Monitoring and Evaluation at Time to Shine

A Time to Shine toolkit
February 2022

Time to Shine was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better programme. It was originally funded for six years (until March 2021) but due to the Covid-19 pandemic the programme was extended until March 2022. One of the aims of Ageing Better was to develop "*better evidence about how to reduce isolation and loneliness for people aged over 50 in order to improve the design of services in the future*." Monitoring and evaluation was a high priority; it was well-funded, multifaceted and focused on test and learn.

All 14 Ageing Better programmes in England took part in a national evaluation led by Ecorys UK. All were asked to commission their own research partners, often academics, to lead the local evaluation of each programme. All 14 areas took different approaches to delivery so the way in which data was collected, reported and shared was designed by each programme. There was a mix of qualitative (words) and quantitative (numbers) data. Progress towards the Time to Shine outcomes and targets was reported to the Core Partnership and the Lottery.

Introduction

Time to Shine was a research programme. The team was keen to understand the complexities of loneliness and to explore what did, and didn't, work when trying to support older people to develop friendly connections and meaningful relationships. Time to Shine was led by Leeds Older People's Forum, whose primary goal is to make sure every older person in Leeds has the opportunities, freedom and support to live the life they choose. Learning from a diverse group of people was important so a wide range of projects were commissioned and evaluated. The voices of older people - in LGBT+ communities, older people with learning disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, people living in care homes, carers, people living in poverty and many others - helped to shape the learning at Time to Shine.

Time to Shine used a hub and spoke model for research. The monitoring and evaluation officer (the hub) supported and connected all different elements of the research and reporting requirements (the spokes) within the programme. A one-page diagram helps to explain the structure of the programme and how projects linked with Time to Shine in Leeds and with Ageing Better nationally.

Robust data can be challenging to collect but solid evidence can change things for the better. It can also bring about new ways of working and create new opportunities to make a difference. In-depth reflections on the whole experience of monitoring and evaluation at Time to Shine - from the perspective of delivery partners, local evaluators, Core Partnership members, strategic partners and the programme team - are not covered in this toolkit.

Instead, this toolkit focuses on the practicalities of data collection in a large, complex programme and how it was used and shared. It complements other Time to Shine reports, particularly Greater than the sum of its parts and Creating a cohesive programme. This toolkit is organised into sections and contains quotes from delivery partners. It outlines the ethos and approach taken at Time to Shine, the resources used and the key learning points. Its purpose is to share practical information and templates that others can use (or adapt) for their own purposes. This toolkit may be useful for people who design their own monitoring and evaluation processes including commissioners, fundraisers, board members, managers, researchers, students and monitoring officers.

"Leeds Older People's Forum has introduced projects to each other, making it easier to work together. They kept us informed of best practice locally and nationally and this informed our approach. This allowed projects to get on with delivery rather than reinventing the wheel."

Ethos

Data collection was a team effort from the outset and everyone worked towards shared outcomes and targets. The programme team collaborated with delivery partners to understand their experiences of the monitoring and evaluation processes, making changes where possible. Templates and forms were created to try to make data collection easier. The monitoring and evaluation officer was friendly and approachable, answering questions or offering practical help as often as required, and made time to meet with people in person before the pandemic.

Delivery partners received a personalised thank you email after each quarterly monitoring round. Partners knew that the information they collected was important and it was read, shared and used. Partners could see a clear, tangible link between the monitoring and evaluation information supplied and the progress towards the Time to Shine targets, the learning and evaluation reports produced and the shared learning sessions.

"Continually highlighting project achievements and sharing case studies from different projects has been beneficial."

Reporting on the Time to Shine targets and progress towards the four outcomes

During the commissioning process applicants designed their own projects and indicated what data they could collect. At the contract negotiation stage partners agreed to use a standard set of measures. This ensured that the programme collected data from partners that was comparable between Time to Shine projects and that data could be collated for Lottery reporting. Although the measures were standardised, the targets were bespoke for each project to reflect the different ways of working.

