



# Tackling loneliness and social isolation in older people:

## How to make a difference in your community and keep your activity going

So you're thinking about setting up a local group or activity. How do you make sure the benefits last?

Social connections are important for wellbeing and happiness. Older people can be more vulnerable to loneliness and isolation. Local groups and community activities are one way to make friends and feel part of a community. This guide will help you plan your activity, keeping in mind it can help people for years to come. This is referred to as 'legacy'.

### Legacy – leaving a mark

Legacy can take many different forms, so here are a few ideas of different types of legacy you might be able to leave in your community.



I look forward to our meeting every week. I have never been in any community project in my life before this and I will certainly join another group in the future





## Lasting friendships

The most effective groups provide an environment in which people can develop friendships which outlast an activity. Then, if your group stops meeting, even temporarily, people may decide to continue meeting informally. Some activities have a natural end point - this is not necessarily a bad thing, especially if those who take part make lasting friendships.

If your group or activity is a one-off event or time-limited, think about how you can encourage people to get together afterwards.

If members want to continue to meet, how could you support them to do this?

You can find some useful advice on how best to support friendships to flourish in our briefing 'Tackling loneliness and social isolation in older people: Top tips for a successful activity'.

Consider whether it would be useful to partner up with other groups or at least advertise your activity within these groups. This may help to encourage relationships that continue after your activity has concluded.

## The Speaking Circle

The Speaking Circle group received funding from Ageing Better to deliver English lessons alongside horticulture activities to help a group of older women in the Sparkbrook area of Birmingham.

The activity, held in the Tyseley Community Centre, ran for 15 weeks. For the first 12 weeks the activity was held in the centre, and the remaining sessions were organised as trips to botanical gardens. Using the community centre had the added benefit of offering opportunities for participants to interact with other groups using the centre. For example the centre also held a nursery at the same time, and the informal nature of both activities was such that there was a high level of interaction between the two groups, and consequently friendships were made.

The initial trips were funded using Ageing Better funds however, subsequent outings were funded by participants. To encourage take up of subsequent trips, venues were selected based on cost to ensure that participants were able to attend - this has been key.

“ When I started telling them about all the other venues in Birmingham that are free or cheap to visit they actually started organising their own visits ”

“ I want them to make friends and keep that friendship going... we've given them a push on the boat and now they are going to float off and keep those friendships going ”



## Positive learning

One of the most important legacies you can leave is sharing the lessons you have learned along the way. When you find out what works well, let people who want to start a similar group know so they can really hit the ground running. Likewise, if you have found some things didn't work so well, this is really helpful information you can pass on to support others

Ultimately, this learning will help improve other activities and social connections for older people in your community, which is always going to be a wonderful legacy to leave.

## Improved community environment

Your group can also leave a lasting legacy by doing something to benefit the wider community. This could be something concrete, like improving a public space, or just generating enthusiasm for contributing to the community and helping others. For example, a group in Birmingham meets to maintain a local church garden:

*They have created a lasting legacy in the form of a garden which can be enjoyed by many people in the community for years to come.*

## Opportunities through volunteering

Providing opportunities for people to volunteer at your group can leave a lasting legacy, by giving them skills and experiences they might not otherwise have had the opportunity to engage in. In some instances this may even lead to gaining paid employment.

## Improved social cohesion

There is evidence of wider benefits of creating a social space for different communities of older people to come together, such as broadening people's horizons, and getting people from different backgrounds or ages to interact and challenge perspectives on others, which can leave a lasting impact. For example, at one group in Birmingham two Asian participants went to the assistance of a white participant with limited mobility.

I was just watching from a distance, and the Asian ladies, two of them didn't

“ speak English but they understood she needed her walker, so one of them went and got the walker for her and they both helped her stand up [...] she was quite prejudiced about things in the area, but her comment was, 'Those ladies were nice to me.' I said, 'Well, what did you expect?' She said, 'I didn't expect them to be nice to me.' [...] I said 'Why?' and she said, 'Because I'm white.' I said, 'Actually your perception of the community is not really balanced at all.' It was a nice opportunity [...] seeing actually the skin colour may be different, the language may be different but they're people. It was good. ”

## **Springhill over 50s Club (previously Springhill Library Group)**

This group, which was set up by a volunteer with Ageing Better funding, has created such a strong bond that they have found a way to continue meeting, even after the funding ended and the original group leader left to start full-time work.

