Supporting Ageing in Place:
A Process Evaluation of Ambition for Ageing's microfunding programme

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Acknowledgments

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Ambition for Ageing is a Greater Manchester wide cross-sector partnership, led by GMCVO aimed at creating more age friendly places by connecting communities and people through the creation of relationships, development of existing assets and putting older people at the heart of designing the places they live.

Ambition for Ageing is part of the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better Programme. 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.

Contents

Glossary

Note on terminology: While we are aware of the negative connotations that terms such as 'marginalised', 'disadvantaged', and 'hard to reach' have for some people, we have included in the glossary some working definitions of these terms as they at times emerge in interviews and/or reports found within Ambition for Ageing's database.

Ageing Leads	People working for local authorities that have a focus on ageing as part of their role.
Asset-based approach	Uses a community's own assets to achieve positive change.
Asset maps	Differently from needs maps which focus solely on negative aspects of communities, assets maps focus on community assets, abilities, skills, connections and strengths.
Co-design	When communities and service providers or professionals work together as equals to design services.
Co-production	When communities and service providers work together as equals to design, deliver, and evaluate a programme or project.
Community organisation	A not-for-profit group with a formal constitution that is set up to provide services for a specific local community, or community of identity.
Dispersed communities	a group of individuals who share an identity or experience but who do not live in the same neighbourhood and are instead dispersed across geographic locations. as a result, members of smaller dispersed communities usually have to travel outside their neighbourhood to meet their social, cultural and / or religious needs.
Equalities Board	The group responsible for making Ambition for Ageing as inclusive and accessible for everyone.
Grassroots organisations	Any small community based, locally controlled group/organisation that is primarily made up of local people working together to deliver change at a local level.
'Hard to reach'	This is a controversial term that should be used in an informed way. it is our general take that people are not hard to reach, but rather, those trying to access some groups and individuals do not know how to do it. in addition, like the "marginalised" term, it can be seen as offensive.
LDL (Local Delivery Lead)	The organisations responsible for Ambition for Ageing in the local wards.
Marginalised	The result of being pushed to the margins of society: excluded or ignored.
Micro-funding	The provision of small pots of funding to organisations (in the case of Ambition for Ageing, this was to the value of £2,000). in practice, this is seen in many models, from microfinance bank loans to small grants, peer-to-peer loans to community investments.

Older people	Ambition for Ageing, in line with more recent literature on the topic, uses this term to refer to people aged 50 and above. The shift away from the 65 marker is due to a recognition that, owing to inequalities, people experience age related challenges at very different points in their lives.
Place-based approach	A person-centred, bottom-up approach used to meet the unique needs of people in one given location by working together to use the best available resources and collaborate to gain local knowledge and insight.
Social capital	Relationships and networks made between diverse groups of people.
Social infrastructure	The range of activities, organisations and facilities supporting the formation, development and maintenance of social relationships in a community.
Social isolation	A lack of social contact with other people. it is different from loneliness which is a subjective perception of feeling lonely.
Social prescribing	A system whereby local agencies can refer people to a link worker, who in turn connect people to community groups and services taking a holistic approach to people's health and wellbeing.
Test and learn	A variety of bespoke projects and delivery models are trialled, and good practice is shared and replicated across the programme. test and learn is a key principle in the Ambition for Ageing approach.
Universal design	Design geared towards meeting the needs of everyone. it is about making environments, activities or services accessible to as many people as possible considering diversity of needs and ability.

Stitched Up project

Executive Summary

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) was a programme led by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO), funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF), with the primary aim of reducing social isolation for people aged 50 and over. The programme began in 2015 with initial funding for five years, subsequently extended for a further two years, and worked across eight Greater Manchester local authorities. The programme had a *'test and learn'* ethos and a collaborative approach with both organisations and older people themselves.

This report examines the legacy of Ambition for Ageing by drawing on the lessons learned over its seven years of supporting projects to improve age-friendliness and social connections across a range of neighbourhoods. The data presented in this report was collected through participant observation in meetings; visits to projects; analyses of previous reports; past and present case studies; and semi-structured interviews with project staff, projects leaders, and community members.

About this report

Ambition for Ageing (AfA hereafter), led by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO), was launched in 2015 and completed its work in March 2022. AfA was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better initiative, a seven year, £87 million investment aimed at improving the lives of people aged 50 and over, by addressing social isolation and loneliness within local communities. This report is designed to:

- Share the lessons learned by AfA over the course of seven years of supporting organisations in Greater Manchester to deliver community projects.
- Offer recommendations regarding funding, support and delivery of community activities by focusing on the process evaluation of the Supporting Ageing in Place (SAiP) microfunding Project in Year 7.

The report includes:

- An overview of the different funding streams of AfA since its launch in 2015.
- A critical assessment of the implementation of the Year Seven Supporting Ageing in Place microfunding programme.
- Selected case studies from AfA-funded projects covering a wide-range of thematic areas of work. These case studies were selected to provide practical examples of both successes and shortcomings of community initiatives.
- A summary of recommended practices and potential challenges.

This evaluation builds on previous work conducted by AfA and complements previously published reports:

- Changing a place: microfunding, co-production and community development

- [Looking Back Whilst Moving Forward: Ambition for Ageing's lessons learned and their implications for future commissioning](#)
- [Stronger Together: A Co-Production Toolkit from Ageing Better](#)
- [Developing social contact models in a time of social distancing: A Response to COVID-19](#)
- [Equalities Board evaluation](#)
- [Toolkit for Inclusion in Practice](#)
- [Making age-friendly neighbourhoods inclusive](#)
- [Asset based approaches and inequalities](#)
- [Interim programme evaluation](#)
- [Collection of case studies](#)

The work of AfA has been developed as part of a wider conversation about urban ageing, age-friendly places, and ageing in place. An age-friendly community has been defined as a '… *place where older people are actively involved, valued, and supported with infrastructure and services that effectively accommodate their needs*' (Alley et al.2007:2). The World Health Organization (WHO) identified eight dimensions of an age-friendly community, these comprising: *housing, transportation, respect and social inclusion, social participation, social and civic engagement, outdoor spaces and buildings, community support and health services, and communication and information* (WHO, 2007).

In 2010, the WHO launched the *Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and* Communities (GNAFCC), with Manchester the first city in the UK to become a member of the Network, followed by Greater Manchester (GM) as the first city region, with membership involving a commitment to making GM more age-friendly in terms of service provision, the built environment, and social infrastructure. The following reports are examples of the significant body of literature that both inform and speak to the work carried out by AfA:

- [Greater Manchester Age Friendly Strategy](#)
- [World Health Organization: The Global Network for Age-friendly cities and communities](#)

We hope this document will highlight AfA's achievements whilst helping communities and organisations deliver initiatives that will make Greater Manchester a great place in which to grow old. A summary of the recommendations and key findings of this report has also been published as a Good Practice Guide for community workers and organisations.

Methodology

The evaluation of the Supporting Ageing in Place Programme (SAiP hereafter) involved qualitative research with an ethnographic component for a better understanding of the microfunding process. An ethnographic approach involves spending time and working with people, enabling a more intimate exchange with – in this case – those active in different projects. The process also included:

- Collection and analysis of data produced in AfA reports;
- Participative observation in meetings;

- Regular discussion between team members to exchange insights about the process over the years;
- Interviews with project leaders and community members;
- Focus groups with a variety of actors;
- Follow-up and assessment of each stage in the process;
- Thematic coding of case studies

The methodology described allowed for a detailed assessment of the AfA microfunding programme over a period of seven years, and the ethnographic follow-up of a limited number of projects in Year 7 which provided a more detailed perspective of community initiatives. The researcher also kept a reflective diary of visits undertaken to various projects.

There were significant collaborations between organisations, community members, and partners, which translated into a valuable exchange of insights about the evaluation. Thus, co-production was not only a method that AfA promoted in the criteria for funding, but was also an ongoing style of work with partners and older people themselves. Findings from visits were shared with project leaders, and case studies produced by them were in turn shared with AfA, enhancing cross-fertilization and nurturing of the network. All these exchanges were fed into the overall evaluation with a mutual sharing of learning and insights. Finally, the recommendations at the end of this report are the result of collective work with older people and partner; we are grateful for their help and support in the preparation of this report.

Section 1: Ambition for Ageing: history, values, and main funding streams

In October 2014, Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) was awarded £10 million from the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better initiative, to lead the *Ambition for Ageing* partnership across the Greater Manchester (GM) region. The core ethos of the programme was that older people would play a key role in the design of the programme, generating real and sustainable change in their communities by identifying local assets and choosing where investments would be made. Through this '*test and learn'* approach, a small number of successful interventions were chosen to be rolled out at a bigger scale across GM. This took place from *Year 2* of the programme and was driven by the views of the older people involved. AfA was originally a five-year programme delivered by a cross-sector partnership with Local Delivery Leads (LDLs), working across 24 neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester. With an extension of the programme for a further two years, the programme was able to support communities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, helping organisations to deliver activities despite restrictions imposed by successive lockdowns and necessary changes in community organisation.

Overall, between 2015 - 2022, AfA supported more than 21,000 people to develop over 1,500 small projects in 24 neighbourhoods

1.1 The core values of AfA

An understanding of the **diverse experiences of ageing** was central to the philosophy of AfA, as was the need to address lifelong inequalities associated with class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, together with the impact of these on quality of life in old age. In addition, age-friendliness, social connectivity, and co-production were core values in the approach taken by AfA to support community activities. Small changes to a place can, it is argued, have a significant impact and the programme has produced various innovations to empower older people in the neighbourhoods in which they live. These achievements have also determined the scope of the evaluation of the programme.

To ensure that **equality** issues were adequately addressed, AfA established, in 2016, an *Equalities Board* (EB). The development of the Equalities Board was central to Ambition for Ageing (AfA) meeting its commitment to recognising that older people were drawn from a range of social, cultural and generational backgrounds, and that they may experience different types of inequalities and forms of oppression. The report *Widening Circles of Influence - An Evaluation of the Equalities Board (2020)*, reflects on the work of the Board and upon how equalities, and inequalities, were approached across the programme. The Board drew upon an inclusive culture of collaboration, consensus and community, established through methods of co-production. The Board evaluated how AfA achieved its commitment to inclusiveness, while ensuring that the programme promoted a more democratic structure to encourage individuals from minority or marginalised communities to participate. In addition to equality, *inclusion* and *intersectionality* helps us think about diversity in relation to overlapping identities, such as being a mother, woman, disabled, each of which may create challenges in accessing vital resources.

Accessibility was another key value of AfA, here referring to both *material accessibility* (such as accessible spaces, giving people the choice of paper forms in applications); and *social accessibility* (using the right language in communications and covering a wide-range of opportunities for diverse publics). This principle has oriented a work ethos within the programme towards a '*universal design*', to ensure that resources are accessible to as many people as possible. Team members and project leaders are encouraged to think about differences between and within groups. So, for example, if organising a social eating event, thinking about the different dietary requirements of those who will attend is an important requirement. This commitment towards accessibility demands taking into consideration possible *excluding factors*, such as language and attitudes when dealing with minority groups, but also on the *physical constraints* that older people may experience in accessing different activities.

Another core principle in AfA has been the application of **participatory methods**. This approach aims to offer older people greater control over the research and design process, with the aim of developing sustainable projects relevant to their needs. A key value in the process is that activities should be done *with* older people rather than *to* them. This included the use of community-embedded co-researchers which produced work grounded in local knowledge and understanding. Co-researchers also enjoyed high levels of trust amongst community members, an important aspect when conducting research particularly in the case of communities of identity or experience.

An approach that feeds into the commitment to participatory methodologies is **'test and learn'**, a method that translates into developing good practice through learning. In practical terms, this meant those involved in a project sharing learning as the work progressed, whether this was the organization, the funders, or community members. Test and learn also demands an inquisitive curiosity so that that all parties are attentive to the gaps that are not being addressed. This learning ethos translates into an endeavour to optimise the process through constant questioning: *who is missing in the group activities? What are the most effective means of creating and maintaining social connections for older people? What needs to be adjusted to reduce barriers for social connections in later life? What activities and adaptation of spaces can make neighbourhoods more age-friendly? What can be easy replicated across neighbourhoods? What adaptations (of spaces and activities) can make neighbourhoods more age-friendly?*

Based on these values, projects supported by AfA aimed to:

- Connect communities and older people across Greater Manchester.
- Help create places that were age-friendly and would empower people to live fulfilling lives.
- Create the opportunity for people to contribute to the ageing agenda, offering choice and helping them to make more and better connections so that they can live fulfilling lives in their communities.
- Include minority groups who may feel excluded from their immediate neighbourhood.
- Influence behaviours, beliefs and policies, resulting in a long term, large scale reduction in social isolation in older people across our city region.

