

**Time to Shine - Evaluation report of the ABCD approach to
reducing Social Isolation in older people**

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Executive Summary:

This research project looks at two Time to Shine delivery partners and aims to provide an insight into the experiences of people participating in the activities, and their unique approaches, on participants themselves. The overarching aim of this research is to explore the benefit and appropriateness of an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach in reducing social isolation in older people.

The following questions were identified and provided a starting point for the discussions with older people.

- Triggers: Finding out why people joined the activities,
- Success: What they feel has and hasn't worked.

This report is part of a short internship at Time to Shine. Time to Shine is an organisation that helps deliver projects across Leeds to reduce social isolation. Time to Shine is managed by Leeds Older People's Forum and funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better programme to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst people over 50. This report is a small contribution to the evidence base that is being gathered to inform future funding. This data was collected through informal discussions or focus groups with both the beneficiaries and volunteers of the projects and observations of the community groups in action. This report is split into three sections. The first section provides an overview of the ABCD approach, highlighting the approaches most important aspects. The second section provides a discussion of this in relation to the aim of reducing social isolation. Finally the third section will provide a summary of the findings from each of the two delivery partners, focusing on the triggers, success and structure of the project from the view of beneficiaries. This section includes case studies and an assessment of any positive and negative aspects that have been identified. Following this, some overarching recommendations are put forward for consideration.

Asset based Community Development (ABCD), is a developmental approach that focuses on enhancing a community's existing assets. The approach seeks to foster community led participation and build social capital by linking across sector networks and sharing local knowledge and resources.¹ It is a bottom up approach that means people contribute to and are valued in their community. The ABCD model does have a good framework for being inclusive and engaging people in the community. Some of the aspects of the model such as using the idea of assets instead of needs, sustainability through community control and asset mapping are useful in reducing social isolation and loneliness in older people. The

¹ Winther, T. (2015). 'What lies within? : An exploration of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)'. An unpublished thesis, can be accessed at:
http://unitec.researchbank.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10652/2695/Tracy%20Winther_2015-02-23.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

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benefits can be seen in the two delivery partner's use of the model. Other aspects such as challenging skill based learning have also been identified and as generally effective measures. These generally do not conflict with the ABCD approach. The triggers identified in joining the groups were ranging from liking the activities and 'something to do' to being very lonely and wanting to meet and engage with people. People who attended these groups were happy with them and wanted to keep coming. It remains unclear as to whether the members of these projects are socially isolated but it is clear that by focusing on target groups when recruiting members to the groups, this is more likely. Socially excluded groups and people that we know are disproportionately affected by loneliness should be the focus for interventions.

The report findings were wholly positive. However, some areas of weakness can be identified. The way that the beneficiaries are found by the organisers, using leaflets and other traditional advertising methods as discussed, can be problematic when trying to reach people that are isolated. It is likely that in the majority of cases, the 'socially-active lonely' are being attracted and helped by these interventions. Another point of interest was the lack of involvement with other community groups or other age groups within the community. This is an essential part of the progression of an ABCD approach however; it is clear that in the case of reducing social isolation this is not particularly appropriate. Furthermore, these groups have a loose and informal structure, which is inviting and provides a warm atmosphere for people to feel comfortable in. The blurred lines between volunteer and beneficiary are part of the empowering ABCD approach and this seems to work well as the opportunities for people to become volunteers are important to develop self-esteem and this role may be particularly important to some personality types provides an opportunity for people to use their assets. Similarly, the impact of a group having a well known and identified purpose has been shown to be important in giving people a purpose and thus deepening the effect of the group on people who are socially isolated. Furthermore the impact of the group could be enhanced by offering more challenging activities and providing help or encouragement to be more independent. This could include activities based around; mobility, information, advice or technology.

Recommendations:

- Consider the importance of goals and visions for the end of the project, or just general outcomes. How to become a community that prevents the emergence of widespread social isolation.
- Consider the importance of independence building; these could include factors such as mobility, information, advice or technology. An approach that improves people's lives beyond the group itself.
- Integration into the community, building links and partnerships with other projects that fits into a wider community movement.

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- Consider the assets of local institutions, government and non-government agencies, and private sector businesses that could offer resources to the local community.
- Focus on people that are both; socially excluded and socially isolated.
- Consider how to reach people who won't or can't respond to traditional advertising methods. (Look at identifying socially isolated people and coming to them using a risk assessment approach).
- Create opportunities for participation and volunteering where possible.
- Project models should always be adapted to the local area.
- Look at the nature of groups, what is the purpose of them? Are activities creative and challenging? These work well.
- Continue focusing on group based interventions
- For projects to consider the question: Has the community met challenges before? And how did they deal with them?

Introduction

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This section includes case studies and an assessment of any positive and negative aspects that have been identified. Following this, some overarching recommendations are put forward for consideration.

