



Leicester Ageing Together (LAT)

LAT Learning:

Supporting active involvement in communities

March 2019



About Leicester Ageing Together

Leicester Ageing Together (LAT) is developing creative ways for people aged 50+ to be actively involved in their local communities, and in creating empowering responses to loneliness and social isolation.

Since October 2015 we have



reached
over 6,000 people



activated 1,438
volunteers



funded >£1.5million
local jobs

LAT is one of 14 [Ageing Better](#) partnerships funded across England by the National Lottery Community Fund, working to ensure that older people's active involvement in their communities is valued, and that they are involved in the co-production of services that reduce isolation.

'Playing a role in the local community should become the new normal,' according to [A Connected Society](#), the government's strategy for tackling loneliness. Active involvement is defined as everything from formal volunteering to informal community contributions (e.g. neighbourliness).

The Centre for Ageing Better's [review](#) of community contributions in later life notes that making a community contribution helps 'improve our social connections, enhances our sense of purpose and self-esteem – and as a result, increases our life satisfaction, happiness and wellbeing.' Rather than age-specific opportunities, the review calls for 'age-friendly' and 'inclusive' opportunities that remove the barriers to wider community involvement (see also the LAT Learning briefing on [Intergenerational Projects](#), Dec 2018).

According to the [RVS](#) 1.3m new volunteers stepped forward for the first time in the past year, with social issues such as community cuts, concern for older people and disconnection from communities being significant motivators. However, the [Centre for Ageing Better](#) notes, 'People who are less financially



secure, in poorer health or from a BAME (Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic) background can face structural barriers which make them less likely to formally volunteer with a charity.’ Research from the [RVS](#) shows that 34% of people from the highest socio-economic groups have never volunteered, compared with 56% of individuals from the lowest socio-economic groups.

More needs to be done to support age-friendly inclusive volunteering and active involvement in local communities.

About this report

This report highlights learning from the LAT programme on supporting active involvement in local communities that is age-friendly and inclusive. Information has been gathered from LAT project reports, from LAT Partners delivery staff and LAT participants, and through an interactive workshop (held on 12 March 2019) with LAT Partners to identify what helps and hinders community involvement.

Supporting age-friendly and inclusive community involvement

An intended outcome of LAT was to support older people’s active involvement in their local communities, and for their views and participation to be valued more highly.

Over the four years of the LAT Programme a diverse group of people of all ages volunteered with LAT projects including:

- previous LAT project participants
- retired people
- people who have a few spare hours (who work full-time)
- people referred from the Job Centre – particularly people aged 25-30 looking for work experience
- people on parental leave or with pre-school children
- students from adult and community education/University/college/schools

(Source, LAT Partners’ workshop, 12 March 2019)



The following two case studies explore learning from the LAT programme in developing age-friendly and inclusive projects to support community contributions.

Case Study - Action on Hearing Loss

A LAT Peer to Peer Information and Support project set up by **Action on Hearing Loss (AoHL)** aimed to support older people with information and advice on the long-term management of their hearing aids and hearing loss. AoHL also provided opportunities for people to come together to share information and experiences on developing inclusive services for those with hearing loss.

Project delivery in the early stage was enhanced by a partnership with a local charity, **Action Deafness**, who were sub-contracted to provide consultancy and advice to boost knowledge on Leicester's diverse Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.



Action on Hearing Loss developing inclusive services

The **Deaf Friends Group** was introduced to the project as it became clear that profoundly deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users from BAME communities were not able to access existing services in the city due to language difference – their sign language being heavily influenced by family language use resulting in a reliance on ‘home signs’. Some of the members did not learn sign language until recently and they in effect have no ‘mother tongue’ as they grew up deaf



without a signing family, and with no deaf community. Other group members use Indian sign language, and others their own variation.

The Deaf Friends Group led their element of the project, running their own activities and sessions. This included arranging guest speakers and day trips to meet their needs. Regular meetings and discussions were held as part of the planned sessions, providing an ongoing opportunity for LAT participants to design their service.

Several members of the group talked about their experience when first coming to the group - how shy and nervous they had been - and how little language they had. They appreciated how much they have benefitted from coming to the group, how they have grown in confidence as well as language skills, and how it has helped them in other areas of their life.

As part of LAT's legacy, this group continues to meet at the Pop-in Café (in Thurnby Lodge) every 2 weeks, and are regularly supported by a couple of volunteers.

At a local level, this BSL and English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision helps to engage communities who are most at risk of social isolation. Nationally, it also links strongly to key ambitions for strengthening communities in the government's Integrated Communities [Action Plan](#) (Feb 2019).

Case Study – (Diabetes) Self-Help Group

LAT's Community Connectors (posts seconded from LAT Partners in March 2018) have been supporting volunteers to improve the lives of older people (see also a LAT Learning event [presentation](#) on the Community Connectors' work).