The programme managers reported to the Core Partnership every quarter using a standard report template. The monitoring and evaluation officer reported every six months using the Time to Shine monitoring and evaluation report template and also reported numerical data directly to the Lottery each quarter. Postcode data was inputted into Maple to create a heat map and this data could also be visualised by ward. Our funding relationship manager from the National Lottery Community Fund received these reports at Core Partnership meetings, reducing the need for additional reporting. Co-production was an important element of Time to Shine and the evaluation subgroup - a mix of older people with expertise, academics and external partners - met regularly to oversee all elements of the evaluation.

Ageing Better placed emphasis on a test and learn approach. Learning is often reactive, gathered in response to something that goes wrong. There is value in collecting proactive learning because this helps projects to change and adapt. Through consultation, Time to Shine developed a list of 21 test and learn questions that the programme aimed to answer. These were used to collect specific data and helped to shape the evaluation.

"The reporting that delivery partners were asked to produce for the programme felt proportionate and we'd recommend this level of reporting be kept. The reporting requirements for the Small Funds programme were more onerous than standard reporting so this may be worth re-thinking in any future programmes."

Quarterly reporting by delivery partners

A regular cycle of quarterly reporting was established with set deadlines: 14 April, 14 July, 14 October and 14 January. Gentle reminders were sent 30 days and 14 days before the deadline. Delivery partners knew that a short extension could be given on request and this helped to reduce stress during their busy times. Delivery partner organisations were paid quarterly in advance after satisfactory monitoring returns were received.

Quarterly monitoring data was collected via a number of different tools over the seven years; all had their pros and cons. Excel, SurveyMonkey, Limesurvey, Jotform were all used within the programme. Examples of the questions asked as part of the monitoring returns were:

- Please give an overview of the work done in your project over the last 3 months

- What has gone well? What are you proud of? Has anything not worked as well as expected?

- Please reflect on any learning this quarter. This could be from your Time To Shine project, your Action Learning Set, training or any other aspect of Time To Shine work

- How has your work influenced changes to your organisation's processes and practice?

Delivery partners collected and reported qualitative and quantitative data as part of their monitoring returns. Case studies were a vital source of information. Case studies brought the projects to life and helped the programme team and Core Partnership to understand people's experiences, challenges and outcomes. Two templates were provided, along with consent forms, to differentiate between the types of information required. One was a case study template to share an individual's story, outcomes and experiences. The other was a Test and Learn case study template to help partners reflect on their approach and what they might do differently next time. This Time to Shine learning briefing is an example of the way in which the information written on a test and learn case study form was adapted for public use.

> *"We found it useful to reflect on our progress [in the monitoring returns] and to meet with our contract manager soon after….We identified that the team had a much clearer understanding of the strategy for the work going forward because we met as a team to evaluate the project every three months. We are looking at building regular evaluation points into new projects."*

The Time to Shine Community

This was a bespoke, collaborative online resource introduced in 2018 after a new set of delivery partner projects were commissioned. It was based on an open source learning platform called Moodle. The Time to Shine Community was intended to be a useful tool to help partners to connect with each other, share learning with each other and download useful documents. Training was included in a series of group induction sessions and partners were encouraged to login and upload photos, quotes and case studies as part of their quarterly monitoring returns.

The Time to Shine Community had its uses, most notably sharing and organising large numbers of documents in a way that made them easy to retrieve. As such, it was useful for sharing qualitative data with the local evaluation team and downloading large volumes of Small Funds photos, case studies and reports shared by Leeds Community Foundation. However, it wasn't well used by delivery partners. They thought it was unnecessary, complicated and just another thing to remember to log into. The Time to Shine Community was phased out in the final year of the programme.