The ABCD approach:

Asset based Community Development (ABCD), is a developmental approach that focuses on enhancing assets within a community. The approach seeks to foster community led participation and build social capital by linking across sector networks and sharing local knowledge and resources.² It is a bottom up approach that means people contribute to and are valued in their community.

Needs / deficits:

ABCD advocates a move away from a 'needs' based approach that identifies the gap or gaps between the current situation to the desired situation. The needs of a community are often highlighted in a bid to attract funding, and 'our situations is worse than yours' approach. This often results in outside expertise and resources coming into a community to fix the problems. Needs assessments identify problems and prioritise some over others. A positive asset based approach highlights what a community has to offer, in order to counter the passive recipients of services and the 'culture of disempowerment and dependency'. Foot and Hopkins summarise this: "As well as having needs and problems, our most marginalised communities also have social, cultural and material assets. Identifying and mobilising these can help them overcome the health challenges they face...The more familiar 'deficit' approach focuses on the problems, needs and deficiencies in a community such as deprivation, illness and health-damaging behaviours. It designs services to fill the gaps and fix the problems. As a result, a community can feel disempowered and dependent; people can become passive recipients of services rather than active agents in their own and their families' lives."³

Communities:

The approach sees communities as producers of their own well-being rather than the recipients of services. Local resident's skills and the resources of the community are identified and then mobilised. Assets are central to the approach. Community assets are local businesses, buildings, local transport but can also be: "the practical skills, capacity and knowledge of local residents" and are also the "passions and interests of local residents that

² Winther, T. (2015). 'What lies within? : *An exploration of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)*'. An unpublished thesis, can be accessed at: http://unitec.researchbank.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10652/2695/Tracy%20Winther_2015-02-23.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

³ Foot and Hopkins, (March, 2010), *A Glass half full, how an asset based approach can improve community health and wellbeing*, Local Government Association, p:7. Can be accessed at: http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=bf034d2e-7d61-4fac-b37e-f39dc3e2f1f2

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give them energy for change”⁴. “Formal and informal associations, networks, and extended families”⁵ are also seen as assets. It is important but difficult process to identify community assets beyond its physical buildings and resources. Informal discussions with residents can draw out skills and assets that people have; normally this is done using a capacity inventory. These assets will then be mobilised and linked with other assets to create something new. This process will be explained further in the ‘Asset Mapping’ section. Initiatives must have an awareness of other local groups and associations and develop dialogues with them. It is important that these assets remain under localised control, where decision making is left to community leaders and not outsiders. This is part of the process of citizens building the confidence to be producers not recipients of services that solve problems. The approach also has a focus on engaging people and strengthening civil society.

Asset Mapping:

ABCD can be a good way of targeting social isolation when an ‘asset mapping’ approach is taken. This is where the starting point of a movement or project comes from within the community, starting with collecting stories in order to identify and develop the assets of the community and the people that already live there. Assets can be divided into categories, for example; community building skills, enterprise skills, teaching skills, and artistic skills. These can be recorded in a capacity inventory, (see Appendix 1:a and 1:b for examples). From this, initiatives can be set up to complement these skills and encourage others to mobilise theirs. This process can allow for citizens themselves to “build new relationships, learn more about the contributions and talents of community members, and identify potential linkages between different assets.”⁶ This approach is distinctly different from more traditional forms of social activity where projects are set up in the hope that people will join in and find new connections this way. These projects are less likely to have links with local institutions or other groups and associations. Successful projects involve a community wide change in becoming more empowered, inclusive and linking community groups and people is a priority.

Sustainability

The sustainability of projects is important in this approach to ensure that resources and control are kept within the community and don't rely on an outside source. Sustainable community development continues to engage with citizens and in the long term prevent

⁴ Foot and Hopkins, (March, 2010), *A Glass half full, how an asset based approach can improve community health and wellbeing*, Local Government Association, p:7. Can be accessed at: http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=bf034d2e-7d61-4fac-b37e-f39dc3e2f1f2

⁵ Collaborative for Neighbourhood Transformation, *What is Asset Based Community Development*, ABCD Institute, p:3, can be accessed at:

[http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/What%20isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment\(1\).pdf](http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/What%20isAssetBasedCommunityDevelopment(1).pdf)

⁶ Cunningham, G. and Mathie, A., Coady International Institute, *Asset Based Community Development Workshop Bangkok, Thailand, (February 21, 2002)*, an overview, can be accessed at:

<http://www.synergos.org/knowledge/02/abcdoverview.htm>

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social isolation from manifesting as a serious social problem because a thriving community network already exists. Making community links that can mutually support each other increases the likelihood of sustainability. A goal, vision or plan that is set in place is important to work towards. Success can only be measured when there are goals or a vision in place at the beginning of the project.

