

Warm Welcome Toolkit

A guide to running
welcoming community
activities with older people



Ageing
Better
in Camden 

 Camden
ageUK

 COMMUNITY
FUND



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Introduction

This Warm Welcome Toolkit aims to offer you, as activity providers, information and resources which will support you to run a Warm Welcome activity.

We have heard from older people and activity providers that offering a Warm Welcome is essential when encouraging older people to take part in activities and remain connected in their communities. This sort of 'pull' is even more important if an older person has faced loneliness or social isolation.

We know it takes more than just hiring a room and a yoga teacher to cultivate a welcoming atmosphere and relationships that last, and so we have put together these resources to help you get started.

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Introduction

“ It has taken a lot of courage to come to this place, so the least they deserve is a warm welcome.”



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Creating and sustaining a Warm Welcome experience



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About Ageing Better in Camden

We're a partnership of older people and Camden organisations, working together to tackle social isolation and loneliness. We draw on existing skills and resources in the local community to tackle social isolation and loneliness. We are part of Age UK Camden and we are one of the 14 National Lottery Community Fund Ageing Better programmes, working across England.

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Introduction - About Ageing Better in Camden





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Ageing Better in Camden

Tackling social isolation...

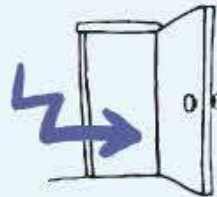
Finding

Identifying socially isolated older people. We use specialist services to find those from under-served communities. An outreach team to find people Nobody knows and Community Connectors to support people who find it Hard to Engage...



Motivating (with a push)

Community Connectors and Social Prescribing services help to overcome barriers to participation in community activities...



Welcoming (with a pull)

We give them a warm welcome with 'Meeter and Greeters, follow-up and reminder phone calls and assistance with transport

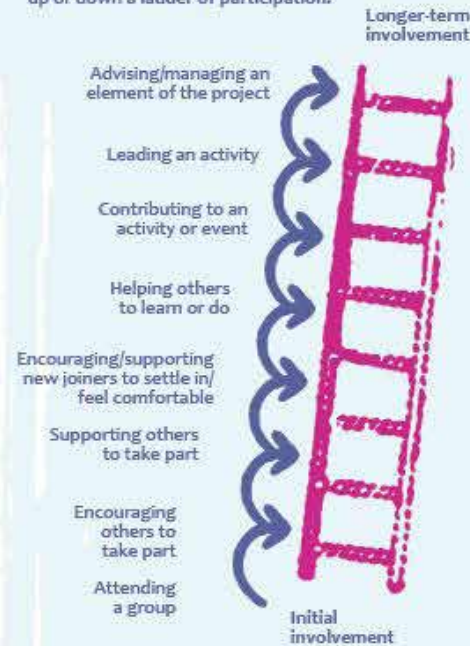


Getting people involved thereby improving their wellbeing and strengthening their communities.

... enabling further participation...

Providing a range of options

Key members in our groups make sure that there are options for people's involvement, and an approach that supports participants to move up or down a ladder of participation.



The result is that older people are informing and developing what is offered (co-design) as well as contributing to the delivery of the projects (co-production).

Turning initial involvement into longer-term participation and contribution.

... building an age-friendly Camden.

We work with Camden Council, CCG and other statutory and voluntary organisations to support them to involve older people in the decisions which affect them and share our learning on what works both locally and nationally.



Giving older people a voice in the borough through our Older People's Advisory Group (OPAG) and Voice of Camden Seniors (VOCUS)

Celebrating older Camden residents leading the way for an Age Friendly borough





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About a Warm Welcome

Throughout our programme, older people have told us that being welcomed (or not!) to a community activity has a big impact on whether or not they will return. Everyone had their own story of being welcomed, or feeling rejected. That's why we decided to explore what a Warm Welcome looks like, and how it can help tackle social isolation and loneliness.

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Introduction - About a Warm Welcome





About a Warm Welcome



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Information

For more information:

- ✓ **Watch our video** featuring older people talking about what a Warm Welcome means to them.
- ✓ **Read our practitioner's guide** to providing a Warm Welcome.
- ✓ **Read our brief guide** for practitioners who want to organise welcoming groups and activities for older people amidst the restrictions imposed by Covid-19.

This toolkit was co-produced with Ageing Better in Camden delivery agencies and partners. We have worked together to gather their expertise from years of experience working with older people to tackle loneliness and social isolation. Ageing Better in Camden would like to extend a huge thank you to each and every person who contributed to this toolkit.

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Introduction - About a Warm Welcome

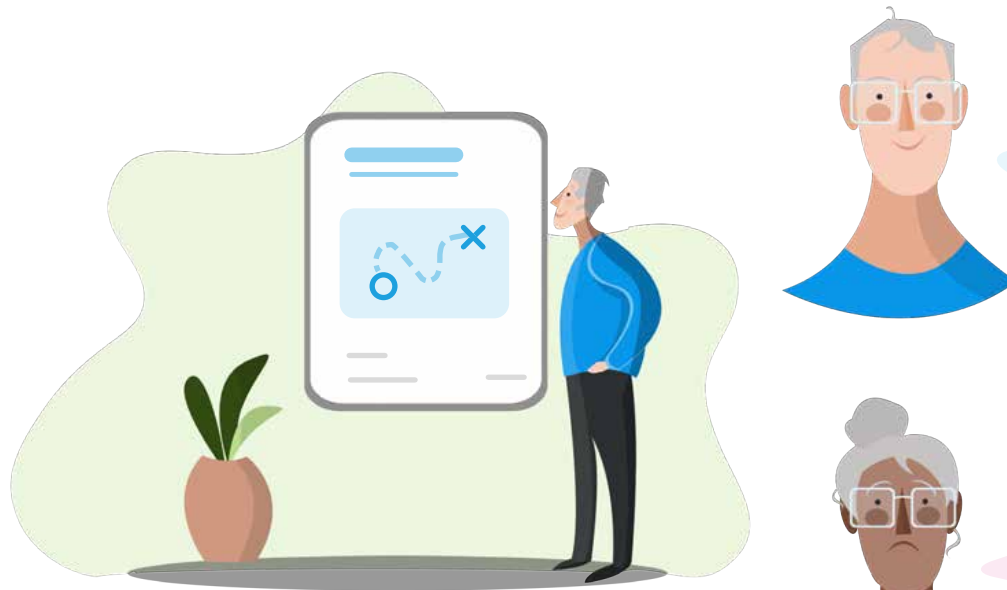


CHAPTER 1

Information about your activity

Before older people attend an activity, they will have heard about it somehow – via a leaflet or poster, online or through a friend. The material

you share about your activity is the start of offering a Warm Welcome to someone, so make sure it is clear, accessible, and informative.



+ I came across this clear poster with the information I needed. There was a phone number and the person I spoke to was very welcoming. I decided to give it a go.



- I saw a poster for the activity, but it didn't have a date, time or contact details. There also wasn't a map on it, just a link to a website. I don't use the internet so I couldn't find out any more information and I couldn't join the activity.



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Checklist:

We recommend making a two-sided A4 flyer which includes:



Content

- ✓ **When:** Date and time of your activity, including frequency – is it every week, every month?
- ✓ **Where:** Location of the activity – include a full address and a clear map. A photo of the front of the venue is also a good idea so it is easy to recognise.
- ✓ **What:** Be explicit about the activity – what are you going to be doing? You can also include a picture of the activity to make it accessible to all.
- ✓ **What:** Be clear about what they need to bring with them, for example, loose clothing for a physical activity, or documents needed to sign up.
- ✓ **Who:** Include the name and phone number of someone they can talk to if they have any questions before they attend.
- ✓ Use plain English.



Top Tip:

Find free stock images to use on your posters at
www.ageingbetter.resourcespace.com
www.pexels.com
www.shutterstock.com



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Checklist: Making posters and flyers


✓ Include a map and directions to the venue

✓ Use a legible font, like Arial

✓ Include a picture of the front of the venue

✓ Make sure there is adequate spacing between lines and paragraphs

✓ Use point 14 font as a minimum



Ageing Better in Camden Community ageUK Camden

An invitation to join the AGE UK Camden Outreach team for free afternoon tea/coffee and cake at the new Kentish Town Library social space



Thursday 27 February, drop by from 1.30-3.30pm at Kentish Town library


262-266 Kentish Town Road NW5 2AA

Come along as our guest and meet your neighbours over free tea coffee and cake at the newly created social space at the front of the library. Relax, read the papers, access the free to use tablets/computers/internet in the library and find out about the recent transformation and plans for your library.


Meet Lorraine, Katharine Jo, AnneMarie (Outreach) and the AGE UK Community Connectors team, pick up information about the fantastic range of free trips, visits and activities including free swimming, or learn how to play the ukulele, available for people aged 60+ across Camden.

Kentish Town Library
262 – 266 Kentish Town High Road

Meet us in the new library social space immediately on your right as you enter the library.



All welcome. No need to confirm in advance. For more information please contact: Lorraine, Katharine, AnneMarie and Jo at the Age UK Camden Outreach team 020 7239 0421




Make sure your poster or flyer is accessible for everyone.