1.2 Partnerships

Over the seven years of its existence, AfA worked alongside various partners who shared its values and ethos, these include the *voluntary, public* , and *educational* sectors. These partnerships proved fruitful in a number of ways, and conversations with some of these long-standing partners give evidence to the mutual learning involved. Some examples of this cross-fertilization are outlined below:

- **Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA)** has been a key partner since the start of the programme. Besides advising on qualitative research and devising co-research methods, researchers from MICRA, including a multi-disciplinary team based at MUARG (Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group), have carried out literature reviews, advised on developing particular programmes, and supported specific pieces of research.

- **The LGBT Foundation** became a partner through the formation of the Equalities Board. The Foundation hosted that group through its four years of existence. The partnership also gave rise to Pride in Ageing and Rainbow Flourish, both of which addressed the specific needs of older LGBT+ communities (see further below).

- **Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)** were influential in the development of the AfA programme and hosting a quantitative researcher for a period of 6 years, providing assistance in evaluation and related support. AfA hosted the Age-Friendly Challenge on behalf of The Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham. Over the two years of its existence, 53 neighbourhoods were recognised as age-friendly, or making excellent progress to becoming age-friendly. Successful areas were awarded with accreditation, official recognition from the Mayor and GM Combined Authority that their neighbourhood was age-friendly.

- **Macc (Manchester Community Central)** is a charity that provides support to voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations. Besides providing technical support to organisations who received funding, Macc also recruited Local Delivery Leads (LDLs), who played a central role in the model used by AfA in its initial five years. Macc also hosts the Greater Manchester Older People's Network (GMOPN hereafter), established in 2015 as part of the AfA programme, with a membership by 2022 of 430 people 50 and over from across GM. Whilst GMOPN received funding from AfA, it has played a significant interventionist role with members taking part in activities such as assessment panels, and in collective efforts in making neighbourhoods more age-friendly.

1.3 The microfunding model

The microfunding model has been used throughout the existence of AfA. Underpinning the programme's delivery model are two principles:

1. First, that a *targeted approach* which focuses on areas of greatest need will have a bigger impact.
2. Second, that *small improvements*, made at a local level, can be more effective than one broad 'top down' approach.

Thus, the programme as a whole had a place-based approach, with the objective of making communities *feel more connected* by offering greater opportunities and activities for older people in the places in which they live.

In the first few months of the programme, a scoping exercise was carried out by the AfA team in each of the target wards, to assess which existing community assets were already being used by older people, these including: libraries, lunch clubs and cafés. This information was then collated and used to ensure that the Local Delivery Leads (LDLs hereafter), commissioned by GMCVO to deliver the project in targeted wards, were able to link into support services and assets that were already available for older people in their area. LDLs worked alongside older people in the respective locations, mapping local assets and developing proposals. They delivered the programme across twenty-five wards in eight GM boroughs:

- **Bolton:** Crompton, Halliwell and Tongue-with-the Haulgh
- **Bury:** Moorside, Radcliffe North and St Mary's
- **Manchester:** Burnage, Moston, Hulme & Moss Side
- **Oldham:** Alexandra, Failsworth West and Crompton
- **Rochdale**: Central Rochdale, Small Bridge and Firgrove and West Middleton
- **Salford:** Weaste and Seedley, Broughton and Langworthy
- **Tameside:** Ashton Waterloo, Denton South and Newton and Hyde
- **Wigan:** Atherton, Leigh West and Pemberton
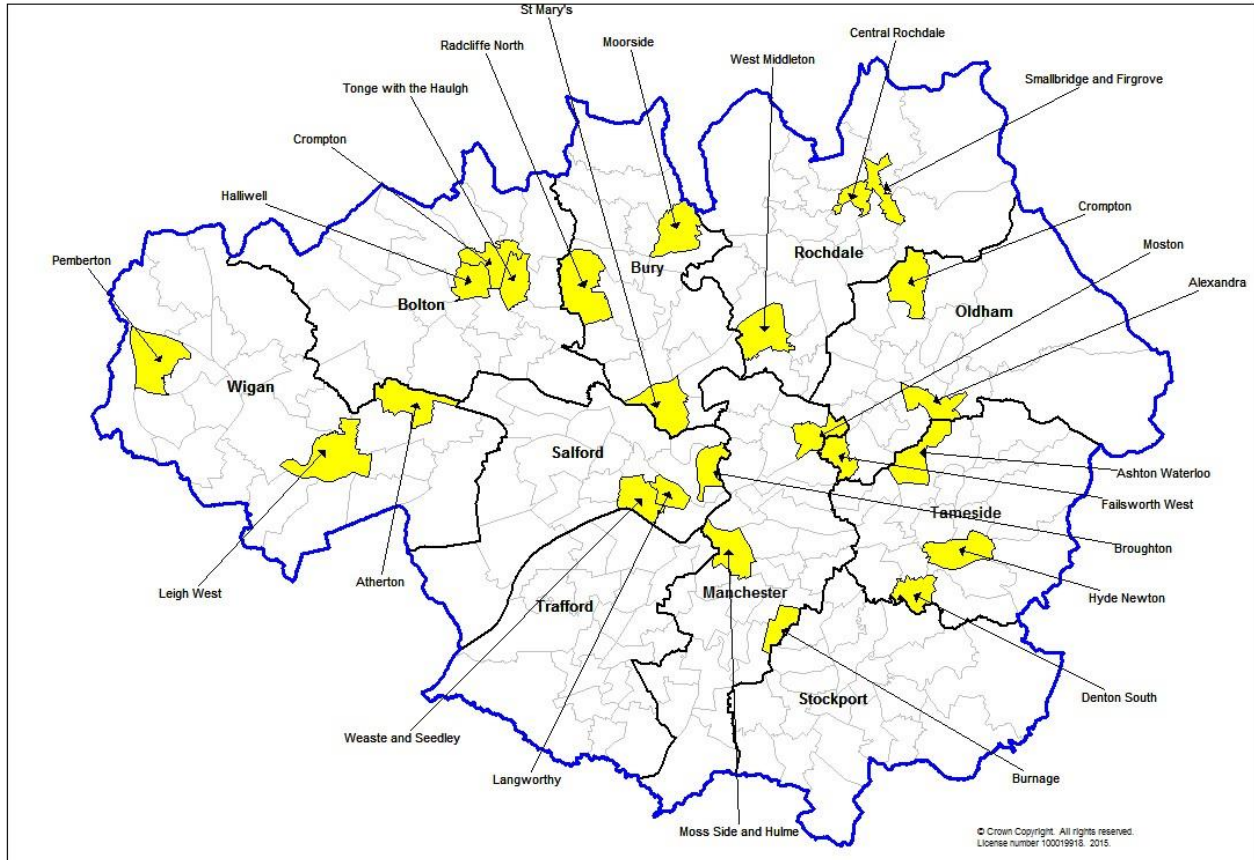
1.4 Microfunding with Local Delivery Leads

In April 2015, GMCVO commissioned organisations in each of the selected areas to act as local delivery leads. These would support older people in the targeted wards to volunteer as local 'investigators', uncovering and highlighting local assets. LDLs, who worked as community connectors, held devolved budgets and, via a participatory budgeting approach, older people themselves could decide where investments would be made. The GMCA Ageing Hub and local authorities worked with ageing leads, with support from organisations like *Action Together* and *Age UK*, to identify pilot areas to support the various initiatives. Over the period 2015-2020, AfA followed a blueprint of working with LDLs, who provided in-house technical support, this being especially important for organisations with limited experience of applying for funding and delivering community projects. Because LDLs were familiar with the local context they were more likely to know which organisations might be experiencing difficulties and which ones had the potential to deliver activities that met the needs of individuals needing the greatest assistance, thus helping to ensure the inclusiveness and sustainability of projects.

The Local Delivery Leads (LDLs) in the areas were as follows:

- **Bolton**: Bolton CVS in partnership with Age UK Bolton & Bolton at Home
- **Bury**: Groundwork in Bury, Bolton, Oldham and Rochdale
- **Manchester:** Manchester Metropolitan University (School of Architect) in partnership with Southway Housing
- **Oldham:** Age UK Oldham in partnership with Action Together
- **Rochdale:** Kashmiri Youth Project
- **Salford**: Age UK Salford in Partnership with Inspiring Communities Together & Salford CVS
- **Tameside**: Age UK Tameside in partnership with Action Together
- **Wigan**: Age UK Wigan

In 2020 (Year 6), the emergence of COVID-19 had a profound impact both on the lives of older people, as well as organisations working on their behalf. Given this context, AfA modified its approach by giving direct support to community organisations without the support of LDLs, liaising instead with project leaders. All parties involved engaged in a process of learning to navigate the restrictions arising from the pandemic, thus taking the test and learn ethos to another level in order to deliver projects with more limited resources. As AfA stopped using LDLs, technical support was outsourced to Manchester Community Central (Macc). In addition, AfA members of staff became more involved with local organisations, as well as taking on a more active role in the process of applications for funding.

1.5 Scaled Programmes

In contrast with the microfunding projects, the projects in the scaled programmes had access to larger sums of money. The themes were informed by an event called *Growing Older in My Greater Manchester,* held in January 2017, to encourage people aged 50 and above to get involved with the design and development process of the AfA programme. Nearly 60 ideas

were generated through this process, which in turn helped AfA shape the development of the scaled programmes, reflected in four workshops on the following topics.

- Age-friendly places and space
- Age-friendly economy
- Cultural participation
- Age-friendly information & communications

Drawing on the contributions by older people and stakeholders in these workshops, a development strategy was written in 2018 to systematise ways of scaling-up certain activities. The rationale was to use a benchmark idea and increase its scope both in size, as well as across locations. In other words, the AfA team would take an idea that worked in one neighbourhood and try it out in other places delivering programmes across GM. In contrast with the microfunding projects, these projects had access to larger sums of money ranging from £8,000 to £250,000, and the theme areas were selected in line with views and recommendations from older people as part of a public consultation. Staff involved in the delivery of scaled programmes identified many positive outcomes, in particular, the wide-ranging lessons and outputs produced, and the opportunity to learn more about different approaches. AfA delivered 10 scaled programmes, which are listed in **Appendix One** along with relevant links which provide more information on the programmes and related partners.

1.6 Ageing Equally and the Dispersed Communities funding stream (Year 7)

Ageing Equally was a research programme focusing on what makes a good place in which to grow older for people who belong to minority communities. The place-based model used in the microfunding programme in AfA had been a relevant and effective approach for older people living in particular neighbourhoods of Greater Manchester. However, it ran the risk of marginalizing individuals whose social lives were not necessarily place-based, as in the case of the LGBT+ community, some ethnic minority groups, or the deaf and hard of hearing community. Researchers have referred to these communities as '*dispersed communities*' i.e. a group of individuals who share an identity or experience but who do not live in the same neighbourhood. In some cases, there is no significant concentration of members of a particular community of identity/experience residing in one place, which means that individuals have to travel to other neighbourhoods to meet their social, cultural and / or religious needs:

> *"I will talk about this scatter-factor, we have Ramsbottom, there is Prestwich, Radcliffe, Whitefield, and they're not easy. You've travelled on the tram today and it's not an easy venue to get here if you're living far away. The other thing is how do they keep in touch? There are no mosques in those areas, there are no community centres" – Jinnah Centre, Bury*

Amongst some dispersed communities, language may also be a differentiating factor that may prevent individuals from accessing community services in their immediate neighbourhood:

"I think the issue of language, this also plays a key role because when you are an asylum seeker or refugee you are quite vulnerable, you don't know who is going to share your information with the immigration and next day you just find immigration at your door sending you back home, people are so scared" – Project leader

Through its history of working with a wide range of communities of identity and experience, AfA has been aware of the limitations of place-based models, and the need to develop other approaches. The programme has from its inception used different funding streams to address the needs of non-place-based communities, notably *Pride in Ageing* and the *Greater Manchester Older People's Network* (*GMOPN).* In partnership with the LGBT Foundation, conversations started about developing another narrative alongside the Ageing in Place work. One of the ideas was to develop activities for older LGBT outside Manchester city centre. Subsequently, the *Pride in Ageing* programme launched in June 2019, part funded by AfA as part of its Ageing Equally scaled programme and hosted at the LGBT Foundation. Covid-19 made the project more challenging because of people's reluctance to go out and meet others but the programme provided an opportunity for learning with the potential to expand it as a pilot project with dispersed communities.

Pride in Ageing and GMOPN represent an important legacy from the AfA programme. After initial funding, they were able to secure additional support to continue their work. Members of the GMOPN have also become active co-producers as they integrated the AfA process through their participation in assessment panels, and assumed roles as community reporters (*Talking About my Generation*)[1], photographers (*Old Frame, New Picture*)[2], and activists (*This is what an activist looks like*)[3].

