



The Ageless Thanet Feelgood Factory: Creating a community through exercise



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Introduction to Ageless Thanet and the Feelgood Factory

Ageless Thanet is a National Lottery Community Fund project, part of the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better programme. In 2015 we were awarded £3 million to reduce loneliness and social isolation in the 50+ community in Thanet.

The project is split into four key areas, Wellbeing Activities, Planning for Later Life, Active Citizenship, and Age-Friendly Business Scheme.

Our Wellbeing Activities, led by partner Your Leisure, have provided free activities for Thanet's over 50s, including Belly Dancing, Art Classes, Tai Chi, Photography, Ballet, Walking Netball, to name but a few. As part of our sustainability model, we have now started charging for some of our activities.

Also led by Your Leisure is the Ageless Thanet Feelgood Factory, a suite of Toning Tables designed as an inclusive form of exercise. Unlike standard gym equipment, the toning tables are power-assisted, which means that the exercise is done with the machine rather than using resistance against it. As a result, this is a low-impact exercise, suitable for people with conditions such as osteoporosis, mobility problems and joint problems. It is also an excellent way to rehabilitate after a stroke or operation. The Feelgood Factory was opened in April 2017.



The plan...

The vision for the Feelgood Factory was for it to become a community venue as well; a hub of activity and a place where older people could get support. We knew from previous consultations with local 50+ residents that having somewhere to park and that was on a bus route was important when considering a venue. We also wanted a location where we would get a lot of footfall, to reach people who may not have engaged with the project before. Therefore we settled on a space on Margate High Street, which was less than 100m from a bus stop, and had paid parking along the road. Through our connections at Thanet District Council, we negotiated free parking for members of the Feelgood Factory.



Consulting older people

Throughout the process of sourcing a venue, refitting it and deciding how it would be used; we always consulted with the 50+ community to find out what they would like. This has led to the Feelgood Factory becoming a place that reflected the needs of older people, and has contributed to its success.

Initially there were concerns that using a glass fronted premises would discourage older people from using the equipment. After listening to this feedback we set the toning tables up at the back of the venue where there was less visibility from the street. This actually proved to be a useful tool in recruiting new members, as people were curious and would come in to find out more.

Even the types of memberships we offered were co-designed by the customers. We created bespoke membership types to ensure that financial issues were not a barrier to people accessing the Toning Tables. This even included free sessions, if someone's financial situation dictated this. However, where we provided a 28 day free trial initially, the majority of people appreciated the value the Toning Suite brought to their wellbeing and were then happy to pay for the membership. It was very rare that further free access was needed.

Incorporating a social aspect

As a project that was aiming to reduce loneliness, it was really important that we included a social aspect to the Feelgood Factory. As well as creating an area at the front of the venue where people could sit and have a drink before and/or after their toning session, the social aspect was enhanced further by providing quiz nights, and also trips for customers to theatres, restaurants, and shopping centres.



Engaging medical professionals

Having this type of venue on Margate High Street was very unusual, which sparked a lot of interest locally. With its high footfall location, word spread quickly, and we soon became very busy after opening.

Because the venue was so visible and quite unique, this seemed to make it easier to engage with health professionals. One notable example was a GP manager who learnt of the benefits to stroke sufferers. After visiting the venue she then wrote to all her stroke patients to encourage them to take up the free trial. which led on to some great successes.

Additional opportunities

The venue was made available to some groups outside opening hours. This was achieved by training someone within the group to safely open and close the venue. This meant there was no staff cost attached with providing this access, which made it more achievable. This included Ageless Thanet volunteers who were able to use their skills to provide free activities for local over 50s. This opened up more opportunities for people who worked traditional hours to come along to activities.

We were awarded funding from local councillors to purchase tablets for older people to use. This led to volunteers setting up drop-in sessions to help people get more confident with technology, as well as answering questions they had about their own devices.

In addition to the funding for the tablets, we were also successful in a bid to have a lift installed. This made it much easier for people with mobility issues to access the first floor where many community activities took place. We also rented out spaces to assist with the sustainability of the venue.

Impact

The following is based on 447 people who completed both the baseline and follow-up questionnaire. The data was collected between July 2015 and September 2019.

LONELINESS



Overall our findings from the questionnaires showed that there was no statistically significant difference in reducing feelings of loneliness when people started at the Toning Suite, compared to when they finished. In total 33.3% (149 people) saw a decrease in loneliness. However, those who were classified as moderately or intensely lonely from the baseline questionnaire, reported a statistically significant reduction in loneliness. Importantly, this suggests that the Toning Suite is having a positive impact on those most at risk of, or already experiencing, feelings of loneliness.