Don't use brightly coloured text on top of brightly coloured backgrounds

Bad contrast

Bad contrast

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Chapter 1 – Information about your activity

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Spreading the word

Services like social prescribers or community connectors will be working with older people who are specifically looking for activities to go to in order to reconnect with their communities. We recommend getting in touch with these services and making sure they know about your activity. You can share your flyer, which will have all the key information included, so they can then pass it on to the people they are working with who might like to attend.

12**Chapter 1** - Information about your activity



Meeting and greeting

Once someone has made the decision to come to an activity, the next challenge is walking through the door, which is always easier if you are greeted with a smile and made to feel at ease.

It is very important that all staff embody a welcoming ethos. Reception staff are often the

first point of contact for older people arriving at an activity. For those who are hesitant about joining, the interaction with reception staff can define whether they perceive a group as welcoming or not, and even influence whether they return.



+ The receptionist was really friendly and took me to the room himself. He pointed out the signs around the centre so that next time I can find the room for myself.



- It was my first time at the centre and when I arrived the receptionist spoke to me quite dismissively. I didn't know where to go and there were no signs up. There were some people around the centre, but no one offered to help.



Meeting and greeting

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Top Tip:

Include named photos of all staff in the reception at your centre.

In order to make sure the reception staff can help you to meet and greet older people, make sure you let them know in advance:

- ✓ **When your activity is**, so they know when to expect people and can manage other work around it.
- ✓ **Where your activity is** in the building and your mobile phone number if they need to contact you if they are unable to show someone where to go.
- ✓ **Who they should expect**, and if anyone you know of has a particular access or communication need that they should be aware of.
- ✓ **What the activity is** so that they can let people know what to expect so they can decide if the activity is of interest to them.





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Meeting and greeting



First impressions

You could also ask one of the older people in the group to volunteer to go and wait in reception before an activity in order to help greet people and show them into the room. This offers support to the reception staff as well as demonstrating that the responsibility for meeting and greeting new members is shared by everyone taking part in the activity.

No matter if you are a volunteer or a member of reception staff, we recommend that on first meeting someone arriving for an activity you should:



Top Tip:

For some of large social sessions like lunch clubs, you could have a small table with colouring/jigsaw/cards where new people can sit and occupy themselves before joining the larger group, or have a quiet chat with one or two people over a task.

- ✓ **Acknowledge the person** and make eye contact, rather than looking at a computer screen.
- ✓ **Ask the person their name**, and try and note it for next time – this helps with getting to know people who come regularly.
- ✓ **Offer them directions** to the activity they have come for.
- ✓ **Show them into the room**, or contact the activity provider or someone from the group so they can come out and meet them.

i For volunteer Meeters and Greeters at your activity

Host's welcome:

Your role as host is very important. You can make people feel comfortable and welcome in the group.

- ✓ **Having a proper start and finish every time, including introducing helpers, removes any stigma for new members.** Using the checklist overleaf can help you share the tasks with others. Telling people what will happen will help both newcomers and members with memory problems.
- ✓ **It's also helpful for everyone to know who they can speak to if they have any concerns.**



i For volunteer Meeters and Greeters at your activity

Host's welcome:



At the start

- ✓ Introduce yourself, and other helpers.
- ✓ Specific announcements - birthdays, trips etc.
- ✓ Programme for the session, including the timing of breaks.
- ✓ Are you doing introductions with participants?
- ✓ Make your way round the new people during the session, try to make sure they are happy and tell them about other groups, activities and services on offer.



At the end

- ✓ Thank everyone for coming, thank today's volunteers.
- ✓ Remind everyone what is happening next time.
- ✓ Let them know they can have a chat to you before they go.



CASE STUDY

A personal introduction

I am the Centre Manager and I am the first person new members meet when they come to the Centre. I tell them what the group is about, what the expectations of them are. I then introduce them personally to the tutor.

We make sure that tutors understand the ethos of our organisation. As a Women's Centre, for us that's very, very important because we work with women from all walks of life and who have had many life experiences. The tutor then acknowledges to the group when a new person has joined and introduces them to the other members.



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RESOURCE

Checklist: Meeting and greeting


We've created a template for volunteers to be used at a reception. This is available on the next page.

Print this out and keep it for the volunteer at reception.



Checklist for receptionists/staff: Greeting and registration

- ✓ **Acknowledge the person** and make eye contact, rather than looking at a computer screen.
- ✓ **Ask the person their name**, and try and note it for next time – this helps with getting to know people who come regularly.
- ✓ **Offer them directions to the activity** they have come for or,
- ✓ **Show them into the room**, or contact the activity provider or someone from the group so they can come out and meet them.

 To be kept at reception of your Warm Welcome event

CASE STUDY

A two-way communication

Due to the nature of our work with vulnerable women, people have to ring a bell and be let into our centre by a member of staff. At the start of the project we had a problem with participants coming in all at different times and ringing the bell. Staff were getting stressed about constantly getting up and down, as this is also our office where staff would be working.

So we did a really nice communication exercise, explaining who the women were, what the project was about, and the staff were very supportive. From then on someone would meet the women, greet them warmly and make them feel welcome.

However, a lot of staff members were saying that the project participants were quite



rude. When staff were greeting them, they were not saying hello back, acknowledging them, or making eye contact.

So our project coordinator worked with the women to explain that when they come in they should greet staff members even if they don't know them. And they did. That really contributed to everybody feeling really engaged. It was a two-way thing.

Many of our participants and staff don't share the same language, so this really helped everyone understand each other and feel much warmer. Smiling, eye contact and warm body language goes a long way!



Introductions and icebreakers

It is a good idea to start with a welcome from the activity provider leading the group. They should introduce themselves and give a brief summary of what the group is going to be doing, for example: “Hello my name is Carol and today we are going

to be playing Boccia. It is a great game where you have to try and throw coloured balls from a seated position closest to the target to win”. Then, give everyone the chance to get to know each other a little with an icebreaker.



+ People feel a bit silly at first, but through the icebreakers they learn each other's names and something they may have in common. This leads to lively conversation and genuine friendships forming.



- The group aren't given a chance to introduce themselves, people feel shy and awkward at the tea break and don't know one another's names.



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Ideas for breaking the ice



**Best
practice**

Some people like to make clear who the staff in the room are by wearing identifying name badges or lanyards. You could have a poster on the wall showing photos, names and roles of staff so people know who to look to if they need support.

It is also useful to start the session by going round the group and asking everyone to say their name, even if everyone has a name badge. Everyone can see who else is in the room and learn the names of those they are sitting next to. Sometimes it is easy to forget names when you feel nervous and by doing this the participants might not have to

ask twice! It is also a good reminder for people who attend the group regularly.

You could also ask people to share a detail about themselves in this introduction that is relevant to the group activity. For example, if you are doing a music session, you could ask them what their favourite artist / song is or, in a craft session, you could ask what their favourite colour is. This offers an opportunity for people to find out if they have things in common with others that they might be able to chat about. When doing this make sure that the question is not too personal.



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Ideas for breaking the ice



Get a routine

Even if you don't have new people in the activity every week, it is useful to get into a routine with how the session starts. Then it does not differentiate the sessions where new people are attending for the first time and shine a spotlight on them. It also helps to make it clear when the session has begun if you have left time for socialising at the very beginning.



Top Tip:

You could give out name badges or lanyards when people arrive. Some groups like to use name badges for everyone. This can help people with memory problems. Some groups use coloured name badges or lanyards for organisers so members can easily see who to ask for help. Remember that some people in your group may not want to wear a name badge. Make sure the writing on the badge is big enough so that you can read everyone's name!



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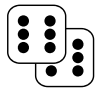
Icebreaker activity examples

Taking part in an activity session when you don't know anyone can be a nerve-racking experience, so it is important to try and break the ice at the beginning of an activity session.

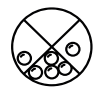
It is important for the activity lead to try to include everyone in a way that suits them. You could start with a short icebreaker activity to get the ball rolling. Some examples of these are:



Pair discussions – ask people to talk to their neighbour about a topic for two minutes, then do the same with the other neighbour.



Dice-breaker – ask a different question for each number on a dice. You could do this as a whole group or in pairs.



People bingo – use a simple scoring sheet to encourage people to ask questions. Eg – find someone who likes cheese / find who has had the longest journey here / find someone with brown eyes....etc. When someone has answered them all they can call bingo.



Top Tip:

Try not to use icebreaker activities that require people to remember long lists of information (like the popular activity 'I went to the supermarket and I bought...'). These could be exclusionary for people with memory issues.

CASE STUDY

Introductions when it's not your centre

Our clubs and activities take place in different centres throughout the borough, so we always make sure someone is outside to meet new people, and bring them in. We put our logo around the centre with an arrow to the room where we are.

We ensure reception staff have been informed of what activity is on, and where they're taking place. We have a chat with new people the day before the activity, and chat through directions and what to expect when they get there.



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CHAPTER 4

Seating arrangements and time for chatting

Seating arrangements should maximise opportunities for conversation and friendly social interactions. Some ideas, with the pros and cons, are outlined on the following pages.



+

I get a chance to talk to lots of people in the class, and I found one member who I really get on with. We decided to go for a coffee after class.



-

I come to the activity and each week the same people sit with each other. I feel really left out.