While the microfunding work mostly focused on place-based initiatives, there was a small number of projects that included members of dispersed communities who accessed services through place-based organisations. Examples included work with refugees carried out by *Warm Hut* in Salford, and *Drumming out of Isolation* in Bury, which included hard of hearing participants. Year 7 microfunding helped Warm Hut to purchase arts and craft materials and stimulate positive discussions about participants' memories explored through photographs that connected individuals' trajectories over place and time:

Bloco Ashê Bury Community Samba Group are a community-led percussion group formed in Bury in 2008. Inspired by the work of Evelyn Glennie, a percussionist and recording artist who is almost completely deaf, the project leaders encouraged members of the hard of hearing community to participate:

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[1] https://talkingaboutmygeneration.co.uk/
[2] https://www.gmopn.org.uk/old-frame-new-picture-gallery
[3] https://www.gmopn.org.uk/this-is-what-an-activist-looks-like-1

Warm Hut (Salford)
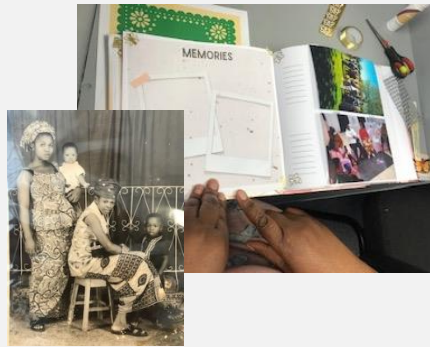
"We are helping them create a memory, encouraging them to create memory box...It's more to raise awareness, in our community we are not aware of Dementia, even though we do have it in the community they don't recognize it, it's a taboo, where people get really bad treatment, they think if your loosing your memory is witchcraft, so we are doing this to educate people in the community".

"I still remember the areas I would avoid going around here because it was too dangerous, and you know a lot of people here with a language barrier, there is a lot of immigrants and refugees, they have got it very bad, some young people and me would try to help them with interpreting, then it grew from that, instead of a place to just get together, we were thinking how can we help our community".

"We are using the knowledge and English and trying to translate to their mother tongue....Luckily, one of our workers speaks many of those languages".

Drumming out of Isolation – Bloco Ashe (Bury)

"The project is to document and celebrate, through audio and video, the journey a group of over 50-year-olds in Bury, from isolation to integration back into the wider community, through drumming".

"During Covid they [hard of hearing people] have had a lot of trouble, you see, people are wearing masks so they can't see peoples mouths, so they cant lip read at all, see facial expressions...We had a couple of deaf participants who were able to be completely involved in the sessions which, shows that everyone can get involved with this activity!"

"We also got a bit of extra funding in to do a welding session and we did what we eventually called the Clampestry, and it was body percussion".

"In the past we had death/blind little boy who would just smile all the time, just holding on to the drum, because of the vibration".

In *Year Seven* of AfA, it became clear that changes were needed to include dispersed communities in future work in a more targeted manner. To that end, in September 2021, AfA's team of researchers together with BAME organisations, engaged in a conversation about how to address this gap. Together, they sketched out projects that would speak to the immediate needs of dispersed communities. Some of the preliminary findings from this work indicated the need for appropriate funding to cover transport costs for members of dispersed communities to attend activities alongside their communities of identity and experience. Because many may live some distance from centres where their communities of identity and/or experience meet, it is crucial that they can reach these without prohibitive travel costs. The value of this insight is illustrated in the excerpts below from a visit to *Jinnah Day Care Centre* in Bury, an organization that provides transport to visitors:

Case Study

Jinnah Day Care Centre (Bury)

"Because they live quite far out there are not many community centres like this near to where they live so this gives them a chance, we put transport on and everything so it gives them a chance to come in and join in some of the activities".
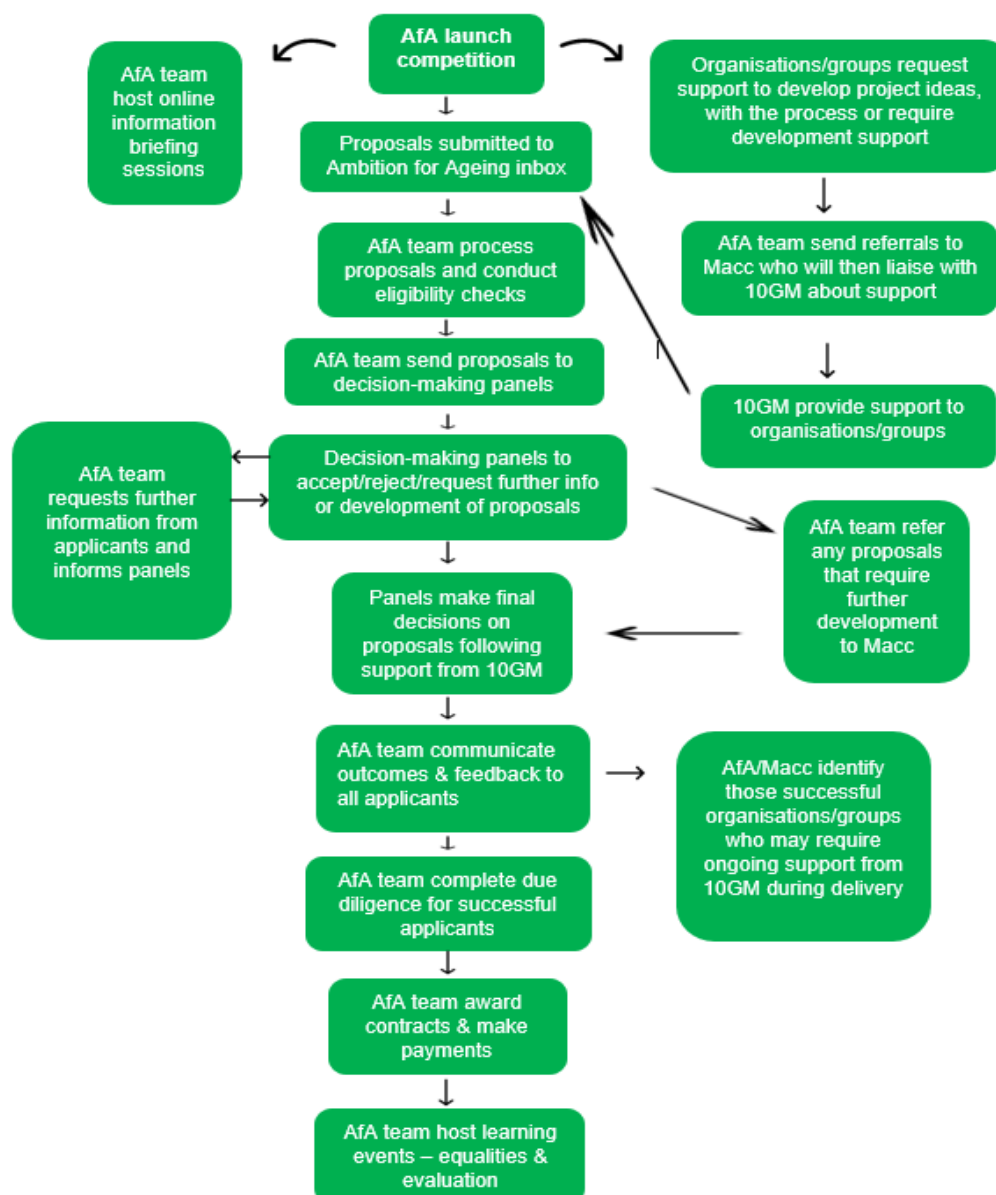
"If I was to walk, it would take me one hour to get here".

"It's like getting out of bed in the morning, you've got to convince yourself, 'I can do this, one step at a time.' Once you overcome the hurdles it gets easier, especially when you see smiling faces, they give you encouragement and it's nice, it's lovely. We have a bit of a singalong here as well".

Section 2: Supporting Ageing in Place Microfunding Projects (Year 6 & 7)

Supporting Ageing in Place (SAiP) started in Year 6 as a new fund using a place-based microfunding approach. The model was aligned with local authority ageing in place work, targeting neighbourhoods in need of additional resources. The projects were intended to help connect older people in neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester. In 2020, AfA funded 22 projects in what became a pilot for the SAiP programme. In 2021, £20,000 was allocated to each neighbourhood, with a maximum of £2K per project. The plan was to fund projects across 10 local authorities: Bolton (Farnworth and Kearsley); Bury East; Manchester (Gorton and Burnage); Oldham (Saddleworth); Rochdale (Kirkholt); Salford (Swinton); Stockport (Reddish); Tameside (Stalybridge); Trafford (Clifford); and Wigan North. The process design in Year 7 was as follows:

The proposed timeline for 2021 was as follows:

Competition launched — 10th May
- Deadline for proposals: midday, 26th July

Round 1 deadline and panels
- Deadline for proposals: midday, 14th June
- Round 1 panels: 28th June – 7th July

Round 2 deadline — June / July
- Deadline for proposals: midday, 26th July

Round 1 inductions & delivery beings
- Contracts issued. Delivery begins Monday 2nd August.
- Round 1 inductions: 3rd August & 5th August

Round 2 panels — Early August / Mid-August
- Panel dates: 9th August – 20th August

Round 2 inductions and delivery beings
- Round 2 inductions: 21st and 23rd September

Delivery ends — September / 31st December

2.1 The Supporting Ageing in Place (SAiP) evaluation

This evaluation of Supporting Ageing in Place (SAiP) is designed to provide an overview of the funding process developed in the final year of the programme (Year 7). In this evaluation the following stages have been assessed:

1. Application, Information Sessions & Submission
2. Technical Support
3. Assessment Panels
4. Funding packs, contracts & investment
5. Induction
6. Monitoring & case studies
7. Delivery

The process evaluation was guided by the following research questions, with the objective of fostering a reflection on how the programme was meeting the needs of diverse communities in Greater Manchester. The questions were followed through each stage of the evaluation and informed recommendations for future work:

Question 1: What were the lessons learnt over the six years of microfunding projects?
Question 2: What changes were implemented in Year 7?
Question 3: What are the recommendations arising from the work?

The first question relates to the lessons learned from previous evaluations carried out within AfA. This learning informed some of the changes implemented in Year 7 (question 2). The third question draws on the qualitative research undertaken in Year 7 with different actors, including stakeholders and community members. The evaluation summarises the design and actions involved in each stage of the process, how they evolved to enhance the core values of AfA, and concludes with a set of recommendations for organisations endeavouring to support community initiatives.

2.1.1 Application, Information Sessions and Submission

"AfA did everything right making it easy to apply for the grant. Support was there if needed. The biggest challenge was to register as a CIC [Community Interest Companies], which I did following AfA's advice. Once I understood the difference between being a sole trader and being a CIC, it was fairly straightforward. With hindsight I should have been a CIC from the beginning, so I'm really grateful they suggested I should do this" – *Project leader*

Supporting Ageing in Place (SAiP) was launched in early May 2021, with AfA producing guidance documents for potential bidders, these explaining the principles behind SAiP, the type of projects to be funded, areas covered, the amount of funding, and related issues. The document also included dates and links to register to three online information sessions about how to apply for funding. The document was disseminated through AfA's website, e-Bulletin lists from partner organisations, together with networks across GM.

A link to a survey was sent to all who applied for SAiP funding. One question asked how long it took to complete the application form, with 14% of respondents ticking 'more than 8 hours', this suggesting that people may still have found the application process difficult even though the forms had been simplified. The following responses to the question of how to improve the application process, reveal variations in the range of skills amongst those applying:

"I thought it was an easy to understand grant application process. I am a member of staff and have applied for grants in the past. They are sometimes really difficult to complete, and this can be a barrier for members of the community. This one was refreshingly simple and straightforward, and I think it would be simple for community members to complete also, thereby removing one of the barriers they sometimes have for not applying"

"It's difficult for older people to process online information. Reading from a screen, following a long sequence of steps and buttons to press, digesting a lot of information at one sitting – all these are hard. So, shorter sentences; fewer buttons; simpler guidance forms. And how can we 'sign' digital forms? Maybe more oldies, fewer techies in your design teams"

AfA was committed to breaking down barriers that can prevent people from applying for grants, and language can be a considerable barrier in this regard, particularly in areas with large BAME communities. However, being able to provide the form in different languages proved difficult to achieve. Instead, staff were available for telephone conversations whilst also linking groups with local support.

From talking to project leaders, it became apparent that in some areas individuals felt under pressure with the amount of work involved when applying for funding. Project leaders often worked on their own, and sometimes were the only person in their group with the skills to submit funding applications. Consequently, some project leaders felt exhausted by the additional duty of writing bid applications to keep projects going. When designing the

application forms, funders must calculate the best approach taking into account the relationship between bidders (who are often older themselves), technology, and resources (including staff capacity).