Many schemes cannot yet be proven to be successful, even though it has been assumed that they have been successful. Measurement of effectiveness should be built into the design of any new project. The Asset Based Community Development Institute sets out six broad conditions that indicate the success of ABCD from an individual's perspective:

1. *“Everything is personal. The neighbours know me by name.*
2. *I am valued. It is recognized that I have gifts to offer the community.*
3. *There are opportunities for my gifts to be given.*
4. *There is informality to Our Way. Order exists, but it is not rigid and allows for my uniqueness.*
5. *There is creativity and spontaneity. There are opportunities for singing, celebration and eating together.*
6. *Invention abounds. There is tragedy, and it is acknowledged that tragedy is a part of life. So we mourn and move on together, always finding Our Way.”⁷*

The long term development of a project, (especially ones that rely on funding) should be central to the planning and running of a project. AGE UK summarises the reason for this, “The loss of a service which has had success at alleviating loneliness is worse than never having had the service at all. This also applies to patchy and unreliable services.”⁸ This also highlights the need for effectiveness to be consistently measured in order to avoid a negative impact on the beneficiaries.

An assessment of ABCD as a tool to reduce social isolation:

The following section will assess to what extent the approach is suitable for working with older people to reduce social isolation, this is the focus of Time to Shine and their associated projects. ABCD is a developmental approach that looks at the bigger picture and is best suited to communities where there is a wider and active movement of inclusion and empowering the local community. This is because the approach works across a whole

⁷Mcknight, J., A Basic Guide To ABCD Community Organizing, ABCD Institute, p:20, Can be accessed at:
[http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/A%20Basic%20Guide%20to%20ABCD%20Community%20Organizing\(3\).pdf](http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/A%20Basic%20Guide%20to%20ABCD%20Community%20Organizing(3).pdf)

⁸ AGE UK, Loneliness and Isolation Evidence review, p:3. Can be accessed at:
http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true

community trying to build genuine networks and links that sustain themselves. Isolated projects or groups of people using this approach won't be able to fully engage with all the benefits associated with engaging whole communities. This can be more appropriate in some communities than others. The social network that the ABCD approach aims to create ideally provides more support, participation, and engagement in the community. This approach empowers people because there is a high level of participation necessary in ABCD projects. This could deepen the impact of the project on an individual, in comparison to a traditional membership based involvement in a group. The opportunities for involvement and developing personal attributes or skills are greater in this approach. Having a new volunteer role could give people a new sense of purpose and would find connections with people that are similar to themselves. This aspect of ABCD is suited to reducing social isolation.

As aforementioned, the asset mapping process is a clear way to identify assets. This can allow for tailor made projects to emerge but there is also benefit in the process of identifying skills and working together to create something new. This sense of ownership and empowerment is the main strength of ABCD. The ABCD approach has a strong focus on the emergence of projects and how they should be set up, especially when asset mapping is considered. However, it is still a useful approach when considering making established groups more effective. By promoting the idea of assets and everyone having skills they can utilise and contribute to the community, people can gain a sense of purpose. This is important in maintaining the momentum of a project and empowering the members of a group. The idea of a capacity inventory can be used in an already established project to recruit new members and discover new assets that people have. This is particularly useful when trying to reduce social isolation because once people are part of something they may feel more confident, to identify qualities they have and be more active in participating and perhaps leading or organising. This can improve the sustainability of a project as more people take ownership of initiatives. Examples of how these exercises can be carried out can be seen in Appendix 1:a and 1:b.

Social Isolation and Social Exclusion

Social isolation can be defined as: "the phenomenon of non-participation (of an individual or group) in a society's mainstream institutions." Contrastingly, social exclusion is "the subset of cases in which social isolation occurs for reasons that are beyond the control of those subject to it."⁹ Using ABCD as an approach to tackle social exclusion has been well documented and can be seen to be a successful approach. The ABCD approach works to create a different type of community that is inclusive to everyone and creates an environment where active participation is encouraged. This approach brings these people into the community. There may be merit in considering the ABCD approach to target

⁹ Barry, B., (1998) :iv, *Social Exclusion, Social Isolation and the Distribution of Income*, can be accessed at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/93935.pdf>

individuals or groups of people living in social isolation that are also socially excluded. This may be older people who have withdrawn from the community because of the threat of or experience of discrimination or hostility. Groups to look at in particular are LGBT older people, religious groups, BME communities, rural communities, disabled people and people living in poverty.

Reducing Social Isolation – what works?