"The induction and programme of events was good and a great way to start the programme. I believe the Time to Shine community hub which was set up was not effective or time conducive."
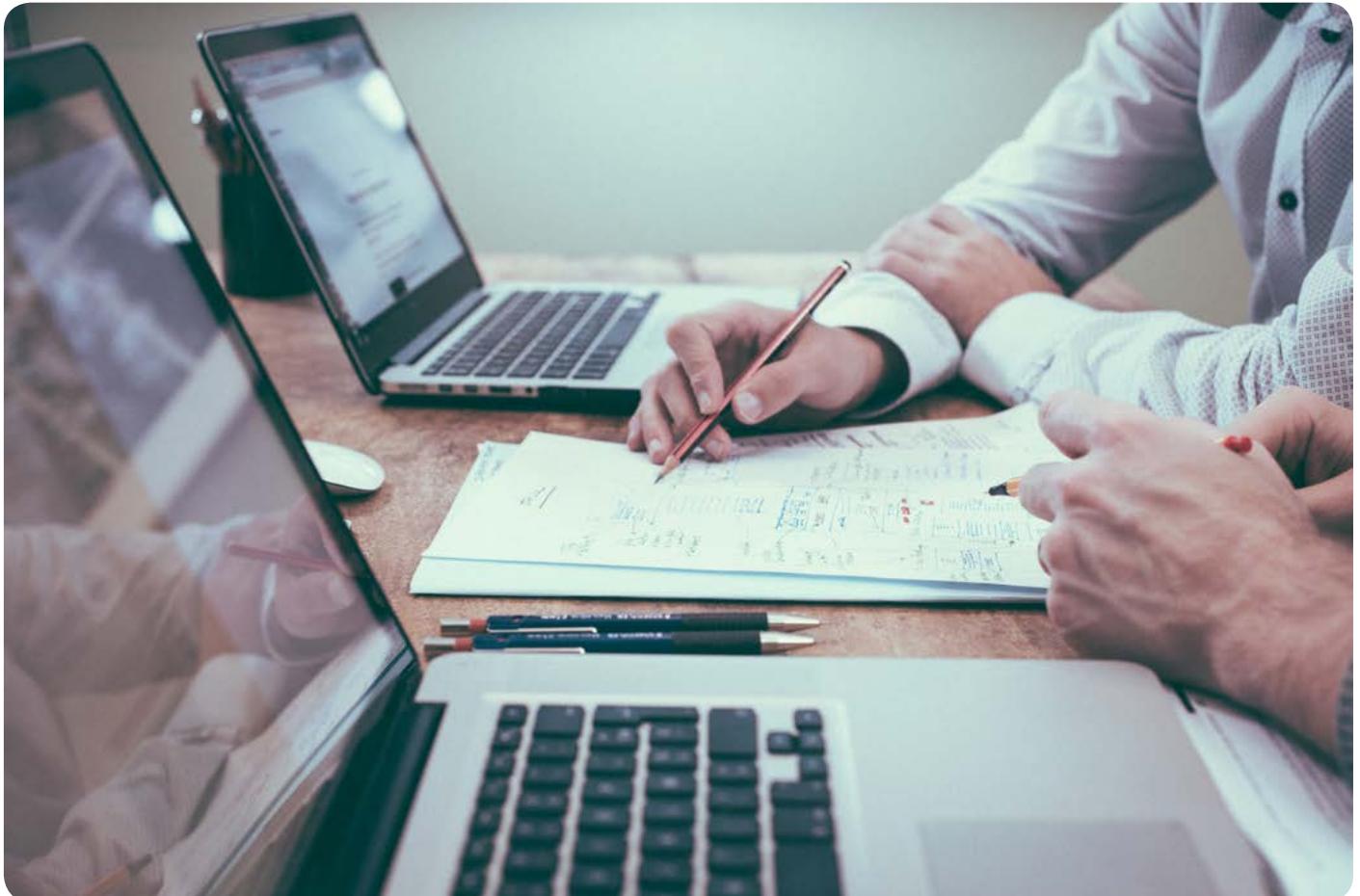
National evaluation of the Ageing Better programme

The National Lottery Community Fund commissioned Ecorys UK to lead the 7-year evaluation. It involved all 14 areas funded by Ageing Better and consisted of qualitative and quantitative research. Ecorys produced a series of thematic learning reports using insight and evidence from programme teams across all Ageing Better programmes. These included Engaging Marginalised People Over 50 and Community Connectors reports.