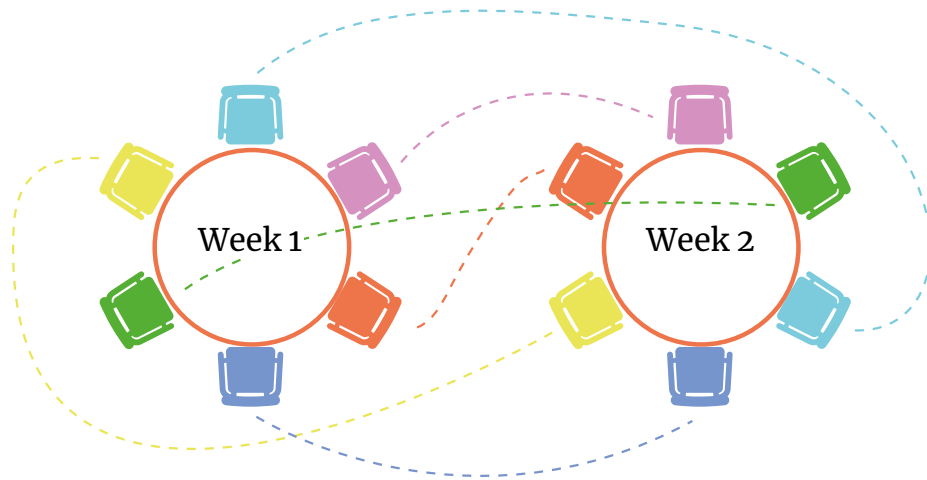
Change the seating every week, not allowing set places for people

Benefits

- This stops people from saving seats and cliques forming around particular chairs or tables.
- Group members can get to know and chat to different people every week.

Things to keep in mind

- Some people will always only sit with friends, so this approach doesn't always work.
- People with particular communication needs (such as visual or hearing issues) might need to sit in the same place every week limiting their opportunity to move around.
- Think about rotating who sits next to them if appropriate so they can still meet new people.





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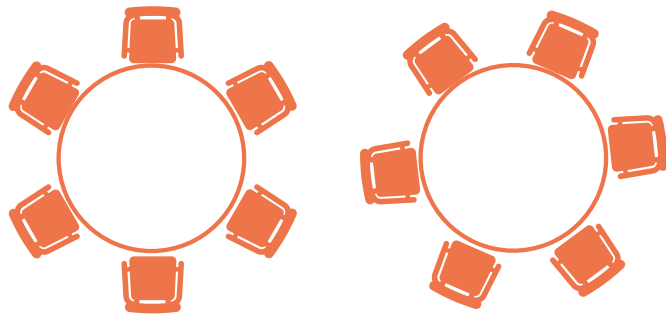
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Use a circular seating plan so people can face each other, and make eye contact

Benefits

- Being able to see people and make eye contact is more conducive to talking and social interaction.
- Less resource is needed for this layout – you could use chairs only.
- The whole group can see one another, which is helpful for introductions.



Things to keep in mind

- As mentioned, you might be limited by the space you have and the resources available for this layout.
- This layout brings the whole group together, which might be more challenging for starting new conversations with individuals. If the tables are large it can be hard to hear the people on the other side. This means people may only be able to speak to the people next to them.



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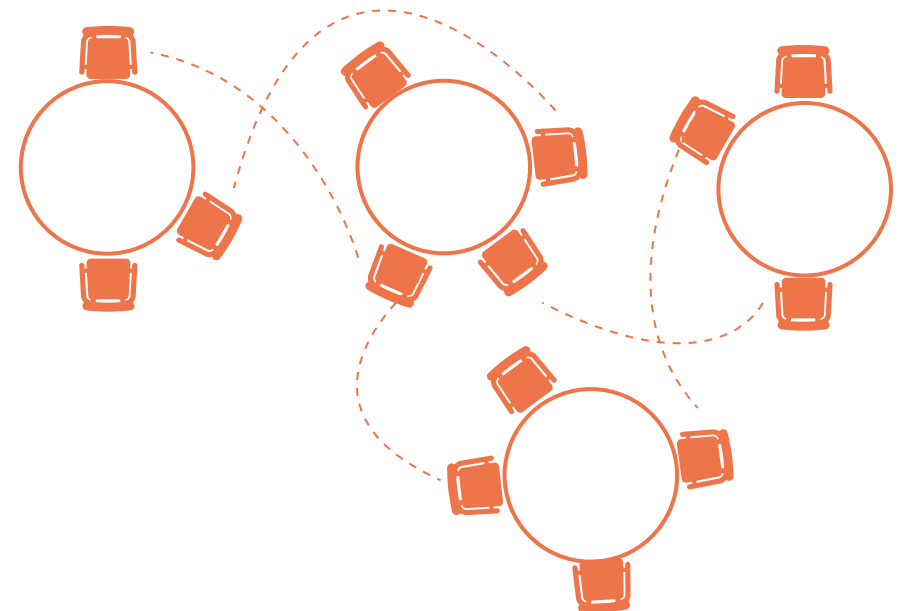
Use small group activities to break up larger groups, or to encourage people to change tables so they move around and mix with others in the wider group

Benefits

- Working with smaller groups can help new people to get to know others better, especially if they are moving around and having conversations with more people than only their neighbour.
- This might help encourage people that do already know each other to talk to others and move around the room, rather than staying together.

Things to keep in mind

- Limited space and limited mobility of participants might make moving around the room in this way more challenging.





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CASE STUDY

Working with large groups

We have large groups of 50–60 people. It's great when people independently become friends, but then you have the problem of people always wanting to sit with their friends, which can be tough for people coming in for the first time. So we try to move people around for the activities. Sometimes it's not as easy for some people to move around as for others, so we keep that in mind, and ask those who feel able to rotate around.

**Top Tip:**

Some organisations number all of the seats when they do coach trips. Seats near the doors are prioritised for those with disabilities. This avoids rushes to get the best seats and takes need into account. They also offer free tickets for volunteer English Buddies to mix up speakers of different languages and allow time to practice.





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CASE STUDY

A home from home

An evaluation of the ABC programme by [Traverse](#) found that in most projects, a specific community centre or network of centres became focal points or hubs around which community life took place. In some centres, it was common for participants to visit the centres almost every day, either to take part in scheduled activities or to just spend half an hour catching up with neighbours, project staff or reading the newspapers. The fact that



the centres were typically located near to participants' homes was also mentioned as a factor encouraging frequent visits, particularly for those who were less confident and connected and those who were less mobile.

“It’s a lot like going home. You go down there, you have a cup of tea. You go to the shop and you pop by the centre and you can always pop in and say hello.”



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Time for chatting

Once someone has found the correct room or been shown into an activity, there are other things activity providers can do to create a welcoming atmosphere. We suggest making time specifically outside of the activity for social interactions – so start the activity five

minutes after the beginning of the session, have a break in the middle, or leave 20 minutes at the end for people to hang around and chat before they head home. This needs to be factored in when booking a space and marking out staff time.

To facilitate conversation in these moments:

- ✓ **Provide refreshments** – letting someone know where they can make a cup of tea or sparking up a conversation around the urn can offer an easy opportunity for the group to speak to each other.
- ✓ **Staff time** – make sure you have time to take part in the socialising as well, then you can approach new people and make them feel welcome.
- ✓ **Staff ratios** – make sure there are enough staff and volunteers in the room to support the number of older people you are expecting.
- ✓ **Volunteers** – ask people who come regularly to look out for new people and to introduce themselves.
- ✓ **Seating arrangements** – make sure there are enough chairs for people to sit on, we also recommend circular seating, so people can see each other's faces and make eye contact.

Top Tip:

Don't forget to budget and fundraise for your tutor and staff to spend time chatting to participants before or after you activity, along with the cost of any refreshments you are planning to provide.

CASE STUDY

Snacks and chats after the class

We started Legs, Bums and Tums, which is pretty heavy exercise. For someone who hasn't exercised in a while it was very, very tough. To make the class inclusive, the tutor introduced different exercises, some of which are chair based.

We buy each member an exercise mat which they can keep safely at the centre so they don't have to carry it around with them. This makes them feel included and wanting to return.

We created a friendly atmosphere after that whereby we make a little fruit salad and a chia seed pudding, a refreshment at the end of the session, which was very popular and encouraged women to come



back week after week. They would tell us – “It’s well worth all the hard effort!”. The women would sit together and have a chat while they had their refreshments.

The women support each other, cheering when they do a hard session!

This has created real friendships among the women. A little refreshment always does the trick!



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Creating a Warm Welcome ethos across the whole organisation

Staff play an essential role at an organisational and group level in establishing the kind of Warm Welcome which is key to developing and maintaining engagement with older people. This not only includes group leaders but also centre managers, reception staff and volunteers.

Embedding a welcoming ethos and culture depends on a combination of formalising the approach through organisational policies and the informal, day-to-day enactment of these policies through interactions between individuals.



+ Everyone I met was really friendly and the manager made a point of popping in to say hello to the group and welcome new members.



- I wasn't happy with how the group was being run but I didn't know who to talk to about it as I didn't want to say it to the tutor directly. We weren't told about how to give feedback or make a complaint.



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Checklist:

Creating an ethos



Top Tip:

Create a wall chart with your Warm Welcome principles written on it. Display your principles in all of the community languages spoken in your centre.