It's important to compare the ABCD model against the evidence base of what characteristics can be seen to reduce social isolation on a consistent basis. These assessments are based on reviews of many studies that have aimed to reduce social isolation in older people. There are some consistencies with the ABCD model but it seems that following the model is not always appropriate in the case of reducing social isolation. Gardiner, Geldenhuys, and Gott have categorised interventions to reduce social isolation in older people, some projects may take aspects from several different categories. The categories are: social facilitation interventions, psychological therapies, health and social care provision, animal interventions, befriending interventions and leisure/skill development. All of these types of interventions assessed reduced social isolation to some extent. However, there are several factors that were identified as having a continuous positive effect on social isolation. These were; adaptability, community development approach and productive engagement (see Table 1).¹⁰

Table 1 - Common characteristics

Adaptability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects specific to the local area • Localised control over the projects
Community Development Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people being involved in the project development and delivery • Participants should decide the activities to be undertaken • When activities were organised by others, some found this patronising
Productive Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive activities (computing, watching T.V etc...) are not as effective as productive engagement activities such as socialising but can include solitary activities (being creative). • Challenging activities are the most effective • Having explicit goals and a purpose of the group

¹⁰ Gardiner, C., Geldenhuys, G. and Gott, M. (2016), Interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people: an integrative review. Health Soc Care Community.

Adapted from, Gardiner, C., Geldenhuys, G. and Gott, M. (2016), *Interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people: an integrative review*, Health and Social Care Community.

Another study of interventions to reduce social isolation in older people found that 90% of the projects seen as 'effective' were group based educational or support based activities. Whereas nearly half of the projects seen as 'ineffective' were one-on-one support or advice based interventions. When the one-on-one interventions were based in someone's home, effectiveness was even less likely. However this was improved when the support giver was also an older person.¹¹ There are already some Time to Shine delivery partners that use this model but comments on the effectiveness of this approach cannot be made without further research which is outside the scope of this report. Interventions that targeted specific group such as "women, care-givers, the widowed, the physically inactive, or people with serious mental health problems" were also an indicator of effectiveness, participant control, consultation or involvement with the target group before the intervention was also an indicator of success. Furthermore, in 50% of the 'effective' studies, participants were identified from agency lists (GPs, social services, service waiting lists).¹² This brings into question the appropriateness of self-selecting interventions in targeting the severely socially isolated. This problem has been summarised as: "Studies with self-selected subjects could, as Stevens (2001: 12) suggested, lead to the participation of the 'socially-active lonely' rather than the 'resigned lonely' or the 'isolated lonely': this is a pervasive dilemma for intervention study practice".¹³ AGE UK recognises the problem of identifying these people and suggests interventions focus on "targeting those disproportionately affected by loneliness – lower socio-economic groups, the widowed, the physically isolated, people who have recently stopped driving, those with sensory impairment and the very old".¹⁴ Similarly, the issue of attracting the most socially active people even within a pool of socially isolated people is a problem for evaluation. Evaluation will naturally drift towards documenting the most confident and active members of a group because they are easier to approach and more visible. This is a problem because other people's experiences are not documented and it is also a problem of evaluation fatigue. Furthermore, there is evidence that beneficiaries will benefit more from social support when the person giving it is of the same age group, culture and social background. This is because of the need for reciprocity.¹⁵

¹¹ CATTAN, M., WHITE, M., BOND, J. and LEARMOUTH, A. (2005) 'Preventing social isolation and loneliness among older people: a systematic review of health promotion interventions', *Ageing and Society*, 25(1), p: 41.

¹² CATTAN, M., WHITE, M., BOND, J. and LEARMOUTH, A. (2005) 'Preventing social isolation and loneliness among older people: *Ageing and Society*, p: 57.

¹³ CATTAN, M., WHITE, M., BOND, J. and LEARMOUTH, A. (2005) 'Preventing social isolation and loneliness among older people: *Ageing and Society*, p: 60.

¹⁴ AGE UK, *Loneliness and Isolation Evidence review*, p:3. Can be accessed at:

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

¹⁵ CATTAN, M., WHITE, M., BOND, J. and LEARMOUTH, A. (2005) 'Preventing social isolation and loneliness among older people: *Ageing and Society*, p: 61.

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The following section looks at two delivery partners that use the ABCD approach in different ways and provides observations of the experiences of some of the beneficiaries that attend their groups.

Leeds Community Connect: Rural Action Yorkshire

Leeds may have a thriving city centre full of busy shoppers by day and revelling partygoers by night, but its boundaries also contain autonomous rural communities, rich with the culture and traditions of village life. Because of transport and resource concentration, these communities can sometimes underserve their more vulnerable members, including socially isolated older adults. Rural Action Yorkshire helps to lift up an important resource already existent in Leeds communities – the village hall. Currently in Swillington and Scholes, these crucial assets are being developed and strengthened to become a place where older people will come together on a regular basis. A dedicated worker is consulting with local residents to find out what activities they want to see and is then helping to implement them. Steered by local older people and supported by a team of volunteers, village halls have been transformed from underused resources into thriving Community Hubs. The project focuses on utilising local buildings, knowledge and resources. It aims to reach and attract socially isolated people to their community groups for over fifty year olds. (Adapted from the Leeds Community Connects TTS application form).

