



Community Building

**Connecting people and place to build
community and reduce social isolation**

Summary



AGEING WELL TORBAY

Our six year project aims to reconnect communities and reduce social isolation amongst the population of people over 50 in Torbay. It is part of Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better, a programme of the National Lottery Community Fund.

With an estimated 6,000 isolated 'over 50s' residents across the Torbay we needed new possibilities to emerge that would bring people together. We believe that older age can be viewed as an opportunity and if people are valued they gain a sense of purpose and are better able to be part of their community. So we started thousands of small conversations that are bringing about big changes and are already involving over 1,600 previously isolated 'over 50s' people in community life.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

This document summarises the learning of our Neighbourhoods theme – the bedrock on which the rest of the Ageing Well Torbay Programme is built. This theme adopts a 'strengths-based' or 'Asset Based Community Development' approach delivered by a team of 20 Community Builders.

We believe that isolation amongst people is not a person's challenge – it is a community challenge, and it is only the people who live in a neighbourhood who can actually build a community there. Given our rapidly ageing population it is obvious that adequate levels of social care cannot be provided through formal agencies, projects or programmes, (public or private), if they act alone without the active collaboration of the communities involved.

Our work is based on the idea that:

Communities have what they need when they share what they have.

We believe

Most people want to help others reach their potential.

At first we have to discover what it is that people really care enough about - to act on.

Then the new possibilities are limitless as everyone has "gifts" to share.....



THE TORBAY WAY



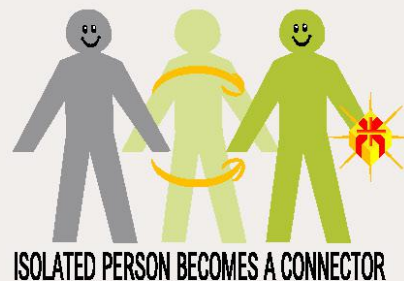
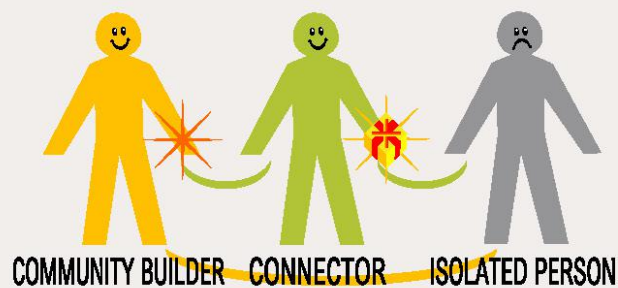
We accept that every neighbourhood is unique and has strengths and assets ready to be built on. We do not try to fix people nor occupy much of our time being concerned about what is missing - identifying needs, deficiencies or problems.

We talk to people, ask questions and discover what skills, gifts, connections, dreams and aspirations they have. We encourage them to think about new possibilities and to take up fresh opportunities to lead the changes they want to see. Slow, small and local is our mantra. We have made a stand with residents and walked alongside them.

Our Community Builders spend their time in our 30 local neighbourhoods building trust and relationships. They stimulate interactions and interdependence and seek out people who naturally connect people - we call them "Connectors".

Connectors know what is happening in their area and believe that everyone should be connected. They have no agenda and usually no idea why they feel driven to connect people. They just are. Together the Community Builders and the Connectors connect people with shared interests.

Then people in the community do positive stuff together! They create activities for mutual support or participate in our local timebank, and this is where friendships are made. This is how we reach the most isolated. The isolated person is no longer isolated and sometimes, our monitoring shows, they even become Connectors themselves.



The potential is limitless.

Through our Community Building work we have identified

1,487

connectors/good neighbours and worked with

1,609

isolated people in our first 4 years.

These numbers will have increased by the time you read this.

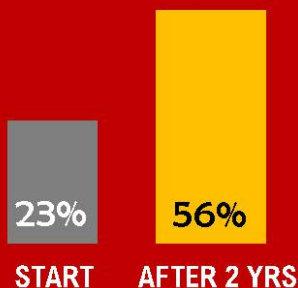
Our communities are shifting back into a space where they can see opportunities to get on with things themselves.

600 groups and activities mapped to date, **250** new citizen-led activities stimulated.

84% increase in the proportion of participants talking to neighbours or others in their community.

We have found the hard to reach - and kept them found.

People's ability to use their skills and expertise to benefit their community.



46%

*Loneliness rates have dropped

Our Community Builders find 'places of welcome'. We 'mystery shop' cafes, pubs, hang out areas, shops, community centres – anywhere where people have the chance to interact. In some communities there aren't enough of these 'bumping places' - so we have helped the community create their own.

44%

increase in valued friendship.