Ecorys also designed a quantitative 'before and after' evaluation questionnaire called the Common Measurement Framework (CMF) that all programmes were required to use. It contained academically-validated questions relating to social isolation, loneliness, social contact, social participation, wellbeing, health and volunteering. Some scales in the CMF, such as the EQ-5D-3L health scale and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale required a licence for use. The full range of outcome questions included in the CMF are contained in this version of the Ageing Better CMF evaluation questionnaire.

Delivery partners often found it a challenge to use CMF questionnaires with participants and volunteers, particularly when taking an Asset-Based Community Development approach. Many delivery partners disliked using the long questionnaire and felt that the questions were negatively-worded and intrusive. This had implications for them when building rapport with participants. Some participants disengaged due to the amount of 'paperwork' that was required of them. It also had implications for the programme team's relationship with delivery partners so the monitoring and evaluation officer tried to make the process of data collection as easy as possible. This included arranging training sessions, producing a shortened version of the Time to Shine CMF evaluation questionnaire (which removed all optional questions) and a separate CMF demographic data questionnaire. Results were shared with partners; by using CMF data they could start to understand how their project was impacting on participants and volunteers.

Ecorys used a Power BI dashboard to convert the CMF data into graphs and charts, as the image on page 7 illustrates. This was helpful for programme teams as it created an interesting visual representation of the data that was easy to share with delivery partners. Some partners used this evidence to build a case for longer-term investment in their projects. Ecorys produced an Ageing Better Impact Evaluation report in December 2021. This draws on CMF data gathered from all 14 programmes to explore the profile of people engaging in Ageing Better and the kinds of activities that attracted them. It also explores the impact – or effect – of taking part in Ageing Better activities.

"Consider the ethics of asking certain emotive questions. We found that these forms can be difficult for frontline staff to collect data. Collecting sensitive data around loneliness can be detrimental to people who are already feeling lonely as these questions force them to focus on negative feelings. They can also be a barrier to people opening up about loneliness."

Local evaluation at Time to Shine

Time to Shine commissioned the Centre for Loneliness Studies at the University of Sheffield to lead a six-year evaluation of Time to Shine. Having a local evaluation team enabled the programme to respond to emerging priorities with a degree of flexibility which wasn't possible with the national evaluation. It also helped to promote the work in Leeds to a national and international audience. The local evaluation team secured additional investment into the programme as, for example, funding was secured for a PhD student to write a thesis on Co-production using Time to Shine as a case study.

The academic team, led by Dr Andrea Wigfield, invited staff, trustees, volunteers and participants to take part in focus groups, interviews and case studies. This helped the local evaluation team to understand people's barriers, motivations and experiences. A team of older Volunteer Listeners also collected stories from their peers. The team analysed a wealth of data and this produced tangible resources, including a case study of the Small Funds projects and Shared Tables: a Time to Shine case study. Delivery partners could see that their effort and input translated into programme-wide learning. This contributed to the 'programme approach' and a sense of working together for common goals.

The interview schedule for one-to-one interviews with Time to Shine participants gives an example of the type of questions that researchers asked. Quantitative data from the CMF questionnaire was also analysed and reported on in Interim Findings from the Time to Shine Common Measurement Framework (CMF) Evaluation Questionnaire. Dr Wigfield's team produced a suite of ten final evaluation reports, all of which are listed at the end of this toolkit.

"Monitoring and data collection has been more inclusive, especially for our elders with English as a second language; we had a focus group arranged to capture their feedback. It would be good to continue the ethos of working with delivery partners together and co-producing outcomes."

Learning dissemination

Having all this data was a dream but it was only beneficial if it was shared and used. The National Lottery Community Fund, Ecorys and the Centre for Loneliness Studies collated and shared programme learning widely. Leeds Older People's Forum employed a Time to Shine learning facilitator in 2016 and a communications officer in 2018. The team also reconfigured the staffing structure in 2018 to enable one programme manager to focus on legacy and the other on learning dissemination.