Research findings and recommendations going forward:

Timing	Ideal timeframe should be two years, from receiving the funding to having projects delivered and potentially sustained over the long-term. A six-month preparation work with a three-month delivery period may also be viable. A flexible approach should be adopted depending the project to be delivered.
Application forms	Need to invest in capacity-building to equip volunteers with the necessary skills. Suggestions by respondents to manage potential difficulties with web forms included: a step- by- step guide (to fill in forms); video demonstrations; screen shots of the process; peer training; and linking in with other organisations who offer technical support. Having digital and paper copies would be another option.
Eligibility & due diligence	Some respondents raised the question as to whether some of the legal requirements to apply, such as insurance, being a constituted group, etc., could be dropped to allow more groups to apply for funding.
Language	Jargon should be explained in induction sessions. Examples include: constitution, public liability insurance, safeguarding, social prescribing, co-production, age-friendliness, and inclusiveness.
Follow-up	The use of SurveyMonkey for feedback proved to be a fruitful addition in Year 7.
Inclusiveness	It is important to provide smaller groups with support so that have an equal chance of a successful application. Legal requirements can be excluding: To be a constituted group you need a committee, and groups without members who are able to have a bank account or engage with administrative tasks, for example, residents living in a housing association complex, have limited funding opportunities. More information is needed to make groups more aware of how to overcome this constraint.

2.1.2 Technical support

"A development worker from the Capacity–building team at Macc had a look at our initial application, and discussed where we could make changes by using the funder's criteria. He arranged several meetings with us to go over more specific

changes in detail, and followed up multiple times to check in with our progress. Some of the feedback seemed simple, but was effective. He helped us break our answers down to be more concise and enhance our application. They also helped us with more complex aspects, for example considering how the project is adaptable within the Covid world, which is something we hadn't considered"
– Project leader

The existence and quality of technical support is an important part of the application process, not least because it has direct implications for AfA's commitment to inclusiveness. Before Year 6, the microfunding model used by AfA worked directly with delivery organisations, which included large and grassroots organisations, and with LDLs. Technical support was then available through the LDLs allocated for each area. The asset-based development work performed by LDLs placed them in a strong position in becoming familiar with the needs of local organisations.

An AfA team member described the first five years of the programme as the 'Rolls Royce' of the AfA experience because of greater availability of funds and time. The fact that from Year 6, AfA no longer had the resources to support LDLs was seen as having both negative and positive effects. Members of staff stressed that LDLs were a considerable help regarding support because of their familiarity with the local community in which they were based. On the other hand, respondents praised the way connections with project leaders became stronger without the mediation of LDLs. Whilst previously, AfA felt one step removed in the process, in Year 6 and 7 the team was happy with being closer to the delivery of projects. AfA was able to build on its track record of work, and the strong reputation and trust it had built amongst communities across GM. However, in this new model, where the team was the first port of call for applicants, there was also the risk of over-burdening staff.

The focus group with **Local Infrastructure Organisations** (LIOs hereafter) provided valuable insights. LIOs are local third sector organisations, such as local branches of Age UK, Community and Voluntary Services, or Action Together, who provide services and development support. One of the key points they stressed is the risk of larger and more experienced key players securing the funding because they have experience with filling in applications and tailoring their projects to the specific funding calls. They also highlighted that standardised applications forms may unwittingly exclude grassroots organisations:

"We are grateful for the money but you have to look at all aspects when giving feedback. Those with more capacity won the competition"
– LIOs giving technical support.

Others stressed the need for more accessible language:

"There was an issue of internal capacity. For a lot of them it's the first time they are filling an application. It's a problem of how they interpret it; use of language"
– LIOs giving technical support

One participant noted that inexperienced players could potentially improve their application if they were allowed to pitch rather than write the idea down. One solution suggested by some

would be to make the process more informal with workshop-like sessions, where people could look together at the application form and accompanying guidance:

"We are missing out on the context that you cannot capture in a five-page application. The personal encounter gives context, shows passion and commitment. When you have a person in the room, it all comes out. After you met that group, it's such a straightforward process. With the older group, that face to face stage makes all the difference" – LIOs giving technical support

Participants pointed to a shift with the pandemic given that only a portion of potential bidders had the confidence to go online, but difficulties are not restricted to language and digital exclusion, but also lack of confidence by those 'new to the game':

"[Small organisations] are scared of taking public money. They feel unsure they can deliver" – LIOs giving technical support

*"We were not decision makers, we had no influence on who got the support. Some of the lesser groups never got anything and the big players did. We were not involved in the selection process and that's a major flaw in the process".
– LIOs giving technical support*

Focus groups with project leaders also yielded positive results. They were generally satisfied with the support provided and thought there was sufficient information in the information and induction sessions:

"The first application I did was rejected, but it came with feedback; they said there was information missing. Then I went to Salford CVS for them to proofread and improve the application, they did, and then it got accepted" – Project leader

Many expressed they would have welcomed additional training:

"We all need to upskill ourselves, so if there's support for that, we will take it. Any training around mental health, or benefits for older people" – Project leader

"When we were trying to register ourselves as a group, we did some things wrong. People really need specialist advice so they don't make mistakes along the way" – Project leader

"Training is important. People have got passion to help a community but they need someone to guide them and support them so that they don't make mistakes: governance, study visits to share experiences, financial management. If they did that, they would help a lot of organisations" – Project leader

Research findings and recommendations going forward

Inclusiveness	Information from ageing leads can help small organisations, a relationship that is often based on mutual trust because of place-based connections. A more sustainable approach would be to equip organisations with the necessary skills so that they can apply to different funders and increase long-term possibilities for funding.
Capacity-building	Capacity-building workshops should be run to introduce potential bidders and smaller organisations to skills such as writing a proposal, governance (including specialist advice on legal documentation and constitutions), networking, social prescribing, asset mapping, and financial management. Organisations of any size may require regular/further training on the topic of mental health to better meet community's needs.
Distribution of funds	More must be done to ensure a more equal distribution of funds across different organisations within the same borough, thus avoiding one organization monopolizing funding.
Type of support	Support sessions should aim at being as informal and interactive as possible, offering a space for learning and networking. The outsourcing of technical support is a good model if there is no capacity to provide support in-house.
Timing	Ensure that as many organisations have equal access to support. Time constraints is a particular hindrance for small groups because they are not as experienced at completing forms.

2.1.3 Assessment Panels

"Normally we would have had a lovely in–person session and work through the obstacles. Pre pandemic we had people pitching their ideas. Half of the panel would be in tears with some of the smaller groups talking about what they wanted to do" – LIOs giving technical support

After the deadline for submissions was over, a funding panel met, including AfA staff members, older people, and representatives from the local authorities and local organisations. They were asked to score each of the proposals on how well they intend to reach people aged 50+ from marginalised communities who were at risk of social isolation. The "dos and don'ts" of a bid assessment was co-produced with older people in August 2017, as a result of the initial panel training session. This was a way of passing on the advice and experience of other older people who had been involved in this process in earlier stages of the programme, ensuring that it was not just a matter of telling older people what to do as panel members.

While bids should ideally be evenly distributed across the selected boroughs, it was often the case that some had much higher numbers than others. For example, from a total of 68 applications in round 1, numbers varied between 2 and 13 per borough. The reasons for this are varied: for example, in 2021 a particular ward had benefitted from a different source of funding, resulting in no applications being submitted. However, reasons could also be some groups not having insufficient skills and time to engage with applications (see further section on Technical Support and the final section on Sustainability for recommendations).

Research findings and recommendations going forward

Timing	The turnaround between the feedback from panels and the contracts going out should ideally be no longer than 4 weeks.
Criteria for assessment	Rather than rejecting a proposal that is promising, ask bidders to re-submit after technical support.
	People taking part in the panel should be familiar with the area, and the older people that integrate the panel should be from the neighbourhood in question, so that they have some local knowledge.
Inclusiveness	Panels should reflect the diversity of communities in GM and have more than one older person.
	Move towards greater flexibility when it comes to applications, with staff and assessment panels judging on a case-by-case basis, and regarding applications written by non-English speakers.
	Panels can help to identify groups who might struggle with delivery.

2.1.4 Funding packs, contracts & investment

"The existence of the group is the main thing, we can't always secure big funding, because we don't have a fundraiser with experience doing it. The small pots of money are as crucial as the big ones, and it gives us an opportunity to do this. With big funders we wouldn't be able to do this, so this is just as important if not more important than the big ones" – Project leader

Once the project proposal had been approved by the assessment panel, letters went out to successful bidders with a contract agreement. The funding pack comprised the following documents:

1. Communications Guide: all relevant information regarding communication and dissemination including information on how to refer to AfA; branding; press release; and photography and filming
2. Film and photo consent form
3. Demographics form
4. Instructions on how to collect and submit demographics data

5. Case study template
6. AfA and NLCF logos: projects need to include NLCF and AfA logos. It is not necessary to acknowledge the funders once delivery is completed.

Some project leaders disliked the idea of signing forms electronically, especially in the case of contracts. Approachable and available support over the phone greatly offset potential difficulties, and members of AfA staff were praised in being able to provide help through the process. There was also a general perception that some pots of money were just not 'worth the effort'. In other words, funders have to be aware of the amount of work they are asking project leaders to undertake. Following the same reasoning, the amount of monitoring required has to be compatible with the amount of funding received:

"The funding, yet again, is more funder-orientated, than service-user orientated. I put in an application where I said I want to do this because I've talked to people, and they said they want this happening. I identify a fund that I think would suit the criteria, and he tells me that I don't fit his criteria, after I've spent five, six hours, two days, three days filling in ten-page application, which I think, I'm not going to do that" – Project leader

Research findings and recommendations going forward

Timing	Time between the feedback from panels and the contracts going out should be as short as possible to give maximum delivery time.
	For small organisations starting a new project with few resources, delays in receiving funding can be an additional burden.
Contracts	Contracts for small pots of money (2,000k and below) should be more straightforward.

2.1.5 Induction

Induction sessions were offered to project leaders who were successful in their application for funding. They provided an opportunity to find out more about what was required in terms of evaluation, and what support was available during delivery. Contracts and funding packs were usually sent out before the induction session, except where was a query or clarification required before the contract was finalised. There were four induction sessions in Year 7: two for projects accepted in the first round and two for projects accepted in the second round. The sessions lasted two hours and while there is time allocated at the end for questions, at the end of each subsection participants can ask for clarification. Attendees found these sessions helpful and the team received praise for this stage of the process.

New information included in Year 7	
Co-production	Importance of co-designing activities **with** older people
Creative thinking	Finding new ways of promoting activity to older people who do not normally engage
Social distancing	New ways of sharing space and managing numbers
Networking	Encouraging participants to connect
Networking (at the organisational scale)	Connecting with other projects/organisations in your locality
Digital connectivity	Supporting older people to connect digitally

The break-out rooms, a feature of meetings conducted via Zoom, proved to be a welcome addition. While networking was not the purpose of the session, it was a very positive unexpected outcome. Participants asked for more similar opportunities and some exchanged contact numbers/addresses. In small groups, participants were asked to explore the following questions:

- How can social connections be improved for a more diverse range of people?
- What can be easily replicated to make more places age friendly?

Participants were mostly concerned with, first, Covid restrictions, risk assessment and safeguarding; second, timescale; and third, the involvement of older people in projects. Established organisations that have long-term spaces in which to base their work, tended to be more well-prepared to address the guidelines related to Covid precautions and safeguarding. For example, Ladybarn Community Hub had already experienced the opening of activities a few months previously so they knew what to do in terms of making participants feel confident about joining in activities. They also have a large space where people can gather while respecting social distance. For this round of funding they decided to run creative workshops that they knew to be popular (*see following page for case study*).

Research findings and recommendations going forward

Test & learn	Induction sessions are a good opportunity to introduce people to new concepts, such as social prescribing.
	In Year 7, a sub-section on equalities and intersectionality was included.
Networking	Induction sessions is a great opportunity for project leaders to meet one another and to hear about what people are doing.

Ladybarn Community Hub (Manchester)

"We have a lot of mental health issues, so I don`t go out at all, this is my rest, this is my only chance to go out, meet with my friends, relax, chill, be myself, doing whatever I want without having to think about it, for me this club is extremely important, more valuable than anything else, I know it's only 2 to 3 hours a week, but it`s 3 hours a week that I actually need to be there too, every second is invaluable, you have a laugh, tell a joke".

"And you can think sometimes that you`re the only one who has mental health issues, but you know it`s not truth, you can be sat down next to someone with some issue, it`s more like a family than anything else being here in this club".