SOCIAL ISOLATION



Similarly there was no significant difference in reducing social isolation for those who attended the Toning Suite. Yet when examining the group of people who identified as being lonely at the beginning of their trial, levels of social isolation decreased, suggesting that the Toning Suite is having a positive impact on those already experiencing feelings of loneliness.

QUALITY OF LIFE



57.3% (228) of participants reported an increase in their quality of life. Interestingly, when we looked at the data in more detail there was a correlation that showed the age of the participant was related to the degree of change in their quality of life. Younger participants (50-59 years) reported a larger improvement in their quality of life, compared to other age groups. Looking at participants who identified as being moderately, or intensely lonely at the beginning of their trial of the Toning Suite, also showed a significant improvement in their quality of life, compared to those who were not lonely who reported no statistically significant change.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING



To measure the impact attending the Toning Tables had on people's mental health, we used the short version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale. At baseline the average score was 23.40 close to the population average (23.61). At follow-up, mental health and wellbeing score had increased to 24.27. When the data was examined more closely this revealed a significant difference between the two scores, suggesting that there was a positive change in mental health and wellbeing following participation in the Toning Suite. Overall 52.5% reported an increase in mental health and wellbeing.

"THE TONING TABLES HAVE IMPROVED BOTH MY PHYSICAL STRENGTH AND STAMINA"



JOHN

"I used to be fit and healthy as a Judo instructor. This had to stop due to an injury about 10 years ago, although I did attend a gym to keep fit until the stroke which took away confidence to go out and do things. I joined the Ageless Thanet Feelgood Factory after I got a letter through my door from my GP.

I came with an open mind for my first month's free trial, I wanted to carry on at a higher level for at least 3 months to see if I would notice any differences by then. Now after 4 months of attending 3 times a week I feel I have more stamina and more physical strength. I can do more gardening and more walking."

WHAT DO YOU THINK THINGS WOULD BE LIKE IF YOU HADN'T STARTED WORKING WITH AGELESS THANET?

"There is a history of strokes in my family and I found after having a stroke I was much more concerned about another stroke happening, and much more aware of the importance of being active and regaining fitness."

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT HAVE YOU RECEIVED FROM AGELESS THANET?

"The staff here at the Ageless Thanet Feelgood Factory have always been supportive, and check positions on the equipment regularly and are just generally helpful. The toning tables have improved both my physical strength and stamina and mean I can continue with other activities."



"IT HAS GIVEN ME SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO DOING EVERY DAY"

TO DOING EVERY DAY"



JAMES

James moved down to Margate from London over 15 years ago. He has always been physically active, regularly going to the gym, but has still seen the benefits from coming along to the Ageless Thanet Feelgood Factory.

After his neighbour encouraged him to come along, James signed up for his free 28 day trial, and has since become a regular member of the Toning Suite.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE BENEFITS FROM ATTENDING THE AGELESS THANET FEELGOOD FACTORY?

"It has helped me a lot. I have lower back problems, I can do things now like bending down to tie my shoelaces without struggling. I have lost weight and inches round my waist and I have made lots more friends."

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT HAVE YOU RECEIVED FROM AGELESS THANET?

"The toning table help me as well as the outside activities such as the Christmas dinner and dance, and meze nights. The staff are supportive and listen to our ideas as well as plan their own activities."

WHAT HAS BEING INVOLVED WITH AGELESS THANET MEANT FOR YOU?

"It has given me something to look forward to doing every day, I do come in every day. Everyone is friendly, and we always have a good laugh, just like a family."



We are delighted to have been able to offer this activity as part of the Ageless Thanet project. The Ageless Thanet Feelgood Factory has helped many people in so many different ways, from rehabilitating those affected by a stroke, to making life-long friends who now go on holiday together. We have enabled the sustainability of the Feelgood Factory by moving it to a local leisure centre. Sadly, it could not continue in the high street venue due to the type of lease we had, but we are pleased that it is able to continue beyond the Ageless Thanet project, and continue supporting the community.

Find out more...



If you would like to find out more about the other aspects to the Ageless Thanet project, please get in touch -

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SEK Social Enterprise Kent

Social Enterprise Kent, the lead organisation of the Ageless Thanet project, is a Community Interest Company (CIC), registered with, and regulated by, the CIC Regulator. We have been in operation for over 35 years, with the overarching vision of "Improving Lives, Supporting Communities".

Our key aims:

To provide support for people, particularly in areas of deprivation or for those most disadvantaged, to gain skills and employment

To support the creation, organisation and management of social enterprises and small enterprises; and to develop a way of making this sustainable

To support in the regeneration of deprived areas in Kent, by creating jobs and skills

If you would like to find out more about SEK, we would love to hear from you -

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