



# Ageing Better



**NATIONAL  
LOTTERY FUNDED**





Crossgates Lunch Club, Leeds

## About the Ageing Better programme

Ageing Better is a National Lottery funded programme set up by the Big Lottery Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. It aims to develop creative ways for older people to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat **social isolation** and **loneliness**. The programme is running from 2015-2021 and is delivered by 14 cross sector **partnerships** across the UK.



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## The aims of Ageing Better

The programme aims to enable people aged 50 and over to be:

- Less isolated and lonely;
- Actively involved in their communities, with their views and participation valued more highly;
- More engaged in the design and delivery of services that improve their social connections.

### It also aims to support:

- Services that improve the planning, co-ordination and delivery of social activities;
- The future design of services by developing better evidence about how to reduce isolation and loneliness for people aged 50 and over.

“Getting involved has got rid of my depression, my family live far away and I started to become very tearful, but since joining the project I have made lots of friends and I feel happier <sup>1</sup>”

Participant

Glossary: Words that appear in a **bold blue** format feature in the glossary at the end of this paper.

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1 Time to Shine Evaluation Interim Report, Care Connect, University of Sheffield, 2016

# Ageing Better activities

Each Ageing Better partnership is delivering diverse activities which build on the skills and experience of people aged 50 and over, making use of the unique nature and assets of each area. The programme is supporting a variety of approaches and interventions, including:

- **One-to-one interventions**

The West Indian Senior Citizens **project** in Leicester works with vulnerable people, and using a team of volunteers, visit people regularly in their own homes. It aims to help them reconnect with their community and become self-reliant through engaging in activities and developing new relationships.

- **Group interventions**

The Birmingham partnership is involved in a large number of group interventions which support a wide range of people. Activities vary from dance classes and other physical activities to book clubs and HIV support.

- **Accessing support via statutory organisations**

Community Connectors in Camden works to identify individuals at risk of social isolation and helps them get the right support through **statutory** organisations as well as non-statutory organisations and services, for example fitness activities and community groups.

- **Community development/neighbourhood interventions**

Thirty areas across Torbay are using specialised workers to support community-led activity, including ensuring that people aged over 50 are represented in discussions regarding matters which affect them and on the design and delivery of services in Torbay.

- **Business engagement**

The East Lindsey partnership has awarded its Age-Friendly Business quality mark to 22 businesses. Businesses have seen an increase in customers aged 50 and over after receiving the quality mark, and it is hoped that this targeted approach will encourage more people to take part in the programme.

- **Awareness raising**

The Bristol partnership has teamed up with a local radio station to create a weekly show which is entirely produced, presented and supported by people aged 50 and over. Based on the theme “new ideas for older people”, it has around 45,000 listeners every week.

- **Intergenerational work**

A range of intergenerational work has taken place in the Greater Manchester partnership. Many young people have got involved in a gardening project aimed at people aged 50 and older, while another project involves teaching younger participants how to knit.



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# About this report

This report has been produced by Ecorys, the lead independent national programme evaluator of the Ageing Better programme<sup>2</sup>.

This document shares the early lessons collected from the 14 partnerships. The partnerships are actively sharing this knowledge so that learning from the programme can improve wider services for people aged 50 and over. The Big Lottery Fund has supported this by appointing Ecorys as an independent evaluation and learning partner, with individual partnerships also carrying out their own local evaluations.

## Information used in this report

- ▶ Surveys of over 19,000 programme participants, which tell us about the changes they have experienced through getting involved in the programme. We report on these changes where they are **statistically significant**.
- ▶ Insight captured from one-day visits to each of the 14 programme areas, including interviews and focus groups with people delivering projects.
- ▶ Feedback from a wider meeting of 25 stakeholders from the partnerships to reflect on lessons from the experience of delivery so far across all areas.

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2 Ecorys lead the evaluation partnership, which also includes Bryson Purdon Social Research and the College of Health and Life Sciences



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LGBT Hub Takeover, Birmingham

## Programme achievements

### Who is taking part?

Partnerships are testing different ways to involve people aged 50 and over that reflect the diversity within their communities.