"This is an activity that has just carried on and it's really well-attended. It can be hard to get new people through the door, specially after Covid. We are also struggling to recruit volunteers. The kitchen staff started two months ago. The chef works on a casual basis and invoices us. Advertise lots through the library, social media, door to door. Talking to them is very important: they wanted more yoga and flower arranaina".

2.1.6 Monitoring and Case Studies

"For me monitoring is part of the process of running an activity and [writing up the case studies] helps you evaluate the difference that you're making. It's part of what we are doing"– *Project leader*

"We got a few quotes and took pictures. We learned a lot because when they ask us the problems we faced and how we can improve, it makes us think. We keep learning along the way. It helps for the project to re-evaluate itself"– *Project leader*

One of the requirements of the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) was monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate the value of funded projects. But beyond being a requirement, this process generates learning in this test and learn programme, shedding light on relevant aspects such as: *who is taking part in the activities? How are older people are engaging with the project? Are projects making a difference in terms of making places more age-friendly? And how inclusive are microfunded projects?* This section examines how monitoring can illustrate the limitations as well as benefits of a particular project.

The evaluation of projects consists drawn upon questionnaires, these answered on a voluntary basis. Questionnaires were available only in English, and project leaders had to help in cases of language and other barriers. Project leaders also had to complete a project

case study to capture impact, a template for which was included in the funding pack along with photo/film consent form.

Case studies were designed to be mini-stories, to inform the reader about the progress and benefits demonstrated by a project. Good case studies inform interested parties what could be achieved with small pots of money. Case studies provide a unique perspective because they are based on the direct experience of participants in the projects, from organisers to community members. A researcher-in-residence at GMCVO from the University of Manchester collected case study data in early 2019, with the view of getting people to talk about the benefits and limitation of the various projects. That data was used to write-up case studies, adding to the rich databank of cases compiled by AfA, including cases written by LDLs in previous years (the link for those case studies is in Appendix One).

This form of monitoring offered valuable insights into the problems some projects experienced and the solutions devised to overcome these. However, researchers had observed in previous years that LDLs and project leaders in writing the case studies, were reluctant to acknowledge failure. For project leaders, monitoring was sometimes seen as yet another responsibility they had to undertake alongside other administrative tasks. In addition, the questionnaires were seen as a burden by some participants who were reluctant to fill in information they considered private:

> "I don't think people mind saying where they live, which year they were born, but when you start asking people beyond a certain age what ethnic group they belong to, details of their disability or sexual orientation, I don't think it will strike a chord. With younger people it might not be a problem, but with older people…also, the majority of our users to respond online, that's an unrealistic expectation; I know there are a few technical savvy 60 70 year olds but most are not, but the vast majority in this location won't even have a computer" – *Project leader*

However, case studies were perceived as necessary in capturing information about projects, revealing what was going well and/or what needed to change. The key value, as stressed in the induction sessions, was to 'keep your antennae out and include all lessons so that others can learn from your experience'. In Year 7, participants were unanimous about the benefits of writing- up the case studies, and found it a helpful and valuable method of capturing ongoing development. Greater stress during induction sessions on the importance of including 'failures' proved fruitful, as evident in the following extracts of case studies produced by project leaders which clearly stated challenges faced during the process:

Case Study Examples:

1. **Minehead Dementia Carers**, Manchester - Old Moat & Withington: A monthly support group for people aged 50 and over who are caring for someone with dementia –

   The café sessions are split into two sections: a group of carers who are able to spend time with other carers and professionals from Together Dementia Support, the Admiral Nurses and the Dementia Advisors from Greater Manchester Mental Health Services (GMMH); a group of people living with dementia, who are supported by a volunteer from Together Dementia Support.

The main challenge we faced was the resurgence of COVID-19 with the omicron variant. Everything moved quickly in relation to the speed of the spread of the virus, so we had to cancel our December café at short notice, as we did not know enough about the its likely impact. According to the scientists, it is possible that COVID-19 may surge like this in the winter for some years. So, for anyone considering group activities, that could be affected by cancelling face to face sessions, it could be useful to check if participants have: access to a digital device; have connectivity; need support or training.

"It has been great to meet other carers who understand and can help me with ideas on how to cope."

"Just being able to have a conversation with another adult has been amazing. My husband doesn't really understand humour anymore, so it has been lovely to have a laugh."

Minehead Dementia Carers Group

Noah's Art therapy animals project

2. **Noah's Art, Tameside:** This project developed a team of specialist care home ambassadors (CHA) of which the majority are over 50. They visited care homes with trained therapy dogs owned by the organization –

"Many of the over 50s have struggled with email contacts and requests for information using technology which has meant weekly emails have been replaced with individual phone calls to ensure everyone is on track with sessions. Ensuring consistency of interventions has also been a challenge. We have worked with a variety of dogs who have different skills and abilities. Some sessions have been more about play with the dog rather than really engaging residents. Discussing with staff after the session has resulted in comments such as the interaction with the dog is valuable regardless of what activity took place".

3. **Oldham Community Radio:** This training project aimed to expand the team of volunteers involved in broadcasts as presenters and programme assistants:

"We would advise others to take longer over recruitment and to "cast the net wider" of where you are looking for participants. Although it must be noted that concerns about Covid safety did have an impact especially amongst older people in willingness to take part in group activities. We also learned to be flexible. We had to revise our plans as we went along to incorporate some local residents on a smaller scale to just take part in a few activities to include them within the broadcast, rather than have everyone take part in a multi-week formal course".

Oldham Community Radio

Dancing with Dementia project

4. **Dancing with Dementia** (Salford) - Hosted lunches to reach out to people living with dementia, their family, friends, and carers:

"You've really opened a new sense of belonging to not only mum but for myself and I've got much better at supporting and become a lot closer to mum because

Research findings and recommendations going forward

Demographic forms	Need for greater flexibility regarding how to submit forms electronically, with a hybrid system wherever possible.
	Question about people's sexuality is frowned upon by some participants, and some project leaders don't consider it appropriate.
	Monitoring helps funders and community organisations to assess the audiences of projects, to reflect on how the project enhanced connectivity amongst older people.
Case studies	Emphasis of case studies should be on what can be achieved with small pots of money, and the specific experiences of running a project.
	The test and learn principle should inform the writing up of the case studies: successes are just as important as what doesn't work.
	Case studies help generate learning (who the project is reaching and gaps in participation); showcases the work and the impact of the project; highlights the impact small projects have on place; and can be used to influence future design.
	People should be allowed to use their own case study template if preferred.
	It is advisable to start thinking about case studies from the beginning of delivery rather than leaving it to the end.
Photographs	As long as there is informed consent, photographs are a sound strategy to promote the group/activity.
Test & learn	Requests for monitoring must be compatible with the amount of funding being offered because of the time involved.

2.1.7 Delivery

"The delivery was the hardest part due to the situation. The pandemic effected the way we could engage and deliver the course. We learnt to be flexible and adapt to the situation so we could still provide the support and assistance that was intended but in a different way"– Project leader

"Delegation and planning ahead is so important – it takes longer than you think to organise these types of events, when they are new and in the trial phase"
– Project leader

To monitor delivery, AfA's researcher-in-residence used an ethnographic approach, which involved talking to participants, getting a sense of the space being used for the activity, and as much as possible, taking part in the activities being offered. Examples are included below of projects delivered in Year 7, using cases that illustrated strengths and weaknesses identified by respondents. The rationale for the selection of case studies was to present a wide range of activities carried out in neighbourhoods with distinct characteristics. We have organised our analysis according to the strengths and challenges that became salient at the delivery stage. We are grateful to the project leaders that shared their experiences with us.

While Covid restrictions, together with a **lack of confidence to participate**, was a challenge for all the organisations, and a few project leaders struggled to **recruit participants**. Costs associated with advertising, room hire, refreshments, insurance, printing and equipment, and keeping people given the uncertainty of the pandemic, was especially difficult for small groups that did not have spare cash to cover costs while waiting for funding:

"One of the biggest challenges was waiting for the funding and the risk of people losing interest. The uncertainty associated with Covid, whether the activity is going to happen or not, also put people away" – Project leader

"To get people in is another thing, and to keep them interested"– Project leader

There were also challenges related to the geographical particularities of a place: people who live in sheltered housing tend to engage with activities that happen in the scheme, so without appropriate research a newcomer delivering a project may find that they are not attracting enough participants. That happened in a few cases to individuals in a CIC [Community Interest Company] starting a new activity in an area about which they had limited knowledge, pointing to the need for connecting groups and community members. Organisations that part of larger networks have more experience in overcoming geographical barriers:

"We exhibit the work at the local library, in the sheltered houses; we try to get our work done where there will be a lot of people to see it. Through the Pandemic we want to show case in the doctor's surgeries, the dentist, things like that, we want the work to be seen by a lot of people. It's important that obviously these people see the work in their communities, but it's also important that other people see it, you know I fancy doing something creative, not necessarily joining us, just being more creative and experience the benefits it gives" – Gorton Arts

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The Walnut Allotment in Bury started in March 2021 as group providing informal coffee and cake gatherings. While the project leader is new to this type of work, she gained benefit from a network already in place:

"Bury Council has several funding opportunities. One of them is called a Pitch where you go and give a three minute talk to local residents about your project. Everybody does the same then they vote for five projects. There's a Bury directory where all groups are listed. We advertise for things happening in Bury".– Project leader

Case Studies On Delivery in Year 7

Case Study

Walnut Allotments 'Coffee and Cake' & 'Winter Warmer' (Bury)

"Funds were used for different things, like the soup maker, which serves 45 people, and more kitchen equipment. The biggest challenge was having the confidence to write a bid. Advertising was also a challenge, making fliers and finding someone to post them through the door".

"The allotment site is on a lease from Bury Council. There are 13 allotments in total, and this occupies one plot. It's council property but it's self-managed".

"The Winter Warmer runs through winter. It's not growing time in the allotment, but it's a time to set things up for the new year".

"A lot of networking; it's very rewarding, very enjoyable, you meet fabulous people".

"You get nice food; in Summer it was lovely because you could sit outside in nice company".

New Springs Community Project Group supports residents in and around the Springs estate in the Redvales area, East Bury, Manchester. There are approximately 400 households on the estate with two main areas that house older and more vulnerable residents. The Springs estate sits within the top 15% most deprived LSOAs in the country (2019 figures) with above average unemployment rates and alcohol misuse rates. The project that received microfunding from AfA in 2021 was to run activities in a community garden in Springs estate and to encourage residents to meet outdoors. A fundraising for the garden had started in 2019 with regular activities there but the lockdown stopped all that. As part of the funding

from AfA, they held a garden event in August 2021 to announce four volunteer-led workshops: *Explore Bury* is a Walking Group with a focus on physical health and mental wellbeing; *Grow Your Own* is a garden workshop with a focus on healthy eating and budgeting; *Introduction to Jam and Chutneys,* a workshop that takes place in the greenhouse in the community allotment (recently purchased with funding from *Awards for All*); and *Flower Arranging*. The AfA researcher visited the project during the planning stage, just after they had been allocated microfunding, and during the delivery stage:

Case Study

New Springs Community Project (Bury)

"The weather was dry when we set off for a walk with a local volunteer guiding us. She had chosen the first route for a nature walk going passed the Bury's historical past and present community farm. The three women that attended the walking session already knew each other. They had found out about the walk through the craft group that meets at the local community hub. We all felt energised by the walk and exchanged pictures via WhatsApp. The group also proposed that the next walk should include a pub lunch at the end."

"It was a bit of a washout because of the rain unfortunately. Hard to know how many may have come otherwise. We had around 18 attend in total – mainly for the cake and lunch. Two attended to the Garden before lunch and two attended our Walk and so we have technically launched our walking group".

"All our activities are community-led and volunteer-led, and we hold community events in the garden space at the bottom. People are encouraged to grow strawberries and vegetables and take them home with them".

Ensuring regular attendance has been difficult for many groups. Sometimes people start to attend and then drop further because numbers in general are low and the activity may not be the event that participants expected. Because of the pandemic, project leaders face two groups of people: those eager to attend events, and those lacking confidence about going out. Having a contingency plan helps to manage the balance between overselling and underselling initiatives. A system of referrals from local councils alongside efficient social prescribing mechanisms can be effective in maintaining attendance:

> "It would be good to get referrals for mental health. To be known by social prescribers. I would like some more information about social prescribing and how to link into other organisations that do that type of work" *– Project leader*

Difficulties were found both attracting older people who had lost confidence after the lockdowns, but also engaging people who did not normally take part in organized activities.