The Elderberries group in Scholes has been running since April 2016, and uses a church hall on the main street in the village as a venue. The group is three hours long and has a loose structure where people can opt in or out of activities. There are stations with activities set up and they change weekly. Activities include, Genealogy, Craft making, Bowls, learning instruments, and tea and biscuits every week. There is also an exercise class most weeks. The group attracts around 30 or 40 people weekly. Most people said they attend most weeks and had been since the group started just under 6 months ago. The group is for people over 50, but attracts people that are mostly in their 70's.

Most people said that they did not know anyone in the group beforehand and were not involved in any others. Those that had gone said they had made friends there. The Elderberries group has developed community links and has partnered with a local Head Injuries Unit, inviting people over fifty to the Monday group. Some people also said they now attend a coffee morning on the 1st Saturday of every month, after meeting other people at the group who attended church regularly. The church hall is also a venue for fitness classes for older people and these seemed very popular and run three times a week. Some people have also attended trips outside the local area, organised by the Manor House Community Centre. Through attending the Elderberries group these other social activities have become available to them, and more approachable. A beneficiary told me that “the formation of the elderberries as had a knock-on effect in the village.” Several people said that the group “brought people out of their shells” and spoke about people becoming more withdrawn as they got older or lost a partner. Members also spoke about being lonely after moving to a village or not being able to travel out of the local area like they used to. Some people said they had lived in Scholes or nearby for over ten years and didn't know anyone beyond their immediate neighbours. The group was described as a very supportive atmosphere and as giving people confidence.

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People thought the group was what they expected and also said they would still come if there were no activities and just tea and biscuits as friendship and socialising was the main attraction of the group. The activities however made the group more fun and attracted people to join up. The activities also provided an outlet for people who felt they wanted to offer something to the community. Participants noted that they would like to see a wider variety of activities such as flower arranging and singing, as these could attract more people to the weekly meetings. Other than this, they could not fault the project.

The project was set up by Rural Action for Yorkshire and advertised for volunteers and ideas for activities through posting a leaflet through people's letterboxes in the four villages nearby and posters in local shops. The group was then advertised the same way and started on the 4th April. This is the way that most people had heard about the group. The church venue is provided free of charge to the group, and the resources used for the activities are normally brought along to the group by volunteers and participants. This group is very sustainable because all of the physical resources come from within the community itself and the community is in control of the day to day running of the project. A challenge for the group could be continuing to attract volunteers and new members and people who are socially inactive and isolated.

This delivery partner uses the ABCD approach, and is committed to empowering local communities. The activities are all introduced by local people who want to share a skill or their resources. Local knowledge is at the centre of this project, which has been shaped by local volunteers at every stage. Volunteers were involved in the setting up of the project, providing ideas and now come early to set up, organise the activities for the week, and stay after to pack up. A volunteer stated that being able to offer something was important to her after being retired, but when asked she stated that had the group not been looking for volunteers she would have come to the group anyway. The important role of volunteers in this project is interesting because it may be more fulfilling for some personality types to volunteer rather than be a participant. Being or having the opportunity to volunteer empowers people to feel creative and active rather than the recipients of services. This project has used the asset mapping idea successfully. Village life can be isolating but one beneficiary said that this project is "putting something new into villages that they haven't had before" and that these resources that have been put into the village are 'invaluable'. This project has been a great success so far.

Case Study: Judy, a volunteer at Elderberries in Scholes

Judy is a volunteer at the Elderberries group in Scholes; she has been involved since the group started. The group meets every Monday for tea and biscuits and a variety of activities. When Judy received the leaflet asking for volunteers to help set up a community group, she saw it as a chance to be involved in the village. Judy is very passionate about craft making and has been making things in her living room for years. Judy wanted to teach others and share the same pleasure in craft making that she has had over the years. This was an opportunity to extend and develop her passion further and 'give something back'. She runs a craft station at the Monday group where people can sit and chat whilst making something they can then take home. Volunteering has had a great impact on her life, she described her experience: "5 months down the line, by sending one email to Becky, it's opened up a whole

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new village life and whole new group of friends. I hope to expand on that as time goes on. I only have positive things to say about it. Volunteering for the Elderberries has changed my life completely.”

The group has led to her being involved in many other things such as being involved in the Manor House Community Centre and attending a fitness class in the church Hall. Judy said her life has been much fuller as a result of being involved in Elderberries. Before this, Judy had always been very active in many different events but these were not related to the village. These included; raising money by making craft items for The Yorkshire Ambulance Service, attending a folk music group, and a local history group. Her husband passed away 4 years ago and this changed her involvement in activities outside of the village because they had always socialised together. She sees the Elderberries as “the catalyst that brought me into village events.” She didn’t know about any of things going on in the village before volunteering at the group. As a result, Judy has formed genuine friendships and feels as if she is part of the village, something she did not feel before. She says, “I wasn’t part of the village before, I’ve lived here for 40 years and never knew anybody except my immediate neighbours.” She described the group as acting as ‘a jumping off point’ to other organisations to get together and that many people she knows have joined the same groups that she has, as a result of meeting people and hearing about events at Elderberries. Judy now has so many extra things to do it’s hard to fit them all in and say she “wants to carry on and do as much as I can for as long as I can”.