Policy

More formal approaches include:

- ✓ **Having written policies and role specifications** which set out what is meant by a Warm Welcome for a given organisation, and expectations for welcoming behaviour on the part of staff, volunteers and group attendees. Policies should also make clear what is considered unacceptable behaviour in that organisation.
- ✓ **Training staff with reference to these policies.** In one example, training sessions included staff role playing given situations and then reviewing their approaches in relation to the written policy (we've included training scenarios on the next page). It's important that all members of staff are involved, including reception staff, who in many cases will be the first person someone meets when they come in the door!
- ✓ **Providing written organisational policies** to the older people who attend groups there. In some cases, however, this may not be appropriate. For example, individuals who are very tentative about joining an activity may find this kind of documentation off-putting.

Training scenarios

Here are some scenarios to support your staff in working through difficult situations. Go through these scenarios with staff and new workers regularly.

- 1 A volunteer is not talking to the person next to them and is on their phone.
- 2 A volunteer asks to leave early.
- 3 A volunteer turns up very late.
- 4 The facilitator hasn't turned up to run your art club.
- 5 It's a film club and the projector has broken five minutes before starting.
- 6 A participant arrives at a club inappropriately dressed for the weather.
- 7 A participant arrives in dirty clothing.
- 8 A participant keeps interrupting during a talk.
- 9 A participant has tried to swap contact details with a volunteer.
- 10 Two participants have had a disagreement and the conversation is becoming fraught.
- 11 A participant uses discriminatory language.
- 12 Not enough volunteers have turned up.
- 13 A participant is hesitant to fill in the new participant form.



Our Warm Welcome principles



- 1 Remember this is a shared place** for everyone to enjoy.
- 2 Be kind and welcoming to everyone,** we all deserve to be here.
- 3 Introduce yourself** if you don't know someone, especially if they are new to the group.
- 4 Treat everyone with respect,** we value difference and diversity.
- 5 If you notice someone isn't here, mention it** in the group so someone can check in on them.
- 6 Remember you are welcome at this activity,** and if you don't feel it please let us know so we can make changes to make you feel more comfortable.





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RESOURCE

Flourishing Lives - Relational Practice CPD

Flourishing Lives is a London-wide coalition of organisations taking a creative, relational approach to supporting richer, more independent lives for older people. They offer a one day CPD-Accredited training course called 'Mattering: An Introduction to the Relational Approach'.

The course is designed for people working at any level in arts, charity and public sector services and provides a practical framework and skill-set to develop effective and genuine interpersonal connections.

[To the resource →](#)



Older people in the lead

Encouraging members to input into the activities undertaken or how they are organised helps to foster a sense of

ownership of a group. Such consultation can be done via informal or formal feedback, or a mixture of the two.



+ A well-run consultation takes place, everyone feels heard and the range of activities keep members coming back week after week.



- No one is asked what they want to do and people quickly tire of the activity, the group becomes smaller and smaller.



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Creating a sense of ownership

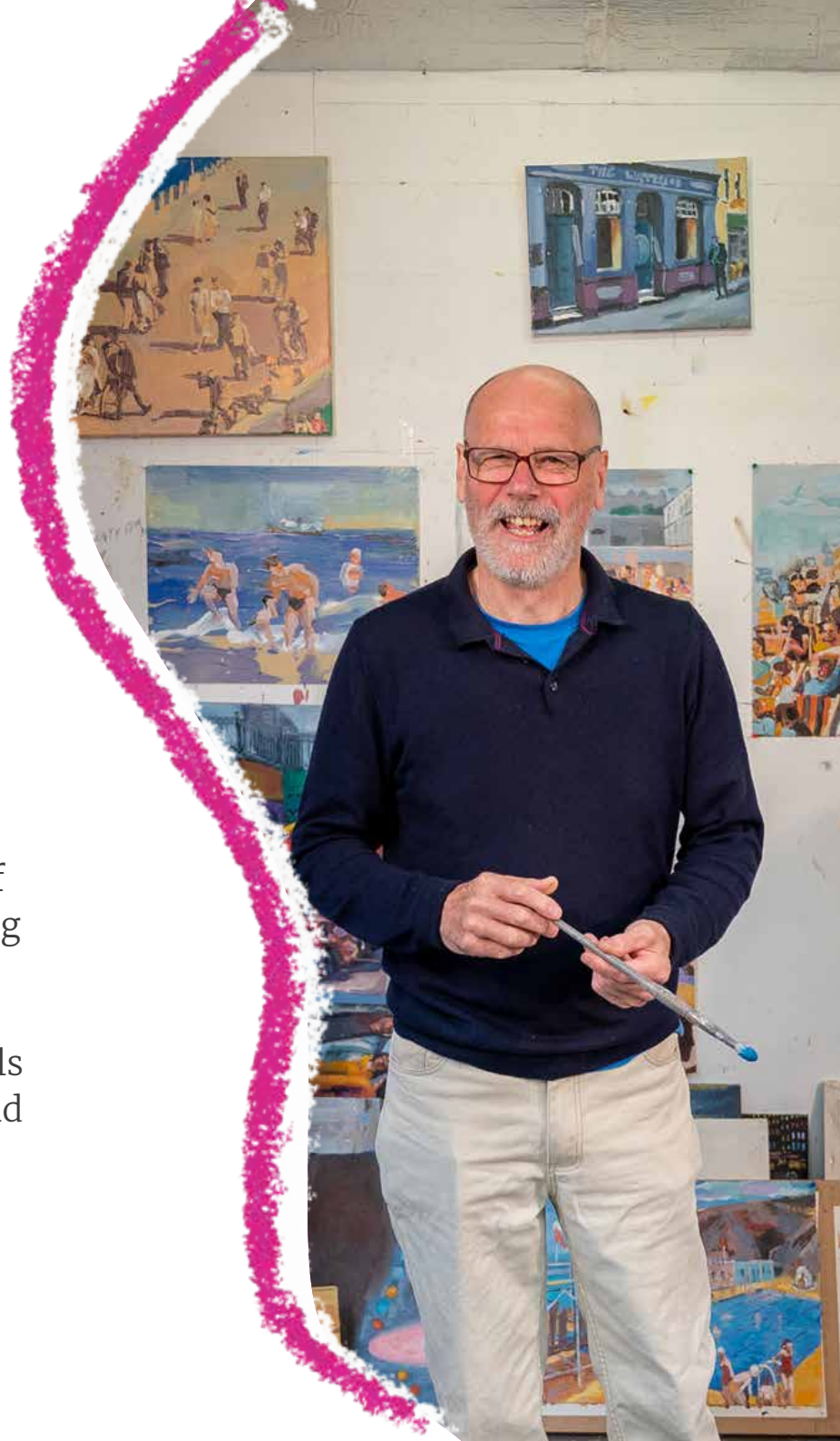


Co-creating
the programme

Within activity-based groups, choices of activity given will be within the parameters of the relevant topic (e.g. where to go on walks in the case of a walking group; what to make in the case of a craft group). In some cases, practitioners may want to develop place-based groups or 'communities of identity' by building an entire programme of activities with members from scratch. This can involve additional challenges of managing the collective decision-making process and meeting varied interests and expectations in a diverse group of people. Indeed, in some cases, individuals may not have many existing interests and lack awareness of the possibilities.

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Chapter 6 - Older people in the lead



CASE STUDY

Seeing value in all volunteers

Some people don't see themselves as having any skills to offer others, so a one-to-one meeting is an important part of the initial process. We also do one-to-one Buddy Walks with people, and in a short time you find out all sorts of things about them that then could be used when introducing them to other people for the first time, or for planning trips or new activities. Then you're able to be more inclusive by taking on the needs of the new people. These walks make the registration process a positive thing, about us offering what people need. This is done with a member of staff. The new person will then be handed over to a volunteer who can be a long term buddy.

What's key in the early days is someone being introduced to everyone, not left to make their



own introductions. Made to feel welcome, not like an outsider.

When you sit down with someone and ask them what they've done in their life they find they have lots to offer. We think this mutual self-help is important but it does need a dedicated worker to make it successful.



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Avoiding disengagement



Best
practice

- ✓ **Providing an initial set of possible group activities.** This will be easier within activity-based groups which already have a broad theme. Examples from the Camden practitioners include a Film Club and a Health Club. Regardless of the group type, possible activities could be generated by a periodic forum or focus group or could be based on a list of activities from other similar groups.
- ✓ **Organising taster sessions or demonstrations of activities,** particularly activities that people may be unfamiliar with. These can be very effective for generating interest.
- ✓ **Using a decision-making activity** to help the group select and prioritise from this initial pool of ideas.
- ✓ **Making consultations genuine** by ensuring that ideas generated really do feed into the group programme.
- ✓ **Changing some activities regularly** (while keeping popular activities the same) so that all group members feel included and respected.
- ✓ **Organising for professionals to lead particular group activities** where possible so that they are high quality and engaging.

The following approaches can be helpful in facilitating a positive consultation process which results in an engaging set of activities and avoids disengagement:

CASE STUDY

Supporting members to run their own activity

We have a member advisory group that comes up with activities. The women wanted to go swimming.

We anticipated potential barriers around access and understanding how to use the facilities e.g. lockers, showers for those who hadn't been to the swimming pool before, and we anticipated some people may feel intimidated by the premises.

It's essential for people to be supported throughout the activity including during the preparation stage. In this case that meant talking about and buying an appropriate swimming costume and booking women-only swimming sessions.



After an initial induction session, the women built their confidence quickly and decided to go directly to the leisure centre instead of meeting at our centre to make their way there.