Some organisations have people who attend on a regular basis but would like to include different groups and are unsure how to going about this:

> "We struggle to reach the BAME community and we are working on it. We have regular meetings with the local network organisations so we don't repeat activities" – *Project leader*

The mechanism of social prescribing was key to get the *Walk & Talk group* in Rochdale started after the pandemic:

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing – Walk & Talk

"The biggest challenge at first was getting people to join it, we found that after coming out of lockdown people were still a little bit wary of going out, and then the doctors got on board and were prescribing people to come on the walks, that really helped to get people coming out, it was mainly because of the doctors kind of thing".

"I am adding history to the walks, and they keep finding things from the past, the area must have been used 50 to 70 years ago or so, we don't know who or when but it was used in the past".

"They come back, the regulars. So if the doctor feels like someone else needs to go on a walk he will send them to me. I've had some different ones that don't come back for another walk, but not everyone has it in them, then you will get one that will stick with you and I'll take them for a brew or a sandwich or something".

"It helps with mental health, being outside. What they do is come on this walk, you can talk about anything you want, anything, I've seen a lot during my time in the world".

One thing that was noticeable across most projects was the absence of older men in many activities. Most project leaders agreed that they are often isolated and do not build social connections in the same way as women.

> "Another challenge that I found is to attract older men; the same volunteers are involved in all projects. We are hitting a lot of the same subjects. And they tend to be white, even though there is a big Asian and Polish demographics here. It's always the same people that end up being consulted, so the activities tend to repeat" – *Project leader*

The men at *Reddish Vale Men in Sheds Bike Repair Group* repair donated bikes. They also sell adult bikes cheaply to low-income families, while donating children's bikes to local

primary schools. Not only do they encourage active travel, but they give new life to bikes that would otherwise go to waste. Members of the bike repair group, all aged 60 and over, have experience of conditions that limit their mental or physical health. The philosophy of the group is that the way out of isolation and depression is through purposeful activity and meaningful work:

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Case Study

Reddish Vale Men in Sheds Bike Repair Group

"Many men experience difficulties in life but are unused to expressing any feelings about these issues. We know from our own experience that working together, eventually, encourages us to be able to talk together. This produces a renewed interest in life and a positive sense of self-worth, particularly when we can see our efforts appreciated in the community".

"I can come out 3 days a week, away from the telly, and have a real purpose in life again building this shed and learning from YouTube."
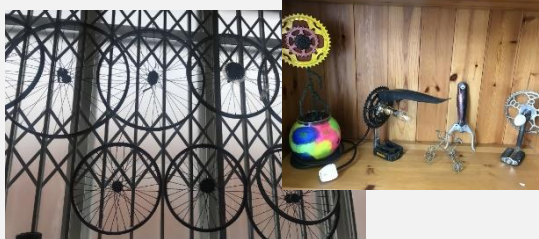
"AfA funding has led to computer courses for older men and a bike sculpture project with Arts for Recovery in the Community. And you'll probably see some of the marbling that we are doing in the display cabinet".

"The health benefits that come from cycling are enormous in terms of aerobic, mental resilience, and this whole project, its fundamentally a mental health project, but it has all these knock-on effects. There's lots of research showing up that men don't emotionally talk about problems if there's eye contact, if you get two men standing horizontally, shoulder to shoulder they may just talk".

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When asked about the challenges he faces, Eric explains that the hardest is that he is **the only one in the group who can complete funding applications**. The group have recently received a second pot of funding from AfA to improve their premises, expand the membership, and gain further training from a qualified bike mechanic. The group has also received support from Stockport Council and Forever Manchester. Another positive development has been working more closely with *Re:Dish*, a charity that supports local residents in Reddish. All the Reddish Vale Men in Sheds' refurbished adult bikes will now be sold through the Re:dish charity shop, creating a regular income stream. This **association with a larger organization** will be beneficial for the sustainability of the group , providing the project leader with logistical support .

There are different types of **hurdles** which groups face in respect of funding. Campbell House is an Extra Care Scheme with 24 Flats, 1 couple, 12 female and 11 male, tenants vary in age from 55 to 102, and have a range of physical and mental health issues. The scheme does not have a community organisation, bank account or committee, but residents

and support workers meet and arrange activities and do some fund raising for activities throughout the year. In the absence of a constitution or bank account, Bolton at Home, a housing association, applied on their behalf for six pottery painting sessions. A member of staff mentioned that some residents were scared to leave their flats, and that several residents had to move to residential accommodation after considerable deterioration as a consequence of the COVID-19 lockdowns. The first time the AfA researcher visited Campbell House, three residents came into the common room talked with great enthusiasm about the pottery sessions, emphasizing the work they had done with decorations for Christmas. They were excited about a Halloween party, and the possibility of doing gardening during the summer.

Case Study

Bolton at Home – Campbell House

"We did some trial sessions with all the schemes, including a pottery painting session, and asked them, 'what did you like best?', and this was very popular. I think it's because they get something from it. They do the painting on one day and when she brings them back, they do look amazing, and they say 'I've done that!'. It's an achievement for them".

"We found it really difficult [to apply for funding] because we are not a constituted group; we aren't a registered charity. To be a constituted group you need a committee, but because a lot of people in this group have dementia, they can't have a bank account or form a committee".

"The challenge is to get them here, but once they come down, they are chatting and making things. When this activity finishes, they will sit at that table and chat all afternoon. And they start remembering things from their childhood".

The observation by one of the helpers at Campbell House, that people like **to take something away with them**, be it an ashtray, a plant pot, or a Christmas decoration, was also remarked upon by the project leader in the *Get Up & Grow* project. Get Up and Grow specialise in the delivery of therapeutic horticulture, food and nature-based activities, and they have recently been awarded a grant for a kiln and potter's wheel. Get up and Grow has been established for four years as a CIC. Each session can cater for up to 10 people, these taking place in the Campbell House library. The pottery instructor stretched a piece of plastic on the floor next to the library counter, with participants then ready to have a go at the wheel. During the researcher's visit to the project, a group of school children came in to visit the library and choose a book. They looked with interest at a participant on the potter's wheel, in a telling example of intergenerational exchange and the fruitful learning that can be generated when social infrastructure provides a truly inclusive space:

Get Up and Grow (Rochdale)

"Not every group is confident with the wheel, so it's good to have a few other activities in parallel, like growing herbs, or decorating a fired pot. I've always worked with libraries because they are a free space where the community gathers".

"During lockdown we all had to rethink what we were doing, and the potter's wheel was a way of going from the activity of growing food to something related, working with clay".
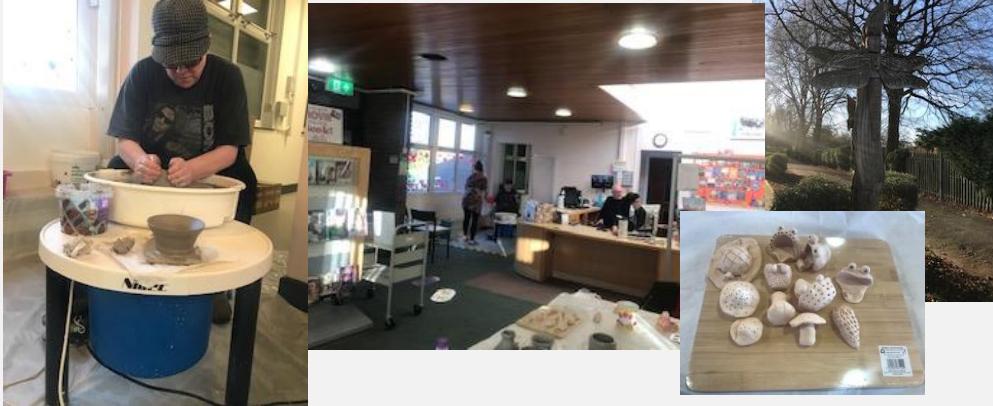
"Our work is a form of occupational therapy, working with plants and nature in clay art. Participants feel they really achieved something when the see the final object they produced".

Facilities such as libraries can also help to connect the community with different local activities, as well as the groups and organisations that may be spread out in the area. *Sharon Youth Association* was formed in formed in 1972 as an extension of Sharon Church to manage and promote youth activities in a purpose built youth centre in Old Trafford. The project leader and minister explained that it was a slow process of complete redevelopment. They have built a recording studio, a band practice area, and a coffee shop. During Covid 19, it has become apparent that people without their own garden space have very few options available to them to meet people and be involved in activities together in a safe environment outside. The funding by AfA was used to develop an enclosed area of approximately 250 square into an all age friendly space with a barbecue, raised planters and a grassed area. When the researcher visited the project in the early stages of delivery, the team working in the project was struggling to find volunteers to help out. In the process of our conversation, a member of the team suggested that something like **a directory of organisations and activities** for the local area would be really helpful so that project leaders knew what activities to run on a certain day without running the risk of doubling something already happening elsewhere. In addition, such a directory would help individuals connect and swap services and skills, such as woodwork, plumbing, or landscaping.

Being able to network successfully makes a significant difference in terms of the sustainability of projects. The ability to network successfully is informed by experience of project leaders and how long organisations have been in existence. *Gorton Arts* have been established for 15 years, have strong networks, a variety of ways to disseminate the work produced by the group. In their work with older and vulnerable people, they receive a significant number of referrals from the NHS. Their programme sends out art materials and activities to people at home, but the project leader also runs a number of activities that help people connect:

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<tr><td>Case Study</td><td>

Gorton Arts (Manchester)

"Collectively we discuss this project idea with all our 18 group members, who are all older people living in the Gorton area. We constantly keep in touch to discuss, plan and deliver this project with Freelance Artists".

"We work closely with the Neighbourhood Health Workers for Greater Manchester Mental Health and Wellbeing Service to make our project accessible to social excluded older people who are experiencing loneliness and are in need. We plan to exhibit this work in Gorton Community Venues when we can safely do so, participants will get an opportunity to share their work with the communities where they live".

"We got a lot of new people coming to these group sessions, because of the word we sent out during the Pandemic, we separated all the activities and material and sent it by post to more than 70 people. So we got new people coming in. It's a great opportunity to do small workshop sessions that differ from week to week to build up confidence and additional training for them".

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"Talk to those you're hoping to benefit in the area before starting. Whilst we had planned the session with our current participants and taken their views on board to plan and develop the sessions, some of them didn't live in Kirkholt and so perhaps were not representative of the area's demographics and faced different challenges" – Project leader

Sharon Youth Centre (Trafford)

"Today I met with a men's woodworking group called Sow the City. The initial meeting was positive and it is likely they will be assisting us in the development of the site by constructing the furniture and possibly the planters".
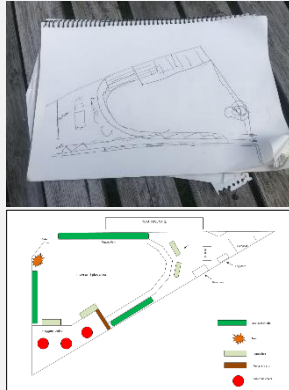
"We are starting almost from zero to get things moving, there's quite a lot of things we need to do, like getting people to know about it, getting more people involved, but with that also comes the planning, lets say 10 people show up, we need to have work for 10 people. I know there is a time issue, a good percentage of our funding is based upon materials, and we probably not going to get the project completed, if we can get the project completed by Christmas that would be a miracle".

Moorside Cricket and Bowling Club in Oldham applied to AfA for funds to support a new outdoor space but they also asked for help from the community when they realised that the prices of building materials had almost doubled since the preparation of their last budget:

Cricket and Bowling Club (Oldham)

"They came back with a price in February, when I went back to them, we now have funding for this, can I order those 5 tables, and those had been increased by about 1000 pounds. Knowing that we had this shortcoming, what we did was advertise it in social media if it's possible to bring it here, and we got some people to help out and paid each one 150 pounds and that worked out".

"The chap who owned the mill paid for the local church to be built...and became the president of the club and presumably the Vicar started to run it, and a lot of mill owners in this part of the world, particularly in the north of England established things like cricket and bowling clubs to give their workers some recreation, so a lot of the teams in this area were created by the mills, the cotton mill manufacturers. A lot of farm land was sold for housing, so we are quite blessed with housing locally, so it feeds our membership".

"It's a community club, the actual cricket and bowling club is registered as a charity to take advantage of buffet donations...it provides a facility for the local community to use, so that facility is the cricket field, the bowling green, but also this building itself, so for example on a Monday we have a guitar group".