When asked what she would say to other people who were thinking about getting involved, she said: “Do it, definitely. Tell anybody to actually be brave enough to put a toe in the water and get out there and become part of something. It’s not only one thing it will have a huge effect to put you in touch with other things as well.”

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Time to Shine BME Elders Network

For the past twelve years, Health for All has been supporting the South Asian communities of Leeds by providing groups and activities tailored to the group’s particular needs. Their Time to Shine project helps to sustain and strengthen this already robust programme by employing a Project Coordinator and recruiting a new group of enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers. Through increased communication and outreach, they bring the assets of Health for All’s activities to care homes, sheltered housing and hospices, making sure that all older adults who might benefit are given the chance. New programming will be designed by older people themselves, to ensure that these crucial connections are culturally appropriate and sensitive to their specific needs. Time to Shine is currently associated with 6 of these community groups and attracts participants from all across Leeds. (Taken from the Time to Shine BME Elders network TTS application).

The weekly groups have a small online presence and although some groups have leaflets promoting their activities, the groups mainly recruit their members through word of mouth. The most common way that people heard about the group, was through a recommendation from a friend or another social group, but some other people were referred by healthcare professionals. Some people said they didn’t know anyone who attended the group before coming. Participants often said they did not come every week but most had been coming for

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years (some since the beginning of the group) and wanted to keep attending. Some people confirmed that they did not attend any other groups of this kind and hadn't before coming to this group. However, others were very socially active and attended as many as four other similar groups a week. This group encourages engagement and participation within the wider community, something that the ABCD model advocates. The members come from all over Leeds and even outside of Leeds, demonstrating the success of the group. However some people said that they could not come every week because of transport barriers, they said they relied on family members to take them to the group. This means that some people need another form of social support to access the group, despite the availability of the bus and lift sharing.

Group members were very positive about the group, especially commenting on what it could offer and how it was run. All the beneficiaries mentioned friendship as the main attribute of the group and saw the other members and volunteers as a source of emotional support. This was often cited as the reason for coming to the group. A beneficiary said that she had made friends at the group and that people "need friendship and love at this age, don't need anything else". Several people said that their life had become lonely and more isolated after their partner had passed away and mentioned being very sad or depressed as a result. Health problems were also a reason for people feeling more isolated. Someone told me that when she is alone she feels "very bad" because never sees anyone living on her own. She had always been a very busy person before her husband passed away. The group has brought her happiness and through attending, she heard about some sewing groups that she now attends and really enjoys. Another beneficiary told me that the group helps her to keep busy and "avoid negative thoughts" and helps her maintain her "independence and freedom". The practical support that the group offers is tailored to the individual, with extra support available to encourage and include older people with health problems or low confidence. This includes home visits and befriending phone calls. The supportive atmosphere extends beyond the meeting. Some people said they would call a friend or would receive a call themselves if they did not attend for a week or two to check they were ok. This genuine fostering of friendship has come from the long time many people have been attending the group and there is a very familiar and supportive atmosphere in the group.

This works well here because people are given the opportunity to participate as much as they can in activities, and develop or learn new skills such as Yoga or learning English. This provides a challenging environment for participants to grow and shape the groups characteristics to suit the participants needs. This is facilitated by a loose structure for the meetings that provide a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere where activities are not compulsory and self-help is encouraged. The space to develop genuine friendships that the informal structure gives members, works well for most people, especially people who would be daunted by a pressurised activity based group. The network uses the ABCD approach to an extent and very successfully. The skills of participants and volunteers are utilised and are central to the makeup of the sessions, this comes from a relaxed approach between the distinction between volunteers and participants but the group is mainly run by unpaid managers. People offer as much as they can to group, with little pressure and this is enhanced by the 'self-management' approach where the managers and organisers of the groups are unpaid and run small groups fairly independently on a day-to-day basis. Outside support is needed for help with paperwork and grant applications. The main source of transport is a bus that brings people to and from the group, and the kitchen staff that cook a

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lunch at the Wednesday meeting are paid for using Leeds City Council funding. This is not particularly sustainable but recruiting volunteers has proven difficult because of importance of culture and the language barrier in this group. The group has successfully reaching some people who did not leave the house very often and who have been experiencing loneliness.

Case Study:

An Indian elderly Female was referred to Time to Shine BME network by a group leader. She was very isolated as she was not going out. She was very low in confidence and was worried about what the community would think of her if she starts socialising outside after her husband had passed away. The staff visited this client in August and organised for her to join in the community group but the client refused to do that. The staff made numerous befriending calls whilst arranging home visits to encourage the client to get out and about. Eventually, in November the client was happy to go with a staff member to the group. Every week staff contacted the client to remind her about the programme of the day. All this support was given till the client became independent to go to the group by herself. The access bus was organised for the client to be picked up and dropped off.

