



Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness Grant Programme: Evaluation Summary Report

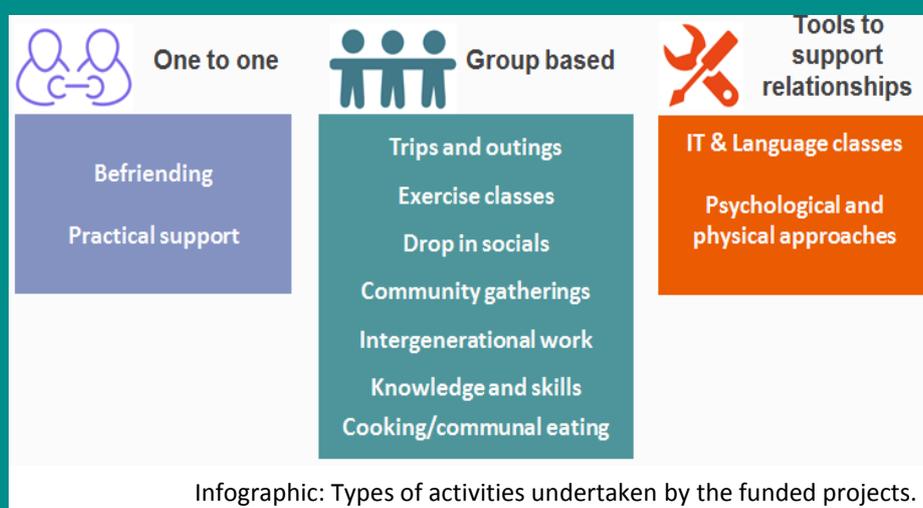
These are the headline findings from the evaluation of the Reducing Social Isolation and Loneliness grant programme. The programme was funded by NHS North, Central and South Manchester Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), and administered and managed by Macc. The evaluation ran for the full 19 month duration of the programme, and was undertaken by the Office for Public Management (OPM).

The programme was designed to encourage a range of innovative approaches from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst Manchester residents aged 50+. It is estimated that across the UK older population, 6-13% of people are often or always lonely (Age UK¹), whilst 12% feel socially isolated.

Overview of the programme

Nine large grants (£10,000-£50,000) and eighteen smaller ones (up to £10,000) were awarded. The funding enabled projects all around the city to run for various durations from September 2014 to March 2016. Projects were funded across Manchester's three CCG areas: nine in the North, twelve in Central, six in the South and five operated city-wide.

Projects typically involved efforts to recruit new participants or beneficiaries, assessment of individuals' needs, befriending in order to build confidence and trust, and group or 1-1 activities.



¹ Age UK http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true

Project delivery

Conservative estimates based on information provided by project leads are that over the 18-months of the programme:

- **3000+ sessions/interventions were delivered**
- **2000+ users were engaged**
- **300+ volunteers were recruited**

In almost all cases, project leads said they had delivered as planned, with many exceeding their original expectations in terms of the scale and reach of their project. Projects that didn't meet their original expectations cited challenges around:

- **Recruiting participants.**
- **Receiving referrals from health, social care and housing partners.**
- **Recruiting volunteers.**



Photo: Stroke Association's indoor aerial assault course

Working in partnership with local organisations was crucial and took two distinct forms at project level: obtaining referrals from partners; and multi-agency delivery.

Volunteers typically formed a central part of project delivery and resourcing, taking on roles including befriending, outreach work, community navigation, administration, delivering training to new volunteers, and marketing and communications activities.

Across the large projects, over 300 volunteers were recruited.

Case study of partnership working: LINK TWO (Trinity House)

“Group work - the key thing that's taken place, and that we couldn't have succeeded without, was our work with housing associations. We have a model now where we will take the shed or a room at a sheltered housing scheme and hold a meeting with the residents and the warden and give them what they want [in terms of activities]. Then we can start to bring in people referred from the local area, once we've built trust they often give us the room for free, and with sheltered housing they have nice rooms that don't get used much.”

Impacts on participants

Some of the impacts reported by participants included:

- **Increased volume of social interactions:** in the follow-on survey almost all respondents agreed that they had met new people through the project (97%)
- **More opportunities to engage with others**
- **Creating new friendships:** 64% strongly agreed and 25% agreed that they had made new friends as a result of accessing a funded project
- **A renewed sense of social belonging**
- **More people feeling able to 'get out and about':** this increased from 64% at baseline to 77% at follow up. More people reported getting out of the house
- **Increased quality of life:** the proportion who rated their quality of life on the whole as 'good' or 'very good' increased from 41% at baseline to 51% at follow up
- **Improvements in self-reported health:** the proportion who rated their health as 'good' or 'very good' increased from 38% at baseline to 44% at follow up

Case study: Brenda, Henshaws seated exercise classes

Brenda first became aware of Henshaws when her husband Eric was diagnosed with a visual impairment. Brenda began to suffer from deteriorating sight loss herself as a result of glaucoma. She decided to try the series of seated exercise classes aimed at over 50s, to regain some of her own confidence. She said:



“Before the classes I was becoming less and less active. By slowly introducing exercise into my routine again, I have gained much more confidence in my physical abilities. I missed a tram on the way to a class and rather than waiting 15 minutes for the next tram, I decided to walk the two mile journey. I felt great for this achievement and would never have had to confidence to walk this far before.”

“I am more positive about my life and my future.”

Chorlton Good Neighbours project participant



Participants at Birch Community Association's bike ride

The programme has reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness, increased social connections, empowered project users to develop and use new skills, and brought different communities and generations together. At project level, there are now new partnerships, shared learning and increased capacity.

established **improved links with VCS organisations**. The programme has reached diverse project users, and aligned with the CCGs' equalities objectives.

The programme has also **generated improved understanding about 'what works' in tackling social isolation** and loneliness within specific communities, and the **diversity of the funded projects** proved critical to generating this learning.

Programme learning

This programme shows that **VCS-led models can deliver the desired outcomes, and can also harness local intelligence, enthusiasm and networks in a way that other types of programmes often cannot.**

The programme has **facilitated a degree of improved understanding between the CCG and VCS organisations**. Macc had the credibility and reach to engage a diverse range of VCS organisations, and generated awareness and enthusiasm about the programme from the outset. Representatives from the CCG feel that they better understand the organisations and types of work being done by VCS organisations in local communities, as well as the challenges they face in delivering their services and activities.

In order to realise these benefits, learning from the programme highlights key pre-conditions or enablers:

- **Effective partnership arrangements** between VCS umbrella organisations and funders, which ideally build on pre-existing relationships.
- **A 'readiness to engage'** at strategic and operational levels; this programme benefitted from being delivered in an Age-Friendly city with existing networks.
- **Flexibility** to respond to user needs and emerging learning.

Learning from the programme highlights that organisations seeking to tackle social isolation and loneliness can benefit from:

- Contingency planning and reviewing performance continually (to mitigate the impact of any initially low referral rates).
- Exploring partnerships with other organisations (to cross-refer and share learning).
- Allowing sufficient time for awareness raising and securing referrals.
- Capturing early feedback from project users to inform delivery planning.

A copy of the full report can be downloaded at:

www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/reducing-social-isolation-and-loneliness-grant-fund-2014-2016 or email info@macc.org.uk.