We set up an informal feedback system with the leisure centre to ensure relevant support can be provided to the women.



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Putting together a volunteering form



Asking members about the skills they'd like to offer:

You can use a form like the one below alongside your existing membership form. You can use it to gather information about what members might like to offer. If a new member is not sure what they might like to offer, sit down and chat with them about it. Formal and informal volunteering is a great way for people to get involved in a way that suits them.

What can you offer us in volunteering?

Do you have any skills you can offer?

Areas of interest:

Please tick your areas of interest.

Volunteer interpreter

Volunteer session helper

Volunteer escort

Volunteer welcome host

Self-help group volunteer

Volunteer English buddy

Putting together a volunteering form

Availability:

Please tick your availability to carry out volunteering with us below

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
AM	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
PM	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Code of conduct

Please read and agree to our terms of conduct.

- 1. Give my time to help others who may be less able and provide practical help and support in the running of the charity's self-help groups, community services and social events.**
- 2. Respect another user/member's privacy and confidentiality.**
- 3. Always treat others respectfully.** We do not tolerate any type of bullying or harassment including physical, verbal or emotional and in such circumstances the persons involved will be spoken to and if it continues they may be excluded from membership or as a user of our services.

I confirm I have read and understood the code of conduct.

Name: Date:

CASE STUDY

Member led groups

We have a stroke support group aimed at people who have had a stroke, care or have cared for someone who has had a stroke, or are at risk of stroke.

Two active members facilitate the group. One is a stroke survivor, the other a retired nurse who has worked with stroke survivors previously. She contacts potential speakers, both established health professionals and young people coming through their training who want to give talks as part of their development remit. Both facilitators keep in touch with members of the group between meetings.



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CHAPTER 7

A sense of belonging and ownership

An additional set of proactive practices can be used to strengthen older people's ties to a group or organisation over time.



+

Sometimes when I don't feel like going to the group, I remember that people are relying on me to make tea and bring around the snacks and that makes me feel motivated to get there and appreciated once I have made the effort!



-

The activity leader does everything for us – handing out materials, making tea, clearing up, greeting new people. He is always running around so he doesn't have time to chat to anyone.



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Valuing group members by acknowledging and highlighting their talents and achievements



Group culture

Acknowledging or highlighting the talents of individuals and their communities may have a big impact on their sense of connectedness to a group or organisation. As such, it may encourage them to become more permanent and established members of their current group or to join other groups within the organisation.

Showcasing work or skills could be part of day-to-day activity within a group. It could also be on a larger scale: in one example, members of one minority group were invited to put on a cultural event which showcased their cooking and traditional dances. This brought other members of their community into the centre and raised the profile and status of individuals involved.





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Giving a role or responsibility to a group member



Group culture

This could include asking selected individuals to take on roles as volunteer helpers to look after a new member or someone who needs extra support. Training for volunteers can include work on creating a warm welcome which encourages them to act as additional role models for their peers. Effective use of volunteers may also lessen the formal divide between leaders and participants as a whole and so increase a sense of ownership of the group by all participants as well as by the volunteers themselves.

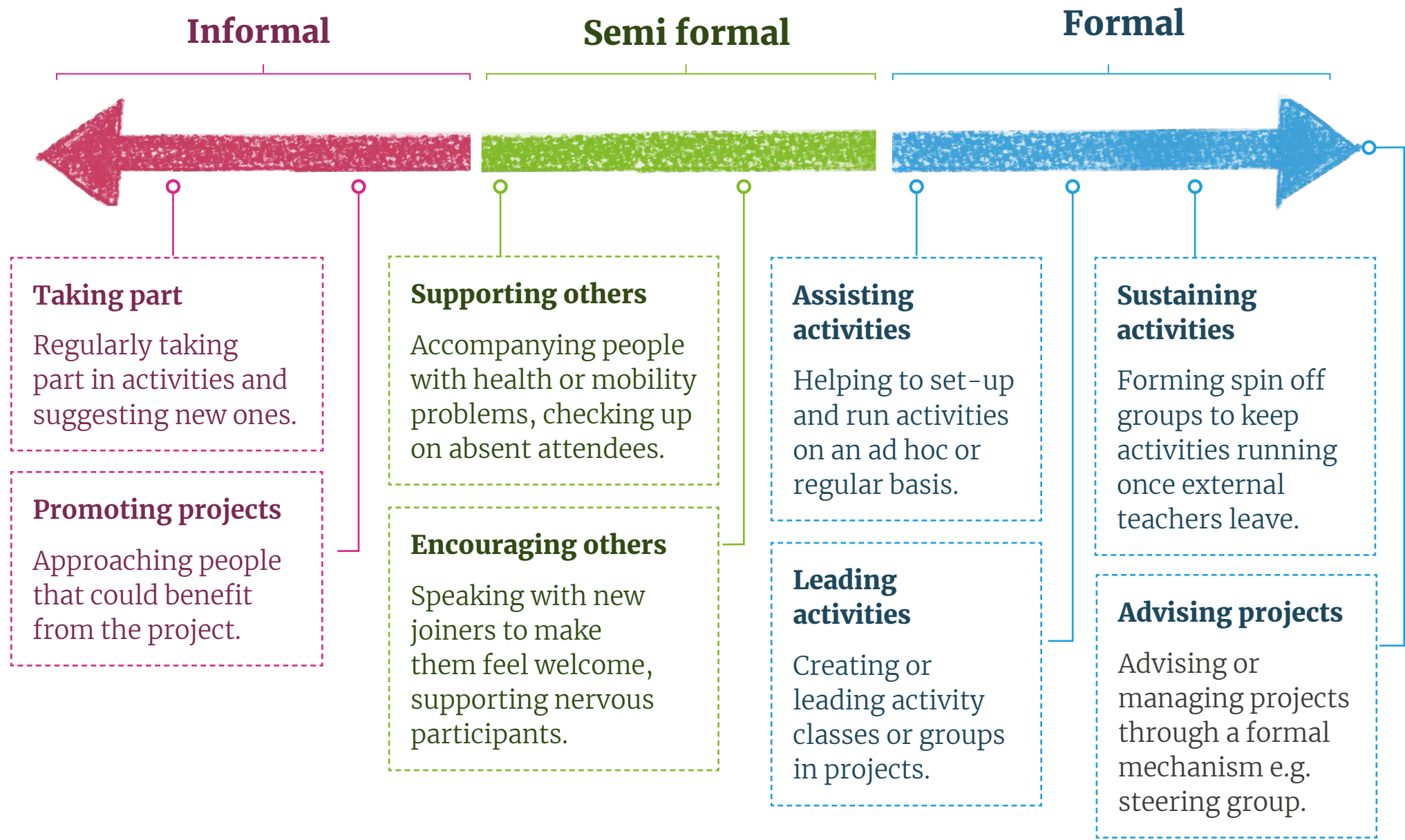
See Chapter 6 for an example of a volunteer form.

Evaluation of older people's participation in community activities by Traverse also shows that increases in 'helping' (i.e. volunteering in various ways) were linked to decreases in loneliness. Encouraging individuals to participate in this way may have benefits for their wellbeing.

See '**Spectrum of participant contributions**' on the next page



Spectrum of participant contributions



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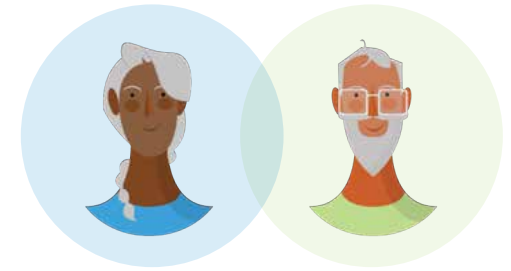
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Buddy systems



Group
culture

You might like to think about setting up a buddy system for new people joining the group, to help them settle in quickly and feel that they are made welcome. This could be something quite informal – you may have a few existing members of the group who would be happy to help. They could simply meet the new person as they arrive, bring them into the room and put them at ease by helping them to get a cup of tea, find a seat, and have a chat before the session starts. They could also help by making introductions to other members of the group, particularly if they know others well and can bring them into the conversation by talking about the area where they live, for example.



Alternatively, if you have the opportunity to meet new participants in advance, you might like to try a more formal approach and match them up with a buddy based on their interests. For example, if the new member has told you that they enjoy going to the cinema, you could arrange in advance for another member with an interest in films to greet them and help them settle in.

Either approach could help support you, in your role as group leader, as you will know that new participants are being well looked after while you are able to concentrate on any other issues.





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Codes of conduct

It is important to try and involve older people who regularly attend the group in this activity, so they can make new social connections as well as taking some responsibility for welcoming new people into the group.

To remind people of their role in the group, you could use a code of conduct, or some guiding principles. By displaying these principles in an obvious way and repeating them to the group regularly, it will help to prevent cliques from forming and hopefully keep the group open and friendly. Although you want to encourage connection, you do not want to do this to the detriment of the group as a whole.