The client is very happy now and no one has to remind her that she needs to get ready to go to the group, the client does it all herself. The client says:

“I am very happy now, I met my old friends in the group and have also made new friends, I look forward to attending the group and I am more active than before as I do Yoga and chair based exercises.”

(Collected and written by a staff member)

Discussion:

When these factors are considered against the two delivery projects chosen for this evaluation report, the approaches these interventions have taken are all on the right track. However some useful points of interest can be identified. The way that the beneficiaries are found by the organisers, using leaflets and other traditional advertising methods as discussed, can be problematic when trying to reach people that are isolated. It is likely that in the majority of cases, the ‘socially-active lonely’ are being attracted and helped by these interventions. As a consequence groups that rely on these methods have a limited effect on reaching socially isolated people. These people may have other issues that prevent them from being able to come to a group or feel able to participate, (this may include being socially excluded also). Projects could be aimed at socially excluded groups or “targeting those disproportionately affected by loneliness – lower socio-economic groups, the widowed, the physically isolated, people who have recently stopped driving, those with sensory impairment and the very old”.¹⁶ Identifying beneficiaries that are socially isolated using a risk assessment approach instead of a self-selection approach is likely to be more successful in fulfilling Time to Shine’s aims. The Time to Shine BME Network already ‘finds’ people this way some of the time, bringing people they have identified to the group by providing support

¹⁶ AGE UK, Loneliness and Isolation Evidence review, p:3 Can be accessed at:
http://www.ageuk.org.uk/documents/en-gb/for-professionals/evidence_review_loneliness_and_isolation.pdf?dtrk=true

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in the transition. This could be built upon to deepen the impact they are already having on severely isolated people. This targeted approach conflicts with the all inclusive ABCD approach but might be a worthwhile approach when thinking about Time to Shine's aims of reaching the most isolated people.

Another area of interest was the lack of involvement with other community groups or other age groups within the community. This is an essential part of the progression of an ABCD approach however; it is clear that in the case of reducing social isolation this is not particularly appropriate. This is particularly true at the start of projects and research suggests that groups work the best when they are tailored to a specific target group and the support is given by someone of the same age group. However in theory, aiming to integrate into the community as much as possible prevents groups from stagnating and improves their sustainability. The existence of a more lively community network would prevent social isolation in the future to an extent because of the availability and ease of accessing community interactions and projects. This is important for delivery partners to consider whether this is suitable for their projects when thinking about long term goals.

Some of the similarities between these groups are that they have a loose and informal structure which is inviting and provides a warm atmosphere for people to feel comfortable in. The blurred lines between volunteer and beneficiary are part of the empowering ABCD approach and this seems to work well as the opportunities for people to become volunteers are important to develop self-esteem and this role may be particularly important to some personality types. Similarly, the impact of a group having a well known and identified purpose has been shown to be important in giving people a purpose and thus deepening the effect of the group on people who are socially isolated. Providing opportunities for people to volunteer alongside embracing the asset mapping process, could be very beneficial and empower people that feel they don't have anything to offer. Furthermore the impact of the group could be enhanced by offering more challenging activities and providing help or encouragement to be more independent. This could include activities based around; mobility, information, advice or technology.

Recommendations

- Consider the importance of goals and visions for the end of the project, or just general outcomes. How to become a community that prevents the emergence of widespread social isolation.
- Consider the importance of independence building; these could include factors such as mobility, information, advice or technology. An approach that improves people's lives beyond the group itself.
- Integration into the community, building links and partnerships with other projects that fits into a wider community movement.
- Consider the assets of local institutions, government and non-government agencies, and private sector businesses that could offer resources to the local community.
- Focus on people that are both; socially excluded and socially isolated.

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- Consider how to reach people who won't or can't respond to traditional advertising methods. (Look at identifying socially isolated people and coming to them using a risk assessment approach).
- Create opportunities for participation and volunteering where possible.
- Project models should always be adapted to the local area.
- Look at the nature of groups, what is the purpose of them? Are activities creative and challenging? These work well.
- Continue focusing on group based interventions
- For projects to consider the question: Has the community met challenges before? And how did they deal with them?