So far, Ageing Better partnerships have worked with around 70,000 participants and 13,250 volunteers<sup>3</sup>.

**70,000**  
participants

**13,250**  
volunteers

<sup>3</sup> Figures up until the end of March 2018



Comparing these figures to data from the UK census shows that Ageing Better is reaching a greater proportion of females and people who do not identify as White<sup>4</sup> than are present in the national population.

Data provided by participants also shows that 5% of Ageing Better participants did not identify as heterosexual, 50% lived alone, and 60% had a longstanding illness. Each of these groups makes up a higher proportion of Ageing Better participants than can generally be found among people aged 50 and over<sup>5</sup>, which shows projects are reaching more members of marginalised communities.

## What has changed for participants?

### Social isolation and loneliness

“It plays a very big role in reducing isolation. Particularly for myself – I live on my own... It keeps me up and out and I enjoy the things I do<sup>6</sup>”  
Participant

Our independent survey of around 3,000 participants showed that, on average, participants are less socially isolated and less lonely<sup>7</sup> after participating in Ageing Better. These positive changes are in line with our data<sup>8</sup> showing that participants are in contact more with their families, friends and other people after getting involved in Ageing Better.

4 Census data shows 53% of those in England aged 50 and over are female and 7% of those aged 50 and over do not identify as white

5 Data from the UK Annual Population Survey suggests that 1.4% of those aged 50-64 and 0.6% of those aged 65 or over do not identify as heterosexual. Census data shows 24% of people aged 50 and over live alone and 36% having a longstanding illness (using slightly different wording)

6 Age Friendly Island Local Evaluation, National Development Team for Inclusion, 2017

7 Mean score change from 3.3 at entry to 3.0 at follow-up on the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (scored from 0 as the least lonely to 6 as the most lonely) across 3,598 respondents.

8 Mean score change from 5.7 at entry to 5.3 at follow-up on the UCLA Loneliness Scale (scored from 3 as the least lonely to 9 as the most lonely) across 2,525 respondents.

## Involvement in community activity

Our data shows that participants are more actively involved in their communities following participation in Ageing Better. Helped by the variety of different activities provided by Ageing Better (see page 9), they are taking part in a greater range of social activities<sup>9</sup> and are members of more types of clubs, organisations and societies<sup>10</sup>.

## Health and wellbeing

Current evidence shows that participants are reporting better mental **wellbeing**<sup>11</sup> and overall quality of life<sup>12 13</sup> after taking part in Ageing Better activities.

“I feel I have more confidence in myself. Able to tackle things I did not think I could and... [to be involved with] a successful group of people who enjoy themselves<sup>14</sup>”

Participant

## What has changed for volunteers?

Getting involved in projects as a volunteer provides an opportunity to increase people’s social connections, which can be beneficial if they are at risk of or directly affected by isolation and loneliness. Many Ageing Better projects support volunteers aged over 50 to take active roles in their local communities. Many volunteers have found this to be a positive experience:

“It opened up a whole new world for me”

Volunteer

“For me, I feel happy when I make someone happy... I’ve got time, so why not do something useful?”

Volunteer

The Hackney partnership has made efforts to reach very isolated people, through its Compassionate Neighbours project. Part of this project involves supporting volunteers with experience of isolation to engage with their peers. Volunteers are very positive about their involvement, reporting that it helps them “feel part of a community”, meet different types of people and reduce their own isolation.

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- 9 Participation in social activities compared to other people of the same age. Mean score change from 1.4 at entry to 1.7 at follow-up (scored from 0 as much less participation in social activities than most to 4 as much more) across 3,942 respondents
  - 10 Types of club, organisation or society of which participants were members. Mean score change from 1.0 types at entry to 1.2 at follow-up across 4,039 respondents
  - 11 Mean score change from 21.0 at entry to 22.5 at follow-up using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (scored from 0 as the lowest level of mental wellbeing to 35 as the highest) across 3,665 respondents.
  - 12 Mean score change from 60.7 at entry to 64.5 at follow-up using the EQ-VAS Scale (scored from 0 as the lowest self-reported health to 100 as the highest) across 1,434 respondents.
  - 13 Mean score change from 0.56 at entry to 0.58 at follow-up using the EQ-5D-3L Scale (scored from 0 as the lowest self-reported health to 1 as the highest) across 1,512 respondents.
  - 14 Evaluation of Ageing Better Middlesbrough, Teeside University, 2017