An example of a list of principles (as mentioned in Chapter 5) could be:

We are all here to enjoy our activity, so:

1. Remember this is a shared place for everyone to share and enjoy.
2. Be kind and welcoming to everyone, we all deserve to be here.
3. Introduce yourself if you don't know someone, especially if they are new to the group.
4. Treat everyone with respect, we value difference and diversity.
5. If you notice someone isn't here, mention it in the group so someone can check in on them.
6. Remember you are welcome at this activity, and if you don't feel it please let us know and we can try and make changes to make you feel more comfortable



CASE STUDY

Engaging members from diverse communities

Our organisation has been going for 24 years and is exclusively focused on older people. Our client group is very diverse, most are on low income, 85% live on their own, and residents in our area have 11 year shorter lives than some other parts of the borough, so many spend their final years in poor health.

47% of our members have little or no English, which is a barrier to participation. So an important ‘way in’ to the centre is the English Club – this is all about informal speaking rather than reading and writing – it’s not like a formal lesson. They go on trips and do practical things like café and shop visits and learn the English needed for those activities. For these members the English Club is a focal point and is used as a platform for integration into other activities.

We try to incentivise attendance with a loyalty card that can be redeemed after the 10th session attended.

We phone up individuals who haven’t attended for a few weeks and this will often serve to bring them back in. We have a buddying scheme to support new members.

It is a process. We tailor activities around a group with particular needs, always with an aim of integrating individuals to become more permanent members.

We will quite often hold focus groups to test out ideas for things we are planning to do.

Our Filipino community were not so involved so we asked them to organise a cultural showcase event with dance, food, etc., and to invite other clients from different cultures within our organisation to come along. It was a big event and brought in lots of others originating from different parts of the Philippines to the centre as volunteers and new members. The entire membership had a new admiration and understanding of the culture.



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A chance to feed back



Here are some ways of encouraging people to input into group activities. It's important to think about how you will respond to feedback. Not responding to members' feedback or requests for talk time would be worse than not offering opportunities for feedback in the first place.



Suggestions box

People post ideas about ways to organise the group or activities. To encourage everyone to input their ideas, you could occasionally have a time where a slip is given out to everyone to write a comment. This could be a very open invitation to comment or a request for opinions on a specific question, for example about whether they enjoyed an activity they have just done.



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A chance to feedback



Discovery tree

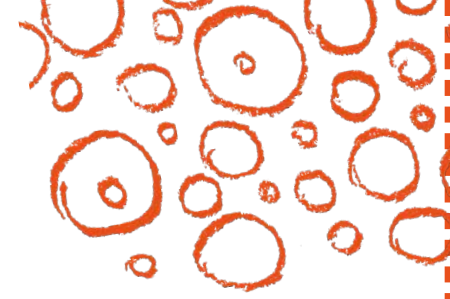
A more visual and instant way of collecting feedback could be to use this 'Tree of Discovery'.

In the simplest version, group members stick a green, yellow or red leaf (cut from pieces of coloured paper) on a large piece of paper or the wall to indicate their opinion. Fuller information could be collected by asking people to write reasons for their opinions on their leaf before hanging it up. One disadvantage to this could be that people are inhibited by having to display responses publicly.



Time to talk

In case anyone wants to voice any ideas or concerns privately, it could also be helpful to set up a simple system for people to indicate they would like one-to-one time to talk with the group leader. This could be by putting a note in the suggestions box or by sending a text or email.





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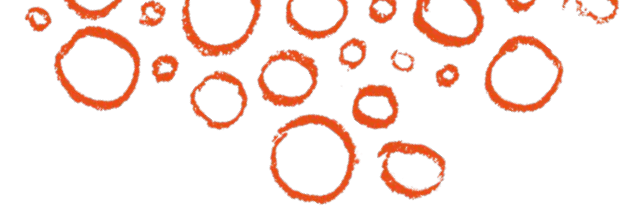
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Managing a meeting



Here are some tips for consulting meaningfully with a group in a more formalised 'meeting' setting. From our own experience, meetings work best if firmly chaired, giving everyone an opportunity to speak and actively trying to involve the people not joining in.

We suggest a few ground rules at the beginning:

- ✓ Explain that all questions or comments will be addressed to the chair.
- ✓ Explain you will be trying to hear the voice of everyone in the room.
- ✓ Explain that in order to give everyone a chance to speak, you will sometimes ask people to move on.
- ✓ Explain what is going to happen to the information shared in the meeting.
- ✓ We recommend giving everyone **large post-it notes** and pens so that they can write down points that they might not get to say or that they want to highlight.

Presenters will need to be able to speak:

- ✓ Loud, clear and slow.
- ✓ Jargon free and without abbreviations.



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Managing a meeting

Useful phrases to help the conversation move on:



Can I just stop you there, you have told us so much valuable information – I can see by the faces of the rest of the group that you have been stimulating other thoughts, let's hear them now.



That is such an interesting story – I can see other people have other things to say on this point – perhaps if I can stop you there and you can talk to me after the meeting if you think I need to include any additional details in my write up.



Interesting – has anyone else had a similar experience?

CASE STUDY

Member-led intergenerational sessions

An older neighbour, Anna, and a younger neighbour, Sofia, had bonded at the social clubs and then during lockdown decided to offer Italian sessions together. Both are from Italian families. They did a shared Zoom Club on Italian, introducing the group to beginners' phrases and how hand gestures are very important in the Italian language. They talked about Italian culture and people were asking them lots of questions. I had been supporting Anna with Zoom as she'd been struggling to get online. And now she was running a session online.

Sofia did lots of the tech stuff and Anna was answering a lot of the questions. It was great to see the effort they had put in and how comfortable they both were.



They inspired other older neighbours to deliver sessions – Violet had learnt ukulele during lockdown so she played some songs and told everyone about that; an older member from Sri Lanka did a session all about Sri Lanka, helped by a younger friend from the Sri Lanka community; Cathy ran a drop-in arts and crafts hour; Annie is very into meditation and wellness and she ran a wellness hour – she ran that totally by herself.

It worked well to do these sessions as a one-off as there's less pressure.



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Behaviour that challenges

When you are facing some behaviour that challenges, before tackling it you need to consider the context surrounding the people or the situation.



+ We are all given our turn to speak. Sometimes I can go on a bit but I don't mind being interrupted because I know it's fair for everyone to get their turn, and we agreed our Code of Conduct when we started the classes.



- One member of the group always dominates the discussion. Their off-topic comments are allowed to go on each week, and this really brings down the tone of the group. No one else feels heard. We feel very frustrated that this behaviour is never addressed.



Behaviour that challenges

Gauging the context of the situation:

- ✓ **Do you know where this is coming from?**
Is it something new, or is it an old issue that has come up again?
- ✓ **If it is to do with an individual,** are there circumstances that you are aware of that might make them behave in a certain way?
- ✓ **Are there things that could be considered in future to avoid this happening again?**

It is important to note that neutrality and impartiality on the part of the activity practitioner is essential when dealing with behaviour that challenges.



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Behaviour that challenges



Working with the group

- ✓ Sometimes acknowledging a situation is enough to stop it, or deal with it in a way that ensures everyone feels listened to. Acknowledge that it has happened and move on.
- ✓ If the group needs more to bring it back together after an incident, try to bring focus back on to the activity you are all there to learn and share.
- ✓ Reiterate the boundaries and principles of the group – this might not be immediately after the incident, it could be at the beginning of the next session, or in a newsletter.

Working with an individual

- ✓ Try and make time for the people involved to talk to you and air their grievances (empathetic listening) – this might be after the session or in a catch up call after the situation has had time to die down.
- ✓ Would the person involved benefit from having a particular role to play in the group – could they be a greeter or in charge of the tea?
- ✓ Before excluding people from the group – think about other ways the situation could be dealt with. Does the person need some time to talk? Or access to more services to help them with other issues?



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Behaviour that challenges

Looking out for staff

- ✓ **Make sure you have someone else in the organisation you can talk to about it, if something happens in a group that is challenging or difficult.** They should be able to listen, and perhaps offer a different viewpoint and some other ideas on how to deal with it.
- ✓ **Having the backing of your organisation is essential** – make sure that you are aware of their policy and how they can support you if someone isn't following it.



Top Tip:

Charity Hope Not Hate offer training for community organisations seeking to tackle racism and unconscious bias within the workforce, on a range of issues including 'Becoming Conscious of Unconscious Bias' and 'Having Difficult Conversations'. Find out more [here](#).



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RESOURCE

Keep Calm and Listen

Effective ways of holding conversations with someone living with a mental health condition.

A resource by
www.agebetersheff.co.uk

To the resource →

CASE STUDY

Lunch club

We have a Saturday lunch club. It includes providing new foods and drinks for people to try. It has become increasingly popular.

One day the volunteers were very busy in the kitchen and the coffee machine had broken and there was a big spillage. Suddenly one of the members came in extremely angry because she said she had been waiting for ages and that everyone else had had theirs.

This was out of character for the group member. We sat her down and when we talked to her we found out that she was actually in a lot of pain and was in need of someone to talk to and a hug – she was venting because of other problems.

This suggests that negative behaviour could be used as a key indicator of problems in the life of the person involved and of a sign that they need some attention. You need to probe the negative behaviour and find out what else is going on.



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Behaviour that challenges

Scenarios to explore in training:

- 1** **One member in the group is consistently negative,** often taking over conversations with long monologues. This dampens the enthusiasm of other members.

- 2** **One person is rather loud and can be overpowering.** This is especially true for quieter participants who can feel intimidated and not able to take part in conversations as much as they would like.

- 3** **A number of more confident participants are good friends and routinely sit together in sessions.** Their voices can be very dominant and the group can feel quite “cliquey” for new or even regular but quieter participants.