George's Kitchen is a community kitchen based at St George's Church in Stalybridge. Their proposal in 2021 aimed at providing free, healthy frozen meals, delivered to the doorstep, once a week to local residents who were known to be lonely, shielding, or otherwise vulnerable. They also hope to tackle social isolation through increased social contact, hoping that those delivering the meals will have an opportunity to identify any further needs. In the long term, they hope to set up a luncheon club and cooking clubs within St George's Church. At the time of the application, the group had a database of 20 potential recipients. While discussing the idea with potential service users, they had offers of food from local allotments and vegetable gardens. Some local people offered to grow herbs in their patios to be used in the community kitchen, but the unpredictability that comes with relying on volunteers can add to the uncertain scenario of delivering projects post-Covid. One thing they do is to offer volunteers an e-learning Food Safety level 2 course in the hope that this may attract more volunteers for food preparation and cooking activities:

Case Study

George's Kitchen (Stalybridge, Tameside)

"We started cooking in summer, in June, so we have been going for a couple of months now, like I said we have around 35 recipients at the moment, we think that we probably can service more people, we didn't want to grow too quickly too soon, we wanted to test out the recipes, get some feedback from our service users, and all the feedback we have got so far has been very encouraging".

"We had a lot of help from Action Together and Big Local, particularly with the administration setting up a constitution, our health and safety policies, our volunteer policies, they are a big help in putting those together, also they help us recruit volunteers, they collect the details of our volunteers, and they forward those details to us so that we can offer various roles within our organization, so it's been a real team effort".

"I think we always have a risk factor as we always rely on volunteers and the good will of volunteers, in Spring time we had a lot of interest of individuals saying 'I'm on Furlough at the moment, I'm not working, I'm being payed to sit at home, can I help?'. But by the time we got back to them, here we are, oh I've got a job now so I'm not available anymore, so I think our biggest risk factor is not having available people".

"Time was the biggest constraint and nothing can offset that"
– Project leader

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Ryder Brow Allotment (Gorton, Manchester)

"I like being creative. It gets me out gives me something to do during the day I didn't cope very well...just getting out learning how to garden feeling a bit useful."

"Project Grow your Heritage was suggested by participants based on their background. We grew sweet potato, callaloo, loufa, okra, inca berries, melon from China, mainly refugees and Asylum seekers. We have been growing native American maize, red and purple".

"At the end of the 6 weeks course, people take home the cards they have been doing as well as a framed picture of one of their prints. They like seeing what they produced".

Research findings and recommendations going forward:

Challenges when delivering	Recruiting participants emerged as the most common challenge (Omicron variant emerged when groups were delivering their activities).
	Recruiting older men is particularly difficult. A suggestion by a project leader was to do activities involving tools, such as building a bench or repairing.
	Ensuring that local people stay engaged over time.
Timing	Time for co-production and organization is key for successful delivery.
Strategic thinking	Being creative when engaging participants and disseminating activities can offset disadvantages.
	Importance of planning ahead to manage uncertainty of demand.
Networking	A directory of organisations and activities would help organisations to cross-fertilize.
	Local councils could make systematic efforts to connect community members and organisations.
	A social prescribing system would help with connecting community members and activities.

Flexibility	Project leaders need more flexibility when delivering so they can have autonomy to channel funds where there is immediate need, for example, offering a pick up and drop off services.
Inclusiveness	Additional support and help with publicising events widely for smaller and peripheral groups.

Section 3: Sustainability and the future

The pandemic shed light on two important aspects of community initiatives: first, how vital they are for the mental wellbeing of older people (Phillipson et al. 2021), whether in their capacity as volunteers or participants in projects; and, second, the need for more funding to be invested in community organisations of all sizes so that they can continue with the work undertaken by dedicated individuals. Following that reasoning, Buffel et al. (2021) call attention to the need to integrate age-friendliness into post-COVID-19 community recovery through: prioritising resources in deprived areas; promoting age inclusiveness; involving older people in designing community initiatives; and investing in social infrastructure. Community assets have become particularly important now in light of people's need to reconnect.

A key factor for the sustainability of projects and organisations that emerged from the evaluation concerns the importance of **social infrastructure (including libraries, community centres),** where people can meet and activities take plaThus, a common difficulty for groups was the extent to which venue hire consumed a high proportion of funding, not to mention time spent in securing spaces to meet. By contrast, organisations that have their own premises are more likely to become an organic and permanent part of the local community:

> *"I've always had a building…I wasn't bothered in what condition it was because I've got construction background. So, as part of the project of making people to use and take ownership of the space was to get them involved in the development of the space"" – Project leader*

Without fixed premises and money upfront to pay the rent, groups have to rely on what is offered to them, sometimes with unexpected outcomes, both bad and good:

> *"The main challenge was when we were running an activity in Gorton and the venue was a church. Some people who were not faith–based were complaining about attending an activity in a place of worship. They were saying 'are you trying to make us become Christian?'. And sometimes our activity was clashing with church activity, and we had to be flexible and change out times" – Project leader*

> *"It's been so long in the making I can't really say that it's because of this or that, the church has a majority of African–Caribbean congregation, so there is kind of an obvious connection there, it's Church of England. I can't say why the Asian communities feel safe here but you can see that they do, I would like to think it`s to do with the work we do here" – St. John's Centre, Trafford*

For older people with mobility issues, an informal setting may be preferred, such as community halls and public house function rooms, which may be close to bus routes. And a few organisations have managed to make transport a key part of their engagement strategy:

> *"With some of the ladies they feel like they want to stay at home and sometimes you push them to get out and once you push them and they come into these classes they realise how stressed or bored or lonely they are at home. When they come here they feel better and feel like, 'We want to be here.' They won't initially come or they'll say it's too far out so when they offer us the transport, 'We'll do it,' so they're there and coming and feeling like, 'Okay"* – Jinnah Centre, Bury

The Jinnah Day Centre is unique in its ability to offer **transport** to participants, something that is particularly important for members of dispersed communities. Transport helps with sustainability because it helps maintain participation over time and through different seasons. Organisations that have resources to provide transport can be far more inclusive, through bringing people in who would normally be restricted to staying at home, but they can also be more sustainable because of a higher influx of people:

> *"The transport is from ourselves, we are funded partially by Bury Council but we have to raise a certain amount ourselves. How do we raise it? It is our own centre, premise hire, people can book it for parties, birthday parties, even a wedding, meetings, so we have some income. Even our pool table takes 20p. So we have ways of generating some money but we have to generate each year a certain amount to make up for the shortfall from the funding"*
> *– Jinnah Day Care Centre, Bury*

> *"When we do things, we have people as far as Leeds come together with us, because it's, when we first came here, Moss Side was one of the places that we landed in, but also people went to Oldham, people went to Birmingham, people went to Leeds, Wolverhampton, Nottingham. So, over the years the way of us kind of coming together was music, domino tournaments, cricket, setting up cricket leagues among ourselves"* – Socio Economic Regeneration, Moss Side

Alongside sustainability, inclusiveness is a key challenge for the future and one that demands more engagement from policy makers to **cater for different needs and interests**, including transport, language and cultural diversity. In addition, there are specific needs according to the nature of communities, whether they are dispersed or localised, and the geographical scope of funding programmes:

> *"I think first of all, it must be understood that the community itself, especially the over-50s, there's an issue around language. So I'm not sure how funders can cater for the needs of the community in terms of their language needs, or language barriers that are there. Now, you might say well, you know, some of these people have been living here from the 60s, how come there's a language problem? But there's a history behind it, especially in the Northwest. A lot of people that came in the 60s and 70s, they would have worked in the cotton mills. Now, a cotton mill is a noisy environment and that even English people, they would some kind of sign language because of the noise"* – Project leader

"We're not just going to meet up to have a conversation about the climate change, it's not what we do. Funerals, music events with food, they're two of the main things that brings us together, and there's a place in Moss Side also now, it's been there for a long time, West Indian Social Club where it's a place that we use at that central gathering place" – Project leader

"We've had some people deported, so that's going to unsettle a few people really at the moment. So, although they feel like, yeah, I've lived in Manchester, love Manchester, worked in Manchester for years, since the Windrush thing has come into play, it's going to unsettle them. Also, the Covid thing has unsettled them as well, this jab thing, and not jab thing and all of that. So, there's a bit of unease at the moment around the place" – Project leader

The need for **capacity-building workshops** was also highlighted as a continuing need. Suggestions for capacity building training came from workshops with project leaders held in November 2021, focus groups with LDLs, and conversations with members of AfA staff. Suggestions for capacity-building included: grant applications; terms and language; legal requirements; mental health training; governance (including specialist advice on legal documentation and constitutions); social prescribing; asset mapping; marketing; networking; monitoring (to ensure the activity was going well); case studies (how to successfully monitor the activities); and financial management. While AfA did acknowledge this need by running additional events on networking and bid writing from November 2021, these are required on a regular basis:

"There's need for capacity-building so that people don't feel as scared to apply for funding. Groups that are led by older people are not too sure that they can do this work or have that energy…. The last thing they want is to commit to something that demands so much responsibility" – LIOs giving technical support

Macc conducted two bid writing interactive webinars in February and March 2022 for AfA-funded groups working with older people. There are also plans to produce a '*where to find funding*' resource and a FAQ document from the session that can be shared with attendees. Organisations that are highly connected with other centres, be it because of local authority efforts to connect them or due to individual initiative, are more likely to attract participants and keep projects going. **Networking** and making connections are important at both an individual and collective level. In addition, connectivity expands the network at the local level and beyond, as illustrated in the quote below:

"The bike sale was an example [of an opportunity] and the great connection made with Re-dish; it immediately takes the burden of managing the group on my own…We may not win if we are just a group of 6 old men, but if we are part of Re-dish…I'm feeling this is a new start" – Men in Sheds, Reddish

Networking with other organisations is essential for creating new opportunities and ensuring the continuation of projects. The ability of groups to network fosters sustainability as project leaders can exchange advice, services, and expertise. Such exchange can help groups

secure access to space thus improving the sustainability of projects. Debdale Nature Centre & Men's Shed project provide an illustration of how much is gained through networking. The group currently running the activities funded by AfA started a relationship with Friends of Debdale Park 15 years ago, when they were on the committee for a nearby allotment. Since that time, they have carried out dozens of activities using a number of different spaces in the park:

Case Study

Debdale Nature Centre & Men's Shed

"We took the keys for this on the 1 of March after it had been emptied, unused for 2 years, so the garden was completely overgrown, 6 foot tall, this garden and all the other gardens space, so we had to completely flatten it and hack everything out, replant it as a wild life garden, to attract pollinators which apparently worked really well, we have now have seen 47 species".

"The Friends of Debdale are kind of an umbrella CIO, set up like a charity, and because of that status they hold more weight, so they can apply to bigger pots and then distribute that to the organizations under".

"These cabins came from a park in Hulme, we went to the park managers and asked if we could have them to set up a Men in Sheds, and they said yes, brilliant, then the park manager got the electric part done through the council".

"This was always supposed to be a library, a quiet room, but the roof leaked so we would have to rip out most of it, so Eco Housing came around and did that for us, we just finished decorating, we had to put down flooring, that wall is gonna be from floor to ceiling, like a lending Library, couple of chairs down there to sit down and read".

Delivery is greatly influenced by how long groups have in existence, and how much they are known in their community. It was observed that groups that had been going for several years not only have had time to invest in their networks but also had a larger pool of participants upon which to draw. The St. John's centre in Trafford was one such example, having been established for some 40 years. The Centre continued going through the pandemic partly because it was funded as a local authority Coronavirus Hub, but also due to the commitment of the organization in providing activities and projects. Try a Bike was a project funded by AfA in 2021 to enable a group of local Asian women over 50 to have a go at cycling. The project was suggested to St. John's centre by a volunteer in the Centre. There are barriers to women taking up cycling so the initiative aimed at providing a COVID-proof social activity with longer-term potential to provide women with an easy and healthy way to get round their local neighbourhood. During the researcher's visit to the Centre, the enthusiasm of the women was visible as they shared their experiences of learning to cycle.

It is important to think creatively in engaging with participants and disseminating the activities and achievements of projects. In the case of *Try a Bike*, the need was identified in everyday exchanges between women spontaneously chatting to other women who also wanted to

cycle, and putting the word around. This provides an example of the value of co-production: ideas that emerge organically and needs that would not have been captured by a top-down approach.

Try a Bike – St John's Centre (Trafford)

"Me? On a bike again? You must be joking! I was fourteen when I last went on a bike. But, you know, I tried it and I loved it!"

"I was so inquisitive to learn...I took one bike from them and I have been trying my best. I've fallen two or three times, but I'm not giving up!"

"The feeling of it is quite wonderful, really."