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## Working in partnership

Involving people in delivery

“We say what we want and if we can do it ourselves we do it...  
We are being treated as though we have still got some contribution to make  
ourselves. We don't just want to sit there and [have] people do things for us<sup>15</sup>”

Participant

Ageing Better is working to increase people's capacity and knowledge to support their involvement in designing and delivering programmes. This has helped ensure a range of different services and activities are provided which meet the needs and priorities of potential participants.

The partnership in Cheshire has worked hard to make sure people aged 50 and over are genuinely involved in decision making. An “Older People’s Alliance” assesses all applications and presents recommendations on which should receive funding. Alliance participants have grown in confidence and are making their voices heard clearly, most recently through consultation with local health services.

Early lessons around involving people in programme design and delivery show that it is important to dedicate time to supporting skills development (especially over the longer term), to be clear about expectations and to ensure those involved have meaningful roles with real influence.

The Thanet partnership is updating and using the IT skills of volunteers to help them support their peers. IT coaches have been used to train people to be “buddies” in their local communities so that neighbours are able to help each other become more confident in using IT.

An important learning is that people often feel stigmatised when referred to as isolated and lonely. Therefore, projects are avoiding promoting themselves directly in this way and are making sure they avoid stigma where possible.

The Sheffield partnership has helped people to develop their skills and knowledge by learning from their peers. To overcome barriers created by stigma, these sessions are referred to as a “skills swap”.

## Improving collaboration and coordination

Ageing Better has a strong commitment to working in partnerships within the 14 programme areas. The programme is seeking to empower voluntary and community organisations to work together with statutory organisations (e.g the NHS or **Clinical Commissioning Groups**) to tackle social isolation and loneliness and increase the voice of the community locally.

It takes time and commitment to develop effective partnerships, but this investment is now bearing fruit. Ageing Better is encouraging other partners to learn from the experience that voluntary and community organisations have of involving service users. Approaches are being taken that help organisations work together positively and make sure that the voices of those engaged in the programmes are heard by those planning services, in order to make them more relevant to people aged 50 and over.

Businesses are an active partner in the programme in some areas, helping partnerships expand their reach.



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The Middlesbrough partnership has successfully engaged private companies, such as a major department store and local cafés. One approach involves Ageing Better participants with badges visiting cafes to talk to people about their issues and the Ageing Better programme. This aims to reach people at risk of social isolation or loneliness and get them involved in other Ageing Better activities.

Having strong ties with local authorities and health service partners who are already in contact with people at risk of social isolation or loneliness is leading to a more effective approach to engaging with people. The ambition is that by developing these connections within communities there should be **'no wrong door'** for people seeking support.

The Isle of Wight partnership uses **Community Navigators** based in GP surgeries. Being based there helps them to identify people with non-medical needs and direct them into alternative community support. This supports people to join in with other community activities and to live more independently in their own homes.

The main lesson to date around working in partnership is the need to balance the development of new services with bringing together existing services and avoid unnecessary competition between local organisations. There is also the need to continue learning from good practice, for example examining whether the success in engaging private businesses in certain areas can work elsewhere.





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## Learning so far

The programme is generating valuable learning. After taking part in Ageing Better, participants are, on average, less socially isolated and lonely, taking a more active role in their communities and getting involved in delivering and designing projects. Ageing Better is helping organisations to develop better ways of working, and increasing skills, capacity and knowledge among participants helping to deliver and design programmes.

Over the course of Ageing Better, those organising partnerships and projects have faced challenges, including how best to work in partnership with other organisations, how to engage with those who are most isolated or lonely and how to reduce the stigma around being lonely or isolated. These have already led to developments in how partnerships and projects work.