- 4** **During a trip, a male member of the class started taking photographs of other members on his phone.** These members were uncomfortable with this and told the group leader. The man was asked to kindly ask if he wanted to take any photographs of other people, but was later seen taking photographs again without asking permission.

- 5** **At a lunch club buffet, a couple of members take much more than their fair share of the food.** They do this every week, and there is then not enough food for everyone. Other members are upset by this.



Engaging with older men

Research identifies that older men are lonelier than women and less likely to engage in activities¹. Older men also have less contact with their children, family and friends than women and are less likely to

take part in activities². However there is little research exploring the reasons for their lower levels of engagement, or what sort of activities or groups men would like to attend.



+ I had always thought the community centre wasn't for me. One day Daniel knocked on my door and invited me on a local walk, so I gave it a go. We chatted about what I'm interested in, and he told me about things happening at the centre. It took me a while, but eventually I came to help out with the garden and now I go on the bike rides every week.



- I've always thought of the community centre as not for me. I don't really see any men there, and I wasn't really interested in the activities on offer.

CASE STUDY

Step by step

The Outreach Team introduced Philip to the centre. He has lived in a block on the estate for 51 years and didn't know anybody. It was quite a while before he registered and then a much longer period before he came in to join anything, probably a year. Now he's our DIY worker, and he's become a Bug Hotel designer. He's an example of someone who appeared to be so acutely isolated and really struggling to build relationships to now everyone knows him, and he's really essential to us in terms of the help he gives.



Top Tip:

Finding out men's interests

One way of finding out about people's interests is having one-to-ones with them, and then keep going back to them with one-to-ones and surveys. We also have an 'interests' form that people fill out when they first join. We provide them with examples in case they're not sure about what their interests might be.





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Tips from men's workers:

The insights below come from project partners running activities specifically aimed at engaging with older men.

- 1. Include representations of older men on your publicity**, such as photos of men on your posters.
- 2. Find out about men's individual interests** and cater to what they tell you.
- 3. Walking groups** have been particularly successful in Camden for engaging with older men.
- 4. Stepping stone activities**, like buddy walks, can be beneficial to get to know an older man before they commit to coming to an activity at a centre.
- 5. Keep in touch.** Some members may need more encouragement to make attending the activity part of their routine.
- 6. Foster relationships within the group.** At first members may only feel comfortable speaking with the staff member. By continually introducing the member to others or assigning them a buddy, the new member can work at becoming more independent within the group.
- 7. Some centres find that offering men-only groups is crucial.**
- 8. Find out the skills men have and would like to offer.**
- 9. Activities don't have to take place at the centre.** Some organisations arrange trips or activities at other places that men have expressed an interest in.
- 10. Set targets, commit as an organisation, and regularly review your targets.** Everyone should be committed to recruiting and maintaining male membership, as it may rise and fall.



CASE STUDY

Outreach with older men

The Ageing Better in Camden (ABC) Outreach Team works to locate and engage with older people who are not accessing activities or support services. Their focus is on the ‘people no-one knows’.

The Outreach Team undertook a small research project with older men in Camden who don't attend community centre activities to find out how they currently socialise with others, and what an attractive social activity would look like for them.

They found that older men for whom groups, education or community activities were not part of their life experience were less likely to make their way into a community centre under their own steam. They found that for these men it can be useful to initially meet



and engage them out in the community in the spaces and places they already go and to consider providing informal pop-up activities in neutral spaces such as cafes and parks.

Read more about their findings [here](#).



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CASE STUDY

A dedicated men's worker

Having a dedicated worker is certainly important. We raised our number of men from 12% to 30% in three years and we're determined to keep it there. Quite a few of the men who come to us find it difficult to make relationships with women, so for us it made sense to have a male worker. Having a dedicated worker with a dedicated target keeps you on the ball, so that when it went back down to 28% we really made an effort to get it back up again.

**Top Tip:**

Sometimes you have to accept that it's OK for someone to come along and be quiet. Just being around people is enough for them. You might not want to push it too hard.



CASE STUDY

Creating a sense of purpose

It doesn't seem to work well to ask men to formally volunteer but if you ask for help with certain things, they respond better to that. They feel invested in what you're doing because they have an active role, not sat there like a loose end if they don't feel like they can have conversations. Often, they will get stuck in with a chat if they have something to get on with. Creating a sense of purpose in it, not just coming together to socialise, a practical thing. For example we've got things in the garden we want them to get stuck in to.





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CHAPTER 10

Keeping in touch

Communication with group or organisation members can serve the purposes of both keeping them informed and giving them the sense that they are included and cared for.



The staff member called me after two weeks to find out why I wasn't at the group, and upon hearing I'd come out of hospital, they sent me a Get Well Soon card. I felt valued and looked forward to returning to the group.



I was ill in hospital and haven't been to the group for four weeks. No one contacted me to find out where I was or if I was OK. I felt like no one cared.



Top Tip: The book

Those who need a reminder get written in the book. Either permanently because they need a reminder every week, or temporarily if they've had a big life event and need a regular call for a while. All the people in the book get a call every week. It's a person-centred way of keeping in touch.



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Checklist:

Ways to keep in touch



Good habits

- ✓ Providing regular information or reminders for everyone about the activities on offer including what they are, where they will take place and at what time. These communications may take place via telephone, email, text, WhatsApp or paper newsletter.
- ✓ Making telephone calls to individual group members when there is a concern about them. For example, if they have unexpectedly failed to attend a group or if it is known that they have been unwell.
- ✓ Making telephone calls to individual group members to check in with them and to encourage ongoing attendance. This could be particularly important after a first visit but telephoning can be an effective means of maintaining engagement over time.
- ✓ Sending birthday cards and get well cards to group members. This makes people feel cared for and connected to the group.



Top Tip:

Membership management takes lots of time and energy, and needs proper resourcing. You could book in regular, shorter calls to re-engage with members.





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Key phone calls to make:



Phone calls after the first visit to a group

For those who have attended an activity for the first time, even if they have enjoyed it, there is often still a feeling of anxiety. Someone calling to say how pleased they were they came and how much they are looking forward to seeing them next week helps to reduce the anxiety.

Regular phone calls to those who need them

Some older people might need a reminder call every week. This could be due to memory issues or because they are in need of additional support to help them come.

Phone calls to regular attendees who haven't come

If an older person who usually attends a group hasn't come then there should be a system where it is noted and then they are called to see if they are OK. Part of belonging is someone noticing if you are missing!

Phone calls and cards to people who are having a difficult time

If older people are going to stay connected to groups when they are having a difficult time such as bereavement or following a stay in hospital, they need to feel a pull back to the group. So someone needs to call or send cards to let them know that they are in people's thoughts and they are looking forward to seeing them again.

CASE STUDY

Re-engagement calls

Our proactive approach to outreach means we have a good uptake of older neighbours we meet signing up to receive our Social Clubs programme by post every month.

However, many neighbours receiving the programme may have never come along to a club. They perhaps need some extra encouragement, more information, would like more time to build trust with staff, or their situation has changed.

Many other neighbours may stop attending clubs for various reasons, and we'd like to better re-engage them with our activities, or offer support elsewhere if perhaps attending social clubs has become difficult.

What we did:

- A regular process for re-engaging neighbours through phone calls.
- Create a clear criteria to identify neighbours in need of re-engagement, using our customer relationship management system (never attended a social club, or not attended in last six months).
- Create a script for different eventualities.
- Create a follow up process for failed phone calls (e.g. letter sent to say we would remove from mailing list unless we heard from them).

The team spoke to 38 members, and managed fewer calls than anticipated in the time allotted. The nature of those conversations could be unpredictable, leading to deeper interventions from the outreach team, or simply the need to be a kind and supportive ear for far longer than 10 minutes.



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Of the 38 members we spoke to 22 wanted to remain on the mailing list, 1 wanted to be removed from mailing list and 15 were left voicemails and will be sent follow up letters.

Overwhelmingly, the response was immensely positive in terms of building trust. So many neighbours were thankful to be remembered and grateful for the call. Many were unable to attend clubs due to changes in their health, but would like to keep receiving the programme as they enjoyed seeing what was out there for when they were feeling better.

Some of the conversations we shared included a member who had been recently bereaved but hoped to attend a club in the future; a man who had an operation and wanted to remain on the mailing list and a woman who was busy planning her son's wedding but would get back in touch to come to events.

Phone calls are personable and warm and allow us to have a dialogue with neighbours we might not reach otherwise. Whilst time



heavy, we much prefer this model of re-engagement than simply sending letters that say we'll remove recipients from the mailing list unless we hear from them, or simply removing them after a certain amount of time has lapsed.



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Acknowledgements

This Warm Welcome toolkit is the result of a huge collaborative effort and is based on the experience and expertise of practitioners (group leaders or teachers, centre managers, and outreach workers) who organise or run these groups for older people in Camden.

We would like to say a massive thank you to all of the practitioners in Camden, and to Ageing Better practitioners around the country, for making this toolkit possible.





A huge thank you to...