None of the people knew one another before joining the group, but over time they have shared food, stories and laughter together and formed a strong, community bond. For some group members that may not have family, this group acts as a substitute. One group member had people from the group attend his baptism to show support.

The group is a valued space for friendship and reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation for many of the participants, and this genuine connection between them has led to a strong legacy for the group.

Individuals want to continue to meet even now that Ageing Better funding has ended. So, to be able to keep the group together, one of the group members has stepped up to run the group and helped set up a bank account and constitution.

*I wanted to try and leave a legacy, you see, and I wanted to leave a club that was sustainable and with some leadership, and with people knowing what the aims were, what they were there for, what they were seeking to achieve.*

Members now contribute £2 a week to help pay for the library space they meet in and they have also successfully applied for more funding to pay for additional trips and events.

## Keeping your activity going – learning from experience

Working towards creating any form of legacy, especially supporting people to build genuine friendships and establish lasting relationships, takes time. So, it's important when setting up a new group or activity to think about how you will keep the group going.

### Maintaining interest

Once you have got your activity off the ground, it's important to continue to promote it to keep people interested.

- Think about how to advertise your activity in local circulars that will be delivered to people's homes – some publications may even let you do so for free.
- It's important to engage everyone in the group by making them feel they have a part to play in the group's success. Spreading tasks across the group creates a sense of 'ownership' and belonging for group members and helps to

promote its sustainability, so the group isn't relying on just one person to keep it going.

- See if there are any local information websites that have a 'What's on' section to advertise community-based activities. Take advantage of this free advertising by making sure your activity is listed. (See Further Information section at the end of this leaflet.)
- Get in touch with your local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), if your city has one, and they might be able to help. CVS supports community and voluntary groups in a variety of ways, from helping to set up a new group to help bidding for funding, and may be able to help generate interest in your group.
- Explore how you might use social media to reach people – for example, by using a platform like Meetup.
- Consider writing a regular email or newsletter (you could use Mailchimp ([www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)) a free



tool), or creating a Facebook or WhatsApp group that people can join to keep them updated on the group's progress. It will also help your group record its achievement and impact.

### Doing more for less

Activities don't always need funding. Think about what you want to achieve first, then consider what resources, if any, you need.

- Consider whether you are able to source materials required for your group for free or at a lower cost. Shop around to compare prices from different companies and providers.
- Tell companies and providers what you're doing. You'd be surprised how much local companies will be willing to budge on price, or even remove costs altogether, if they know they're helping a good cause. 'Don't ask, don't get' is relevant here. If you don't want to haggle face-to-face you can use email instead.
- Remember to check out online selling pages which also sometimes have freebies on offer, such as Gumtree and Freecycle, Facebook marketplace groups and apps like NextDoor, HelpfulPeeps and Silver Sunday.

- If you need to bring in support from paid professionals, such as a professional tutor, try and keep this to a minimum and only where necessary or beneficial. Consider other ways to provide the activity. What skills, equipment or other items (such as refreshments) could your members contribute? Look for helpers within your group – this will help members to feel a sense of shared ownership.

- Consider whether attendees could share transport to the activity. Not only will this save members' money, but it will bring people together before attending.

“The library has been brilliant, because when we have to wait for the funding decision they give us that time in there. Instead of saying ‘Until we’ve got the money you have to leave’, they say they will just backdate the funding.”

“We have a couple of volunteers who will pour the tea and get the sandwiches for people, and then sit down and have a chat to see if people have any problems.”

- If you are struggling to cover the cost of venue hire, talk to the owners to see if you can negotiate a reduction, waiver or payment holiday. Some venues may be willing to be flexible.
- Check different local venues to find the most appropriate. Could you offer a service in return for using rooms? For example, the local church stores the equipment for

gardening group FIGS in return for them looking after the church garden.