'What we are doing is we are buying the bikes and if they want to keep them after they can buy them from us so that we could get the money back so that we can buy other bikes or to donate to other communities".
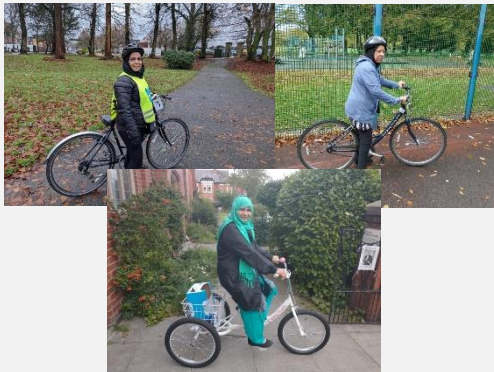
"One of our volunteers got a bike for her birthday and she went to ride at the park, and lots of her friends wanted to have a go, she was very excited about this. It was her idea we should get bikes to lend to people so they could have a go without having to commit money, so we got 10 bikes that have gone out mostly to women, and one man who is the husband of one of the women".

Friends of Debdale Park also found creative ways of involving older people in family activities, like grandparents coming along with their children and grandchildren, enhancing its appeal to visitors and creating a niche for themselves as promoters of intergenerational activities.

"We have the Cycling for Health, Men in Sheds, the bowling and social club, they are all frequented by older people; basically most of what we do attracts older people, so it was a case of, if we knew it would attract families, how could we get the older people who are already involved with other programmes? So that's what we did, we have over 60s, we have adults under 50s and children, and on that last one with 50 60 people we literally had a third of each; we thought that was quite good"– *Friends of Debdale Park*

Advertising and dissemination of activities is also a key aspect of sustainability, with social infrastructure such as libraries, schools, and places of worship able to play an important role:

"On a Friday – a lot of people go to the mosque – you can hand out little leaflets. I think the best way sometimes is to give leaflets to children at school for them to

take home. The parents tend to read, you know, what comes from the school. And if it can be bilingual, that's even better, yeah. So there are resources within the community of things which happen which I think a lot of funders need to be aware of, and so that we can utilise them" – Jinnah day Centre, Bury

"It's more through word of mouth, somebody will tell someone else, a lot of these people are widows, so they left their homes to meet people, so that works as well" – Project leader

"We advertise a little bit through the local help centre, local library, we put leaflets, they were doing a bulletin so we put it up there, but we're conscious that we can't have too many at the moment, as the space doesn't allow us" – Project leader

Contributions by project leaders also highlighted the need to grant them **autonomy and flexibility** in terms of spending funds. They are in the best place to know what their community needs, and funders can learn from their knowledge and experience:

"A lot of project funding is directed towards a particular activity or particular aims of that project only. Now, as a day-care centre, we have a lot of input in terms of our own commitment, commitment of our volunteers, and I think sometimes there needs to be a little bit more flexibility… it would help us to be a bit more decisive and have a bit more agility in the things that we can cater. So, for example, when you've got let's say 10 sessions of a particular activity, that's all that you can offer; but if it was up to us, you know, it wouldn't be just like 10 sessions of yoga or 10 sessions of arts and crafts, you know, we would include other things…and then to visit a pantomime" – Project leader

Finally, **social prescribing**, is a system that is becoming increasingly important for many community groups, and an approach that can produce considerable benefits to all involved, whether they are community members, organisations, or service providers. In sum, findings from the evaluation show how the sustainability of projects and groups depend on structural factors, such as space and a network of local organisations, as well as support services geared assistance to local organisations. Evidence shows that groups across Greater Manchester should be better equipped with regular support and training for skills and capacity development. Sustainability in the long-term depends upon strengthening the resources and capacities of groups so that they can continue delivering the work that that has been developed across Greater Manchester.

A lot of good out of collaboration

Geographical representation is patchy: it's south centered

Some older people don't think they can make a difference

People still prefer to go out and meet people; we are all tired of Zoom

Being able to say no

Manchester centrism

If you are not already involved with something, you are not likely to get involved at all

Not enough acknowledgement for contributions

You must go and knock on people's door

It's about ordinary people having a seat at the table

The personal touch is the one that works

The council could do more in terms of raising awareness and motivation to join the network.

– What members of the Greater Manchester Older People's Network had to say

Conclusion

There have been a number of relevant findings from different evaluations done over the years, most of which were addressed in Year 7. As highlighted in the previous section, investment in social infrastructure across Greater Manchester is key to giving substance to its status as an age-friendly city. In addition, a more structural and systematic support of community work and organisations through capacity-building, social prescribing, networking, and digital inclusion, is the path to make older people more socially connected. Wraparound support is essential to foster the participation of smaller and more isolated community groups. With the right environment and support to provide guidance, mediation, and oversight, the changes offered by a small pot of money can have a significant impact. In line with our co-production ethos, our concluding remarks start with advice by one of the project leaders, which encompasses some of the key values underpinning the work of Ambition for Ageing:

> "It can be a little daunting, I felt this myself, it feels like you're on a single island in a big ocean, someone says prepare a business plan, prepare a budget, apply for funding, like where do I start? I have been doing my professional job for a long time so it's not quite so daunting to me, but for a lot of people I imagine it could be, get as much help and advice from Action Together, Big Local, any organization like that, GMCVO, who actually promote volunteer groups, and the people we spoke to, Ambition for Ageing staff was so helpful and friendly, and make new friends in the process"

While place-based projects were the priority in the funding model used over the years by AfA, its commitment to inclusiveness demands greater attention to the needs of minority groups who are not necessarily attached to a particular neighbourhood. Thus, we call attention to this important finding from the evaluation, and to the need for funders to invest in strategies other than those focused on place-based activities.

Recommendations

The recommendations below build on findings from previous AfA reports, adding new insights that emerged in the evaluation in Year 7. In line with age-friendly principles, and with relevant themes associated with AfA's commitment to make Greater Manchester a better place to grow older, the recommendations set below are according to the following categories: equality, co-production, investment, inclusiveness, connectivity, place-based approach, test and learn, and sustainability:

Equality:

1. Need to build capacity to bid for new funding in underfunded areas: distribution of funding is uneven and criteria of which areas should be contemplated is disputed by community representatives

2. Greater awareness about how cultural specificities, such as religious holidays, may affect delivery of projects

3. Previous reports suggest that AfA's approach may be more successful as a method of preventing social isolation, rather than supporting those already severely isolated

4. The amount of monitoring that project leaders have to do has to be compatible with the amount of funding they receive.

Co-Production:

1. Co-production takes time. Sufficient time to deliver projects, including all the stages in the process, can greatly enhance the outcomes of microfunding projects.

2. Need of more consisted acknowledgment of older people's participation as co-producers.

3. Induction sessions is a great opportunity for project leaders to meet one another and to hear about what people are doing, thus encouraging co-production.

4. More flexibility is needed when project leaders collect data. By focusing on the lessons learned through the process, case studies pave the way to future community work.

Investment:

1. Need for additional funding for transport as a way to bring isolated individuals into community hubs.

2. Need to invest in capacity-building and training on how to tailor applications in order to foster inclusiveness at different scales (individual, organizational, and regionally) and foster sustainability.

3. Local councils should have a systematic approach to support local organisations and promote engagement with the wider community, encompassing social prescribing, networking events, and local directories.

4. The limit of 2K, the short timeframe for the delivery, and the co-production requirement means that for some organisations it is only viable if the idea is already there.

Inclusiveness:

1. Greater flexibility when allocating funds to groups: within limits, project leaders should be given more autonomy to decide how to spend funds.

2. English as a second language should not be a constraint when applying for funding. There needs to be greater awareness of unconscious bias and more flexibility when assessing applications.

3. Need to tailor calls to the needs of minority groups. Organisations should be able to re-apply for extensions and projects should spread over all seasons.

4. Some legal requirements may be excluding initiatives that could be making a difference to the community.

Connectivity:

1. Organisations that networked with peers within their neighbourhood and beyond were more likely to be sustainable in the long term.

2. Importance of systematic exchanging between organisations locally and across Greater Manchester.

3. Local councils have a key role in aggregating information and promoting opportunities for exchange (i.e., Bury Council 'Pitch Community Fund').

4. The importance of asset mapping.

Place-Based Approaches:

1. Coordinating place-based programmes at a distance demands partnerships with individuals on the ground Place-based work needs time built into the project to give time for workers to build trust. The LDL model alleviates this if there are sufficient resource

2. Funders should be more aware of the limitations of place-based microfunding models, needing to also cater for dispersed communities.

3. If implemented without an understanding of marginalisation, asset-based approaches risk contributing to existing inequalities, excluding those who are the most socially isolated.

Sustainability:

1. The section on sustainability in this report could inform a future framework for assessing sustainability of community initiatives.

2. Need for ongoing investment in social infrastructure.

3. Capacity-building workshops should be run throughout microfunding programmes.

4. Programmes such as AfA are vital for the sustainability of age-friendly neighbourhood.

Test and Learn:

1. Importance of comprehensive case studies as a means to share learning.

2. Need for a portfolio of approaches with input by organisations, project leaders, community members, and researchers.

3. Endeavour to optimise the process through constant questioning and evaluation.

4. Greater flexibility is needed to enable small groups to apply and deliver activities.

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Appendix:

Scaled Programmes:

The scaled programmes developed for Ambition for Ageing had access to larger pots of money than in the case of microfunded projects – ranging from £8,000 to £250,000. The theme areas were selected in line with views and recommendations from older people as part of a public consultation. Staff involved in the delivery of scaled programs identified many positive outcomes, in particular, the wide-ranging lessons and outputs produced, and the opportunity to learn more about different approaches for developing projects. AfA delivered 10 scaled programmes, as listed below along with relevant links (follow the links for more information on the programmes and related partners).

- Festival of Ageing: The festival ran from 2nd - 15th July 2018, attracting in the region of 8000 people to over 350 events across all ten GM boroughs. Local celebrations included coffee mornings, fitness sessions, digital workshops, tai chi, walking

football, wellbeing drop-ins, public lectures, wall-climbing, knitting groups, and local history discussions.

- Community Media Research programme: a research project which was delivered by a community media specialist who was asked to carry out a study to identify communities who lack access to information and who would benefit from more effective forms of communication and what this would be.
- Community Media: As a result of the research project, two community media programmes were launched: Talking about my Generation and Subculture. Talking about my Generation win all as delivered in all eight Ambition for Ageing districts (Bolton, Bury, Manchester Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside and Wigan), where residents were supported as community reporters to explore the experiences of older people who have previously experienced social isolation. The subculture programme aimed to create media products with older people based on their niche interests, hobbies or experiences. The project succeeded to connect people who share those interests to reduce social isolation.
- Community Navigators: a programme to connect people to existing activities, services and organisations. Its target audiences were people over 50 with recent hearing loss; men over 75 living alone in receipt of pension credit; Bangladeshi men and women over 50. These three specific groups were selected because there is evidence that they are at higher risk of social isolation owing to barriers they face engaging with mainstream activities. The numbers of people in these groups are likely to grow as Greater Manchester ages.
- Working Potential Project: The programme was a research project that aimed to collect and collate as much information as possible about the best way to support people over 50 who are currently carers to explore job opportunities in preparation for returning to work either on a full or part time basis. The study also involved employers to understand the barriers that they face and to identify best practice
- GOLD (Growing Older with Learning Disabilities): The aim was to reduce social isolation amongst older adults (aged 50+) with learning disabilities and to find out what makes somewhere an age-friendly place to live for older adults with learning disabilities. The project was carried out by a team of 16 older people with learning disabilities. The team was supported by 'research buddies' from Manchester Metropolitan University and the partner organisations to conduct interviews and focus groups with 59 older people (aged 50-79 years) with learning disabilities from eight Greater Manchester areas (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Wigan).
- Social Eating: The Social Eating Project brought together eight partner organisations from across Greater Manchester, to deliver social eating activities, between July 2018 and March 2020. The project was managed by TLC: Talk, Listen Change and commissioned by GMCVO through the Ambition for Ageing Programme. Delivery partners were a mix of social housing providers, social enterprises, food specialists and voluntary sector providers.
- Collective Effect: the programme funded the exploration and development of new and transformational methods designed to increase the levels of active citizenship in local communities. It encouraged organisations to support service users to work collaboratively in the pursuit of mutually agreed goals, rather than working on a pre-

ordained brief. Findings included a better understanding of the relationships between organisations and individuals.

- Culture Champions: this programme was a large-scale volunteer ambassador scheme for older people, currently well-established within the city of Manchester and previously managed by Manchester Museum. Culture Champions aimed to engage people over 50 with cultural venues in the city, from museums and theatres to galleries and concert halls. Providers supported older people to become Culture Champion volunteers, facilitate activity design, and manage small payments to develop new activities.
- Ageing Equally?: a research programme focusing on what makes a good place in which to grow older for people who belong to minority communities. Informed by research that shows how marginalisation is linked to the risk of social isolation, this programme aimed to generate a deeper understanding of what supports wellbeing and what makes places age-friendly for a cross-section of communities of identity or experience. The program has produced thirteen reports in total. It was through funding from the Ageing Equally scaled program that Pride in Ageing started.