1

Our host organisation:

- Age UK Camden

Our delivery agencies across Camden

- Abbey Community Centre
- Umoja (formerly African Health Forum)
- African Physical Training Organisation
- Akademi
- Akash Residents' Association
- Bengali Workers Association
- Community Association for West Hampstead
- The Cornerstone Parish
- Dragon Hall Centre
- Ethiopian Welfare Association
- Henna Asian Women's Group
- Highgate Newton Community Centre
- Holborn Community Association
- Hopscotch Women's Centre
- Kentish Town City Farm
- Kentish Town Community Centre
- Kilburn Older Voices Exchange (KOVE)
- Kings Cross Brunswick Neighbourhood Association
- The Kosmos Centre
- Light for Nations Mission
- The London School of Mosaic
- Mary Ward Centre
- North London Cares
- Opening Doors London

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A huge thank you to...

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- Origin Housing (We Are Ageing Better)
- Queen's Crescent Community Association
- SeeThrough Theatre Company
- South Sudan Women's Skills Development
- The Third Age Project
- West Hampstead Women's Centre
- Women's Lives

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Our independent evaluators

- Traverse

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With special thanks to Time to Shine Leeds

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Our Ageing Better partners around England

- Ageing Better in Birmingham
- Bristol Ageing Better
- Brightlife Cheshire
- Connect Hackney
- Manchester: Ambition for Ageing
- Isle of Wight: Age Friendly Island
- Time to Shine Leeds
- Leicester Ageing Together
- Ageing Better Middlesbrough
- Age Better Sheffield
- Talk, Eat, Drink in East Lindsey
- Ageless Thanet
- Ageing Well Torbay



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Resource: Case study

Anti-racism action

CASE STUDY

Anti-racism action

Our mission is to help people find connection and community in a disconnected age – by reducing loneliness and isolation; deepening belonging, purpose and power; and bringing people together to bridge the gaps across social, generational, digital, cultural and attitudinal divides.

We cannot achieve those objectives without being an anti-racist organisation.

That means we are committed to tackling racism wherever it occurs in our organisation, and to supporting the end of systemic racism in our communities. We recognise that our own policies and processes, built over nine years since we started the organisation, have not done nearly enough to proactively root out racism both in our own work and in our broader communities – and that, in fact, they are likely

to have upheld the injustices and inequities, and the systems of oppression, that occur within and beyond our charities.

We believe that this is a fight for everyone.

That's why, starting in June 2020 – and in response to the murder of George Floyd and so many other racial injustices in the US, the UK and around the world; the terrible impact of Covid-19 on Black people, people of colour and people from other ethnic minorities, which reveals again the health inequalities in our systems and cultures; and the inspirational leadership of the Black Lives Matter movement – our organisation is taking concrete action to make real our commitment to our values, and to help contribute to an awakening and sustained change in our communities.

Firstly, we want to own that we are part of the problem. For an organisation whose mission is to build community and connection, and to do so across perceived differences, we have not always had the courage of our convictions



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when it comes to racism. Yes, we have always had a commitment to equal opportunity and in the last two years we have instigated a diversity initiative. But trying to be equal, or attempting to be diverse, is not the same thing as being pro-actively anti-racist, and a piecemeal approach cannot solve rooted systemic injustices built up over centuries and hardwired into economies and cultures.

Our blind spots and our inactivity have led to failings. In our programmes and in our staff teams, we haven't challenged racism everywhere it has occurred, for fear of upsetting people or overreaching on our charitable objectives. We haven't protected colleagues enough when they have been confronted with racism in their jobs. We haven't acted quickly enough to find space for Black and other ethnic minority leadership in our staff or board teams. In neglecting to do these things, we haven't built a culture that is safe for everyone to work in and to thrive in. Instead, we have acted timidly in the hope that, ultimately, people might change.

But hope is not a strategy and change doesn't happen without action.

Now, we are setting out on an altogether different approach – to be proudly anti-racist in everything we do – so that we can be part of the solution, and no longer part of the problem. To start out on that journey, since the start of June, we have:

- **Created an Anti-Racist Action Group** to lead change within our organisation, our programmes and our communities.
- **Committed to appointing expert external support** to appraise our systems, processes, policies and communications so that they are appropriate for an organisation seeking to make lasting change.
- **Commissioned racial justice mentoring** for all 40 employees at our organisation, to deepen our individual and collective understanding of systemic oppression and privilege; of the interpersonal, the intergenerational and the intersectional.



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- **Committed funding** to anti-racist learning and training, with more investment in future years.
- **Appraised the best ways to share experiences of micro-aggression** in our everyday work and in our teams and started a cultural shift on calling out these unacceptable aggressions wherever they occur.
- **Drafted a new support and escalation process** to implement a no tolerance for racism policy alongside a learning process to help people learn about the impact of micro-aggressions.
- **Started looking at ways to share stories of racism** experienced by people in our communities, and stories of diversity and hope through our core programmes and communications.
- **Committed to sharing our learning**, most importantly with the older and younger people who make up our community, but also with funders, philanthropists, councils,

and partners – to help influence the wider conversation about racial justice in the charity sector and beyond.

The progress we make through this action will not happen quickly, nor will this work alone be sufficient. We know the path towards progress is not a straight line, and more people will continue to feel the trauma of racism every day, everywhere. But by educating ourselves and providing space for our communities to learn; by being accountable for our own actions as an organisation; and by speaking out when we see racial injustice, we can make a significant difference.

We are committed to holding ourselves to account on this agenda, so will regularly share the work we are doing, and the tools we find most helpful, to support others in their anti-racism work too. In the meantime, we're grateful to all our partners and supporters for helping to build community and connection in disconnecting times and – relationship by relationship – helping to re-make the world as it should be.



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Resource: Leaflet

Age Better in Sheffield: Keep calm and listen



AGE BETTER
IN SHEFFIELD

Keep Calm and Listen

Effective ways of holding
conversations with someone living
with a mental health condition

www.agebettersheff.co.uk



Introduction

The first contact with Age Better in Sheffield (ABiS) for many prospective participants is a phone call from a Delivery Partner following a referral from the Programme's administrative assistant. At this stage in the relationship little is known about the individual's history or present circumstances. The Delivery Partner must make the initial contact and decide whether to accept the referral onto their project. At this stage the caller may become aware that the person on the other end of the phone has a mental health condition or this could become apparent at the first face to face meeting. It is vital that this stage of the process is handled as professionally and sensitively as possible.



Learning effective ways of handling conversations with people living with mental health conditions

The challenge for Sheffield projects

Many of the frontline staff working for Delivery Partners are not necessarily trained or experienced in handling conversations with people living with mental health conditions. Because there is little information regarding the individual being referred, that first conversation can quickly become awkward or even impossible, if the member of staff is caught off guard. So how can frontline staff be prepared to handle a conversation with a caller who presents with mental health issues?

ABiS is fortunate in having Sheffield Mind as one of its Programme Delivery Partners and Richard Brocklehurst, Clinical Lead Therapist at Sheffield Mind, designed and led a learning session for all delivery partners. This is a digest of the learning from that session.

Situations are co-created

Situations and relationships can quickly develop in a negative way due to reactions which are unhelpful. Our instinct when confronted with a caller who seems to be upset, agitated or angry is to want to help and to try and fix them. Avoid this immediate desire to “rescue” the person and instead, **LISTEN.**

This is not easy, but it is essential.

Don't start an unhelpful cycle of not listening. Even if it feels really awkward, do not jump in with advice. Let the person speak and stay in the moment. Do not start thinking ahead about how you are going to fix this situation.

Top tips

- Don't try to fix the person
- Listen
- Don't get carried away by your desire to help

How to show empathy

The person at the other end of the phone is very aware of the stigma surrounding mental health conditions whether it's anxiety, depression or schizophrenia. Don't start a cycle of not listening and stigmatising. Don't label the issue but offer reassurance and reflect back their feelings:

“I’m hearing that you are really upset”

“I’m hearing that you’re really frustrated”

All thoughts are driven by feelings. The caller may talk about their thoughts, you need to listen and try to reflect back to them their feelings. By doing this you are showing empathy.

Top tip

- Don’t fall into the trap of asking: “What can I do?”

“If you are coming from a place of good and well meaning, then it’s going to be ok.”

Richard Brocklehurst Sheffield Mind

Keep calm and offer reassurance

Allow the person to talk and reassure them you are listening by using “para verbals” such as *“yep”, “ok”, “Uh huh”* or *“I hear you”*.

They need to feel acknowledged so ask their name and use it in the conversation. If the contact is face to face rather than by phone be sure to make eye contact as this is a basic psychological need for all humans and will help to make them feel grounded.

Top tip

- Talk to the person, not to their symptoms



Understanding why we often react the way we do

To help us understand why we frequently react to situations in a particular way, Richard shared the Three Ego States theory and proposed some hypothetical situations to test how people reacted.

The theory says that each of us will react to a situation from one of three positions:

Parent “It’s my job to sort you out”

Adult Stays calm, is patient, listens and reflects

Child “I don’t know what to do” “I feel helpless”

The caller needs the person at the other end of the phone to react from the position of adult. They are looking for someone to come alongside them, to empower them rather than to rescue them.

***“There are no right or wrong answers;
stay calm and sit with it”***

Richard Brocklehurst Sheffield Mind

Further reading

- First Steps in Counselling (a student’s companion) Pete Sanders PCCS Books
- Next Steps in Counselling Frankland & Sanders PCCS Books
- For more theory and more on skills – Counselling Skills – John and Julia McLeod – Open University / Mc Graw Hill