Word of mouth and social prescribing have provided a good source of referrals into the programme. In Leeds, this has involved linking up with social workers, care professionals, national charities' care programmes, neighbours and relatives. These routes make it easier to reach isolated people.

# Looking forward

In our role at Ecorys as the independent evaluator and learning partner for the Ageing Better programme<sup>16</sup>, we will work with the Big Lottery Fund and the Ageing Better partnerships to generate learning from the programme and share this through future reports and learning events.

For further details about Ageing Better and our plans for the evaluation, please see [biglotteryfund.org.uk/ageingbetter](https://biglotteryfund.org.uk/ageingbetter) or contact us at [ageing.better@ecorys.com](mailto:ageing.better@ecorys.com)

## Partnership websites

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Birmingham         | <a href="https://ageingbetterinbirmingham.co.uk">ageingbetterinbirmingham.co.uk</a>     |
| Bristol            | <a href="https://bristolageingbetter.org.uk">bristolageingbetter.org.uk</a>             |
| Camden             | <a href="https://ageingbetterincamden.org.uk">ageingbetterincamden.org.uk</a>           |
| Cheshire           | <a href="https://brightlifecheshire.org.uk">brightlifecheshire.org.uk</a>               |
| East Lindsey       | <a href="https://tedineastlindsey.co.uk">tedineastlindsey.co.uk</a>                     |
| Greater Manchester | <a href="https://ambitionforageing.org.uk">ambitionforageing.org.uk</a>                 |
| Hackney            | <a href="https://connecthackney.org.uk">connecthackney.org.uk</a>                       |
| Isle of Wight      | <a href="https://agefriendlyisland.org">agefriendlyisland.org</a>                       |
| Leeds              | <a href="https://timetoshineleeds.org">timetoshineleeds.org</a>                         |
| Leicester          | <a href="https://leicesterageingtogether.org.uk">leicesterageingtogether.org.uk</a>     |
| Middlesbrough      | <a href="https://ageingbettermiddlesbrough.org.uk">ageingbettermiddlesbrough.org.uk</a> |
| Sheffield          | <a href="https://agebettersheff.co.uk">agebettersheff.co.uk</a>                         |
| Thanet             | <a href="https://agelessthanet.org.uk">agelessthanet.org.uk</a>                         |
| Torbay             | <a href="https://ageingwelltorbay.com">ageingwelltorbay.com</a>                         |

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16 Ecorys lead the evaluation partnership, which also includes Bryson Purdon Social Research and the College of Health and Life Sciences

# Glossary Definitions

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Community Navigators</b>            | Community Navigators work with people to examine opportunities in their local area and how they might become involved with more people, groups and community activities.  |
| <b>No wrong door</b>                   | A “no wrong door” approach aims to provide people with (or link them to) the right service or organisation, regardless of who they first get in contact with.   |
| <b>Partnership</b>                     | Partnership refers to the individuals and organisations (partners) that oversee and support the delivery of Ageing Better in each of the 14 programme areas. Each partnership selects a variety of projects that best meet local needs.   |
| <b>Project</b>                         | Each project is made up of one or more activities, with multiple projects in each partnership. Projects can take different approaches to working with people over 50 – they could involve working in a group setting with LGBT people; raising awareness about particular issues; or working to improve levels of physical activity.  |
| <b>Social isolation and loneliness</b> | There is no single agreed definition of social isolation or loneliness. In general, social isolation refers to the number and frequency of contacts with other people that a person has, and loneliness refers to the way that a person views this contact (for example whether it is a fulfilling connection). Social isolation is an objective state, whereas loneliness is subjective. |
| <b>Statistically Significant</b>       | Figures are said to show a statistically significant change if it is likely to be a real change and unlikely (but not necessarily impossible) to be due to chance. It does not necessarily mean that changes are important.   |
| <b>Statutory</b>                       | Statutory organisations are created by law, for example the NHS, Clinical Commissioning Groups, or local authorities.   |
| <b>Wellbeing</b>                       | Wellbeing means feeling good, functioning well and being able to respond to challenges in life positively.  |



## Contact us

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