Self reported visits to GP have reduced by

32%

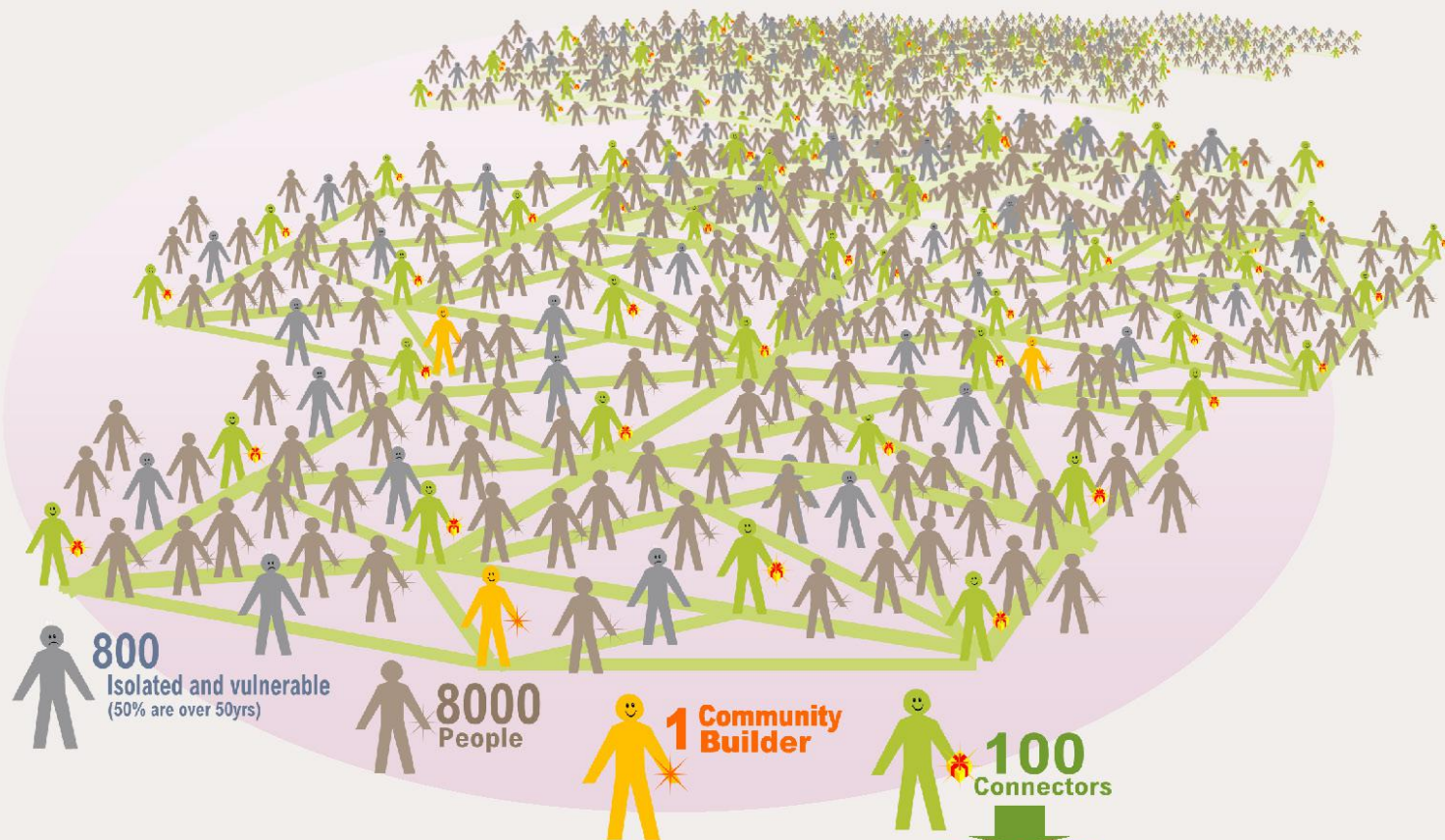
59%

of people report improvements in mental well being through being involved.

All statistics about our work have been provided through a collaboration with our participants, staff, SERIO Plymouth University and Ecorys Lottery appointed evaluators.

*Based on the 6-item De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale measuring overall, emotional, and social loneliness .





Community Building Case Study

Our Community Builder Nina met Wendy at one of our first Festivals. Wendy had become isolated in her flat due to ill health which had led to minimal mobility and a loss of confidence. Wendy signed up to the local Timebank.

Wendy is a keen knitter and found Betty on the Timebank looking for help with knitting her husband a jumper. Betty went to Wendy's flat every week until the jumper was complete.

Their friendship grew as Wendy's confidence grew until she felt so confident she wanted to teach others. So Betty started to take Wendy out to the Upcycling Project, Crafty Cuppa at the Community Café at Lupton House every week so she could teach people to knit.

Wendy took part in a 'yarn bombing' event on the seafront in Paignton. Then she joined the Management Committee of the Community Café and secured funds from the local Co-op to help transform the café into a redesigned shabby chic café.