- Consider whether your group could meet in a public place, such as a library or café, instead of paying for room hire.
- Research other organisations with similar aims or interests to yours. Is there a national society that promotes your activity? They may be able to help you with advice, training, resources and access to new opportunities for your members.

### **Intergenerational cycling club**

Sara Park Community Cycle Club received Ageing Better funding to establish a cycling club, operating out of the charity-run Sara Park Activity Centre in Small Heath, which is designed to bring people of all ages together.

The club worked with Birmingham City Council's 'Big Birmingham Bikes' programme, which offered a range of free cycling opportunities. Club members who did not have a bike were encouraged to apply for a free bike through the programme. The group has also got training for their helpers from Cycling UK, a national charity set up to promote cycling. As a result, some members are now able to provide cycling training to other groups. Cycling UK have also provided advice to the group on other funding sources.

## Charging for activities

It may be necessary to make a small charge for an activity. Participants are not always put off by the prospect of paying to attend. Making a small charge to subsidise your activity can help make funding from other sources go further. If you do introduce a charge, consider the following:

- Try using 'suggested donations'. People may be happier about contributing if they don't feel forced into paying a certain amount; they may even give more than you ask for.
- Be upfront and clear about any charge and explain what the money is going to pay for. It's also important for participants to understand

the actual amount it costs for them to take part in the activity if it's being subsidised from funding, and how valuable their contribution is to the group.

- Make sure that money for the group is held by someone trusted and responsible to keep it safe.
- Be aware that some organisations will not let you advertise in their building if you are charging for the activity – always be upfront about cost.
- If you are relying on members making a financial contribution think about how you will cover or reduce costs if the number of members drops to ensure your activity can continue.



## Creative Threads

This arts group successfully applied for Ageing Better funding for a tutor to enhance sessions. As well as this funding members are asked to make a 'suggested donation' in order to help build the future sustainability of the group. Members are asked to contribute £1 towards refreshments, £4 towards sessions with a tutor and £3 to sessions without. The funds are stored securely by Age UK.

## Fundraising

- Getting grants and donations from external sources can make an important difference to your activity. But think about ways to avoid becoming reliant on this type of funding to make your activity happen. Consider how one-off or short-term funding could help you become more self-reliant in the future. For example, this could be funding for publicity to attract more people to attend your group, to buy equipment to do new activities or to provide expert training to help members run activities themselves.
- Could your group use its skills to help raise funds, or in exchange for services from others?



Everybody so far has been happy to contribute that much money ... and it is understood that that is for the group to use ... We will have a little bit of money behind us.

## FIGS

FIGS is a gardening group for older people which used Ageing Better funding to buy equipment suitable for older people. The group is building sustainability by offering gardening services within the local area in exchange for donations.

- Ageing Better in Birmingham is just one of many sources of funding. Funding Central, created by the National Centre for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), is an online service which lets you search for grants and social investment opportunities for voluntary sector organisations.
- Funding programmes will often have particular requirements (for example, requiring your group to have a bank account and/or constitution). Make sure you check the funder's requirements before spending time on an application that will not be considered.



Fortunately we had several commissions to generate some money. ... So for our seeds and our soils and stuff like that, we've got a bit of money behind us to carry on.

- Don't be put off if you don't get funding first time. Get feedback if you can. Some funders may encourage you to reapply. If not, use the feedback to inform any future applications you may make – there are often a range of different funders out there so keep going.

## About this leaflet

This leaflet was produced as part of the Ageing Better in Birmingham programme. The content is based on learning from the programme. The examples are of activities supported by the programme and the quotes are from people running and taking part in activities.

Ageing Better in Birmingham 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 over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping 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.

## Further information and useful contacts

### **Ageing Better in Birmingham**

[www.ageingbetterinbirmingham.co.uk](http://www.ageingbetterinbirmingham.co.uk)

### **Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC)**

[www.bvsc.org](http://www.bvsc.org)

### **Centre for Ageing Better**

[www.ageing-better.org.uk](http://www.ageing-better.org.uk)

### **Charitable Associations: model constitution**

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission)

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