreciated the independence from Time to Shine and the deeper connections they made with colleagues.

Age Proud Leeds
The Age Proud Leeds anti-ageism campaign was particularly useful to provide practical training and a focused way to involve partners and all members of the community, younger and older.

Celebration events
Four large-scale events were held to bring staff, volunteers, participants and the general public together in a fun and informal way. These provided plenty of opportunities for networking and promotion and served as a visual reminder of the scale and scope of the whole programme.

Commissioning
Potential applicants were invited to workshops, information sessions and 1-2-1 meetings before the deadline. Specific themes tackled identified needs and a panel of older people decided which applications to fund. Projects were spread around the city with no geographical bias and three-year funding from 2018 gave more time for projects and partnerships to establish.

Common Measurement Framework questionnaires
This evaluation tool was challenging to implement but provided a focus for delivery partners and the programme team to work together closely to try to make the process of data collection as easy as possible.

Communications
A Time to Shine brand was created and the logo used in all communications to help partners to connect their work with the wider programme. Monthly e-bulletins, blogs and regular meetings kept partners up to date.

Contract management
Programme managers were accessible and interested in project learning: quarterlycontract management meetings were opportunities for conversations and negotiations and a source of support and encouragement.

Friendly Communities
Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly work was combined halfway through the Time to Shine programme. This brought together a wide range of partners and projects to help make Leeds a better place to grow older.

Governance
Delivery partners were invited to present their project at core partnership meetings to help those steering the programme develop in-depth knowledge and insight into the successes and challenges faced by each project.

Group inductions
These were introduced after the second commissioning round in 2018 as a result of learning from Time to Shine Small Funds. New staff members from a variety of projects met the programme team, and each other, during a series of six workshops covering all aspects of Time to Shine. These sessions provided an opportunity to reinforce the message that it was OK for delivery partners to work together to help participants and volunteers take part in more than one Time to Shine project.

Learning Facilitation
Free training was offered to all partners on a wide range of topics and e-bulletins ensured that information and resources were shared regularly. Weekly Time to Learn sessions developed during the Covid-19 pandemic were a welcome source of inspiration, social interaction and peer support.

Legacy
From the outset all partners knew that funding was time-limited and that they had a role in helping to deliver Time to Shine's aspiration of leaving a legacy that benefitted all older people in Leeds.

Local evaluation
Project staff, volunteers and participants were invited to take part in focus groups, interviews or case studies as part of the programme evaluation in order to understand people's experiences. This produced tangible resources and partners could see that their effort and input translated into programme-wide learning.

Monitoring and evaluation
All delivery partners contributed to the same programme targets: they were confident that the information provided was read, checked for accuracy, shared and well-used in order to support the programme outcomes.

National events
Selected delivery partners were invited to share their knowledge and experience at Ageing Better learning meetings alongside colleagues from other programmes across England, with expenses paid for by the programme team. Taking part in virtual learning events, for example with speakers from the Centre for Ageing Better or the Eden Project, helped partners to recognise that their learning and experience was valuable on a national scale.

Personal connections

The programme team communicated regularly with delivery partners and met in person where possible, attending activity sessions, end-of-project celebrations and holding meetings in their community venues. This helped to create friendships and personal connections between the funder and service providers, enhancing the sense of community within the programme.

Project planning pre-2015

A wide range of organisations contributed to the initial funding bid and this generated enthusiasm for the programme across the third sector in Leeds.

Small Funds

Leeds Community Foundation delivered and managed 11 funding rounds for short-term Small Funds projects. Each new intake brought renewed energy and a different perspective to the programme. The collective sense of being part of something bigger grew as more and more partners joined Time to Shine.

Test and Learn

Delivery partners knew that a test and learn approach was mandated by Ageing Better and endorsed by Time to Shine. It removed some of the stress linked to achieving ambitious targets and the fear of funding being withdrawn if the project didn't go to plan. This levelled the playing field and enabled more negotiation and collaboration.

"Personally, working with Time to Shine has introduced me to the wide range of organisations that are available to support older people in general and the few organisations focused on older LGBT+ adults and the special services that they might need to access. Working with Time to Shine has shown that inter-organisational cooperation is the way to go to maximize impact."