This level of connectivity gives us an almost limitless scope to enable positive change in our community.

Wendy met another woman isolated through grief and encouraged her to get more involved. Wendy's life is now full of activities and friendships, and when Nina asked if she ever feels isolated she replied, 'No, definitely not! I'm craving time to myself!' and laughed loudly. No longer isolated, Wendy has become a Connector who was isolated. Nina calls Wendy a superstar.

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WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?



TAPPING INTO EXISTING ASSETS

1,487

Connectors connecting.

Connectors

“Our Thursday Coffee Morning is now well established as a friendly meeting place. Although our numbers are small, we have already generated another group, the Model Railway Club. This month we plan a coach trip and next month a charity event in aid of Rowcroft Hospice. We feel we are accepted in our community and our friendships have extended wider than our weekly coffee mornings.

Making genuine friends, many living alone and feeling isolated, we now know we can contact each other - whether we need to talk, help in an emergency, help on a practical level or would like some company. These are the important things. It's not just one person that makes the difference to other people's lives. We are grateful to the landlord of our local pub for the venue.”

Julia, Connector.

20 Community Builders focusing on what is strong not wrong.

425 Timebank members exchanging 10,995 hours to date.

Timebank

“I registered with my local Timebank four years ago and started in a local charity shop. Since then I have made many timebanking exchanges with people and groups including dog walking, befriending, Children's Holiday Club, day trips, yarn bombing group and pet sitting and I have clocked up 1,800 credits. I have donated almost all these credits to my local community centres so they can use them to get help back from other timebank members. On my 70th Birthday I went to America with a friend I met through timebanking and we met American timebankers. I fulfilled my lifelong dream and swam with dolphins.”

Ann - Timebanking Champion

Not surprisingly everyone now knows Ann in her community and despite sometimes feeling lonely this recognition has given her huge confidence. She has made many friends through the project and feels connected, valued and celebrated.

Community Builders

Over coffee our Community Builder Seema heard from two people who already volunteer and are Connectors in their community about an overgrown bank along a busy path. They all went to look at it and made plans to weed and plant it. This tiny group attracted more people to help with volunteer days. Seema helped to promote these events and sought permission from the Council. Now a bigger group, one member secured free plants and vouchers from local businesses. Local residents gave

plants. This now beautiful space is tended by local residents who often get chatting with passers-by, some of whom have been isolated and referred on to Seema. People from existing local projects have gained skills volunteering in the maintenance of the space”.



COMMUNITY BUILDING -

HOW DID WE DO IT?

Our Community Builders are directly employed by the Torbay Community Development Trust funded by the National Lottery Community Fund through the Ageing Well Torbay programme. We recruited our Builders in several cohorts which helped us to learn as we developed. They are not based in community buildings, which helps to maintain their independence. Support and training is a priority while trusting them to keep their own hours. It is important to find happy and strong people.

We benchmarked the wage for our Community Builders against the government supported community organisers at £21,000. This number goes up to £30,000 when we add equipment, travel, a small budget for activities and full cost recovery. We recommend a minimum two years funding to get started and we have worked on the basis of one full-time Builder per 10,000 population, based on neighbourhood boundaries the community identify themselves.

In addition to communities becoming self-serving and therefore 'costing' less, part of our plans for sustaining the work is to ascertain the cost benefit to existing mainstream services.

We have found the desire to 'chase money' is quite ingrained in the traditional way of working, and even in a strongly asset based initiative it is very easy to slip back into a deficit approach.

There's no single right way to work in a place. Place-based funding needs a flexible, open and realistic approach and through our funding we are continuing to learn about the importance of knowing the background and context of a place.

There has been a great deal of interest expressed recently in 'strengths based approaches to community-led initiatives' and in social prescribing. Unfortunately, these expressions of interest seem to lack a realistic appreciation of what it takes to make it happen.

What society needs to learn fast is that these positive interactions and social connections do not always happen by themselves, someone has to intentionally connect people, places and spaces.

We are delighted to have been able to 'test and learn' our theory and are delighted to report here that the impact of our work in the neighbourhoods of Torbay has been more significant, more productive and more insightful than even we would have believed possible.

Investing in people and relationships - and building on local assets and potential - is crucial.



Torbay Community Development Trust

Developing stronger communities across Torbay

Encouraging people to do what they do best

Supporting groups to thrive

Making connections and stimulating co-operation

Bringing people together

Established following discussions with over 100 voluntary sector representatives, Torbay Community Development Trust has the intention of making Torbay a place where all people feel included. The Trust builds on existing strengths where key assets are people in their environment.

We have so much to share. Call us for a chat, come visit to see what we do for yourselves, let us train you and your people in the Torbay Way.

Call us on **01803212638** or **0754874876**

Email us on **info@torbaycdt.org.uk**

Check out our training prospectus at

www.torbaycdt.org.uk



Torbay Community Development Trust

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