Bharti, a LAT Community Connector working in the Belgrave area (an area of Leicester with a high proportion of people of South Asian heritage) connects older people with opportunities to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

In Leicester, around 1 in 4 people aged 65+ has diabetes, with the rate in the Asian population almost four times as high as in the white population. Bharti meets regularly with a self-help group based at Belgrave Library and Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre. The group's Coordinator is Sonal, an ayurvedic practitioner, yoga tutor and volunteer. Health and Social Care Students from Leicester College with practical arrangements, lead craft activities and befriending. Sonal explains, "The group was originally set up to support



members around diabetes, but due to interest from our members, we now address wider wellbeing issues. We have kept diabetes in our name, as that is how we are known locally. Members of the group suggest topics of interest – on Wednesdays we meet for coffee mornings, and on Saturdays for speakers on a range of health issues and regular trips.”

According to Bharti, group members contribute to the cohesiveness of the group and the wellbeing of their peers. *“While people are well, they can get out and about and join in with things. But when things change – perhaps they’ve lost a loved one, or they’ve become unwell, or they’ve had a fall – then they can lose confidence and become insular. So even before they think about going out again, we try to connect them with other people - so they connect with each other and look after each other. Someone from the group notices that their friend hasn’t been to the group for a week or two, and they ring them up to check that they’re okay. Then the group can help each other. Just that one phone call can make a world of difference.”* The group encourages members to grow confidence, make connections, and focus on wider wellbeing. For more information visit www.diabetesselfhelpgroup.co.uk



Bharti a Community Connector (far left), Sonal Coordinator (far right) and members of the (Diabetes) Self-Hep Group



Learning Summary

- Volunteers need ongoing support to boost their capacity and capability
- LAT Partners and Community Connectors support volunteers to create new community groups through advice and access to micro-funding
- Small community groups can provide good quality, cost effective support to older people to overcome social isolation as part of Social Prescribing (see an [evaluation](#) of LAT Social Prescribing projects from the University of Nottingham).

Factors that help and hinder community involvement

LAT partners recognise that through the course of the programme they have gained rich experience of supporting people of all ages to become more actively involved in their communities. Table 1 (below) captures their reflections on what factors helped and hindered this involvement – in this case through volunteering.

Key points to note include:

- ✓ the emphasis on building relationships with volunteers, knowing them personally, being proactive with communication and usually communicating personally face-to-face or phone rather than email
- ✓ concern for the personal development of volunteers with training being one key element, and with a willingness to see volunteers progress out of the organisation/group
- ✓ the aim for a short (2-week) turnaround after application to becoming engaged as a volunteer

Areas for future reflection include:

- ongoing support to volunteers to build capacity and capability
- how volunteers can be engaged in reflective learning for themselves and the organisation about the situation of older people and social isolation and loneliness



Table 1: What helps and what hinders community involvement from an interactive workshop with LAT Partners held on 12 March 2019

| What hinders working with volunteers | What helps working with volunteers |
|--|---|
| Structural barriers including poverty, ill-health and cultural perceptions of gender roles/(dis)ability/ 'appropriate' behaviour | Recognise that volunteers are diverse including: previous participants; school/college/university students; and people looking to gain experience/skills for work |
| Lack of consistent project funding and resources | Make clear the gains for the volunteer and participants <i>"What's in it for you and me"</i> and track the impact of the experience for volunteers, participants, and projects through surveys and case studies over time |
| The idea of having to dedicate a length of time to volunteering <i>"Men prefer more task-based roles."</i> | Create varied roles including face-to-face and telephone befriending; supporting groups; emotional short-term support; helping with preparing and serving food in lunch-clubs Offer flexi roles and micro-volunteering on one-off tasks rather than formal roles |
| Insufficient support and communication A previous "bad experience" can put people off | Good communication – including telephone conversations and face-to-face builds rapport and relationships. Build brand recognition – linked to other opportunities |
| Over serious/wordy policies that can seem like legislation e.g. DBS checks, and two references | Induction – swift but include information about the culture and values of the project Explain why systems are in place e.g. to protect personal information, to keep self and others safe |



| What hinders working with volunteers | What helps working with volunteers |
|---|---|
| Lack of confidence and low self-esteem | Respect volunteers and draw on their strengths and interests, or address mutually recognised skills gaps to help build CVs Value volunteers – acknowledge effort e.g. certificates and award ceremonies, and pay honorariums |
| Worries related to volunteering roles or status of volunteers | Promote shadowing of experienced volunteers Support and guide about rights and entitlements |
| Language barriers | Offer English language support and use of community languages |
| No training or insufficient/inappropriate training | Accredited and non-accredited training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) e.g. safeguarding; Health and Safety; Food Hygiene; Slips and Falls training; Active Listening, Mental wellbeing |
| Caring responsibilities | Payment of travel/care expenses |



What now?

To find out more about Leicester Ageing Together (LAT) or to get involved:

1. Visit our website <https://www.leicesteragetogether.org.uk/>
2. Start a conversation and share your views online

 <https://twitter.com/LeicesterAT>

 <https://www.facebook.com/LeicesterAgeingTogether/>

