COMMUNITY FUND

Learning Snapshot: The Connector Role

Ageing Better is a test and learn programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

We collect information and insights from across 14 partnerships and use this learning to support service deliverers, funders and policy makers working to reduce social isolation in people aged 50+.

This learning snapshot details key findings and recommendations taken from Ageing Better projects that employed a range of connector roles and models.

You can use it as a summary of the full learning report, to share practical tools with colleagues and in teams, or include in your own presentations and briefings.

1. Why use connector roles within projects?

- People who experience entrenched loneliness and social isolation benefit from projects with a formal connector role to link them with networks, groups and interventions in a person-centred way.
- Over seven years of the Ageing Better programme, a number of effective connector roles and models have emerged. These include digital connector and community connector roles.
- Connector roles are capable of evolving to situations, staying relevant to the needs of people within their community.

2. What are the challenges?

- Connector roles rely on good relationships with referral partners. It takes time to manage the referral process well with often fast changing projects and teams.
- Tensions between health and social care can make some referrals more difficult.
- The complexity of people's needs is likely to result in challenging relationship building and data collection processes.
- People can find progression onwards from the Connector relationship challenging; drawing up personalised plans with clear end points limits the risk of dependency.

4. So what can we do with this learning?

The connector role delivers short term interventions that help tackle immediate issues and responds to personal needs and barriers. It is most successful when strength-based and operating from within a varied and accessible network of community agencies, groups and referral partners.

Test and learn from services in your area:

- Build flexibility into the time limited nature of the connector role to ensure a person-centred approach is achievable.
- Champion informal asset mapping and the important role connectors play in seeking out and disseminating the ever-changing opportunities within communities.
- Invest in honest communication with partners and support asset based community development initiatives to build local capacity and resilience.

3. How to deliver the Connector role well?

- The first contact with the Connector is crucial to building a relationship of trust and a range of options to meet should be offered: telephone, online, home visits, community hubs or walking outside.
- Connectors play a vital role in exploring the complex wrap-around support needs a person has, often attending activities and groups with clients for the first sessions.
- Ensure the Connector has access to specialist services to deal with the varied range of complex needs they encounter i.e. tech equipment, benefits advice, housing services, mental health support.
- Use paid professionals in the Connector role to build the relationship, identify and understand the issues and to work with individuals to set necessary boundaries, goals and sustainable outcomes.