Covid-19 response

As the first lockdown was announced the programme managers quickly communicated with delivery partners to reassure them that keeping staff and beneficiaries safe and well and maintaining contact was the main priority. Delivery partners were clear that the National Lottery Community Fund and Time to Shine were flexible with contractual requirements under the circumstances, that planned outcomes were on hold and that budgets could be used for contingency planning and to provide new kinds of activities and support. As a result there was a sense of 'we're all in this together' and delivery partners knew that they were trusted to identify and meet the emerging needs of older people. Due to previous collaborations and established relationships everyone in Time to Shine pulled together to help older people - and each other - get through the day-to-day challenges. Learning was shared in real time as people tried out different things and regular peer support helped to create deeper connections.

"The information gleaned from the first lockdown and shared during Time to Learn by other delivery partners has been extremely useful and has allowed us to fine tune our service offering and support. The ongoing support from Time to Shine is great because you can always learn something from a delivery partner and sometimes it's good to be able to share the stresses and strains that you can feel running a 'social isolation' project during a pandemic."

Case study:
In Mature Company from Yorkshire Dance

"We attended Time to Learn weekly catch-up meetings to learn/share experiences with other Time to Shine projects. This has been useful as peer support to connect with other professionals working with the same/similar client group and to share personal experiences of supporting older people during the pandemic. It was also useful to learn, particularly from Carers Leeds, about leading Zoom sessions for older adults.

Yorkshire Dance learnt from others about the time needed to support clients to get onto Zoom, possible technical issues but also that Zoom is working well for others. This gave us the confidence to offer a Zoom session to participants of Yorkshire Dance's Dance On project. This led to a connection with [a] hospital who have now trialled joining a Dance On Zoom session – the staff login and play the session through the TV.

This experience led Yorkshire Dance to consider how a Zoom session might work in a care home setting through In Mature Company and we set this up. In Mature Company takes dance and music into care homes across Leeds, addressing the social isolation of older people living in care across the city. The project was reimagined during Covid-19 with outdoor sessions, shared activites via Zoom and socially distanced, indoor sessions. The Zoom sessions seem to be going really well - here's a note received via email from one of our partners in Leeds City Council:

Just thought everyone should know what a fabulous [Zoom] session occurred today. We had the largest attendance and it was really well received. [Two care homes] had embraced the theme and people had dressed up in their holiday attire. [Seven care homes] in total attended. [One] unfortunately couldn't attend due to technical issues. It really makes such a difference when the staff support the sessions and today shone. I would like to thank everyone for all their hard work as we know how busy everyone is. Please pass on to the staff teams as they are a credit to the service. Dancing and lifting the mood!"

Outcomes

"What's been really beneficial is that we've really been able to maybe improve both of our projects through sharing information, knowledge and experience. So I think it has been really, really positive."

Delivery partners appreciated the programme approach, as evidenced by the quotes from delivery partners throughout this report and in regular monitoring returns. The programme team often found that volunteers and older participants knew that their local activity was part of Time to Shine and this was surprising.

Having the space to pause, reflect, test and learn brought some much-needed headspace to frontline staff and helped to shape services. It is likely that there was a trickle-down effect within the third sector as staff across different organisations got to know each other and made better referrals.

Time to Shine was well-resourced, longer-term and able to match fund a series of city-wide initiatives - Third Sector Development work with Neighbourhood Network Schemes, SWIFt frailty projects and Age and Dementia Friendly Communities - which helped to share risk and enabled a bigger pool of resources to draw on.

The experience has been transformative for the programme team. Some of the elements of Time to Shine could be replicated in future programmes, aided by the learning shared in the toolkit. Funding for the Time to Shine programme ends in March 2022 but Neighbourhood Network Schemes, Leeds City Council services and third sector organisations across Leeds will continue and the legacy of this programme approach will live on.

"As a charity we now have an overall greater understanding of loneliness and isolation as a result of our work alongside other TTS projects"

Further reading

Creating a Cohesive Programme: A Time to Shine toolkit
Report 3: Methods: Part of the suite of ten final evaluation reports produced by the Centre for Loneliness Studies at the University of Sheffield

The following four reports are national learning reports from Ageing Better:
Programme Set up & Development
Test and Learn
Creating a Learning Culture
Use of Language

"Time to Shine has been a very valuable project for staff development: the connection with the other partners has really enriched our work, with the addition of training such as Co-production and Warm Welcome, expanding our practice and challenging previous models of working. It has been a very different experience compared to relationships with previous funders and particularly valuable during the pandemic as the support of Time to Shine has improved and then validated the level of support we were able to offer our participants."

For more information about Time to Shine please visit www.timetoshineleeds.org.