The programme team grouped key learning points into eight distinct learning themes to create order within the huge volume of data. Time to Shine learning reports and insight were shared via blogs, Twitter, shared learning sessions, presentations, conversations, meetings, events and via Leeds Older People's Forum website. The programme team, and Time to Shine delivery partners, embraced creative and engaging ways to get the messages out, including:

- Shine a Light website and Shine magazine to share stories from older people

- Wise Up to Ageism training courses

- Diverse Voices, a podcast in which people from diverse Leeds communities talk about ageism and discrimination

- Dancing the Small Moments, short animations presenting personal stories about working with people living with dementia

- Bollywood Ladies at D-Dance Theatre, a short film about a Time to Shine Small Funds project

- Poem Portraits based on older people's life experiences

Greater than the sum of its parts: Creating a cohesive programme
A Time to Shine Report
October 2021
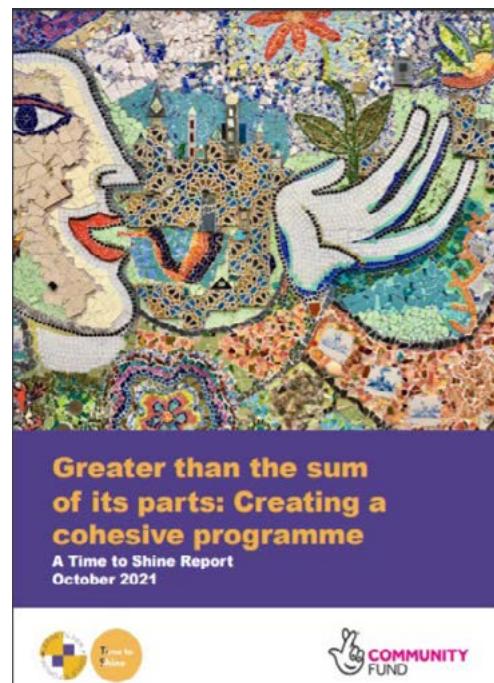
Conclusion

The Ageing Better programme really contributed to the body of evidence available for social isolation and loneliness in older age. Nationally, there is a lot of data available on a wide variety of subjects so when starting any new programme it's important to consider whether new data collection is necessary, or whether previous research can be used to shape services and interventions. The Centre for Ageing Better produced a report called The State of Ageing in 2020 which compiled national evidence from multiple sources to provide a comprehensive, easy to use collection of data. The State of Ageing in Leeds is a similar report using local datasets where possible. Age UK produces useful learning reports, including Older People's Lives During the Pandemic, and the National Lottery Community Fund has funded thousands of evaluations and learning reports, many of which are available from their evidence library.

As Time to Shine draws to a close, Leeds Older People's Forum is working in partnership with Leeds Community Healthcare and Leeds City Council to deliver the Enhance programme. Its purpose is to support safe and sustainable discharge from hospital, linking health specialists with third sector organisations to enhance capacity in both sectors. Learning and evidence from Time to Shine has informed the way in which Enhance is delivered. Data, insight and a collaborative programme approach has enabled Time to Shine to leave a legacy in Leeds which will endure long after the programme ends.

Resources and further reading

- [Measuring your impact on loneliness in later life](#) - a report produced by the [Campaign to End Loneliness](#)

The following documents, plus many of the documents referenced in the body of the toolkit, can be found using the search box on the [resources section of the Time to Shine website](#)

- **Creating a Cohesive Programme**: A Time to Shine toolkit

- **Shine Magazine**: Lifestyle, learning and laughter during lockdown in Leeds - a Time to Shine learning report

- **Dementia Care Mapping**: Evaluating data and finding trends - produced by In Mature Company at Yorkshire Dance

The final evaluation reports from the Centre for Loneliness Studies at the University of Sheffield are also available on the [resources section of the Time to Shine website](#):

- Report 1: Executive Summary of the Time to Shine local evaluation

- Report 2: Methods

- Report 3: Process evaluation

- Report 4: Intervention typologies

- Report 5: Motivations and barriers for beneficiary engagement

- Report 6: Participation, engagement and outcomes for older people

- Report 7: The impacts of Time to Shine on project beneficiaries

- Report 8: The impact of COVID-19 on Time to Shine service delivery and project beneficiaries

- Report 9: Legacy, systems change and sustainability

- Report 10: Test and Learn: Understanding the experiences and challenges of frontline organisations

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