Conclusion:

The report findings were wholly positive. The ABCD model does have a good framework for being inclusive and engaging people in the community. Some of the aspects of the model such as using the idea of assets instead of needs, sustainability through community control and asset mapping are useful in reducing social isolation and loneliness in older people. The benefits can be seen in the two delivery partner's use of the model. Other aspects such as challenging skill based learning have also been identified and as generally effective measures. These generally do not conflict with the ABCD approach. The triggers identified in joining the groups were ranging from liking the activities and 'something to do' to being very lonely and wanting to meet and engage with people. People who attended these groups were happy with them and wanted to keep coming. It remains unclear as to whether the members of these projects are socially isolated but it is clear that by focusing on target groups when recruiting members to the groups, this is more likely. Socially excluded groups and people that we know are disproportionately affected by loneliness should be the focus for interventions. How people hear about the group and how the group recruits its members should be the focus for future assessments of whether TTS is impacting socially isolated people directly.

As a final thought, when the aim of projects is to engage with socially isolated and lonely people and bring them into a community, it is important to think about the future of the project. This is because evidence suggests that the effect of the absence of a project or of ineffective projects can be very damaging to these vulnerable people. Long term investments, regular evaluation and the sustainability of projects are very important to sustain a positive impact on individuals.

With thanks to Leeds Community Connect and Time to Shine BME Network for welcoming me and helping with this report.

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Appendix:

Two examples of capacity inventories.

Appendix 1.a:

“The Greyrockers of Colorado developed a capacity inventory that is designed to be interactive and to promote individuals connecting with one another as a part of the inventory process. In a group setting, the inventory asks people to list their gifts--gifts of the head, gifts of the hands, and gifts of the heart--and then to introduce themselves to others in the room in order to share their gifts. The Greyrockers inventory is unique in that it introduces a note of humor and fun into the process, and gets people talking about capacities right from the start.”¹⁷

¹⁷ John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, GERALYN SHEEHAN, MIKE GREEN AND DEBORAH PUNTENNEY, A GUIDE TO CAPACITY INVENTORIES: MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY SKILLS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS, A Community Building Workbook, The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Can be accessed at: [http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/CapacityInventories\(1\).pdf](http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/CapacityInventories(1).pdf), p:87.

"GREYROCKERS GIFT LIST

MY NAME IS:

AND HERE ARE SOME OF MY GIFTS

Please list 2-4 things in each category--things you wouldn't mind people at Greyrock knowing about you. Please write legibly.

Gifts of the head (things I know something about, and would enjoy talking about, or teaching others about, e.g., birds, art history, movies, solar energy).

Gifts of the hands (things I know how to do and enjoy doing, e.g., carpentry, sports [be specific], gardening, cooking).

Gifts of the heart (things I care deeply about, e.g., protection of the environment, civic life, children).

When you finish, tape the paper to some part of your person and wander around, reading other people's lists and having them read yours. Feel free to add or change as you go. Try to interact with at least 2 people. Benefits of doing a gifts list: (1) You can find people who share your interests. (2) If you need something done that you don't have the skills for, you may find someone who does have those skills and compensate them with money or through a barter arrangement. (Laurie and Katherine are working on a more elaborate barter system, or skills bank; see them if you are interested in helping develop it.) And, finally, (3) it helps you skill over the small talk and get to the meaning of life, or some such thing. PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO ELIZA. THANKS!!"

Taken from: John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, GERALYN SHEEHAN, MIKE GREEN AND DEBORAH PUNTENNEY, A GUIDE TO CAPACITY INVENTORIES: MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY SKILLS OF LOCAL RESIDENTS, *A Community Building Workbook*, The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research, Can be accessed at: [http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/CapacityInventories\(1\).pdf](http://www.abcdinstitute.org/docs/CapacityInventories(1).pdf), p:96

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Appendix 1,b: “The United Neighbors' capacity inventory focuses on the neighborhoods in which people live. The inventory asks what people like best about the neighborhood, and what they would like to improve. It asks a set of questions about participation in civic organizations and activities, and about specific skills the person can share, and current employment. This inventory also asks the individual directly whether they would be willing to become involved in United Neighbors. Most of the questions are open-ended and promote a discussion between the interviewer and the individual being interviewed.”

UNITED NEIGHBORS, Capacity Survey

What would you say are some of the best things about our neighborhood?

Why did you choose to live here?

What are some things that you would like to do to improve the neighborhood?

Have you ever participated in any of the following activities?

Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts

Church Fundraisers

Bingo

PTA or school associations

Sports Teams

Camp trips or field trips

Political campaigns

Neighborhood associations

Rummage sales or yard sales

Church suppers

Tutoring

4-H or gardening

Arts or crafts

Chess or game clubs

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Music

Other

What could we do at the school that could benefit the neighborhood?

When you think about your own skills, what are three things that you think you do best?

What are three skills you would most like to learn?

Are there any skills you would like to teach or show others?

Are there some hobbies or special interests of yours that we have not covered??

How often do you go outside the neighborhood to have fun (in a week)?

Once a week or less 2 to 4 times Every day

Where do you go?

What kinds of new places of activities would you like to see in the neighborhood?

Are you part of any group that gets together on a regular basis?

What are they?

Are you currently employed?

Which shift?

Is there any product or service related to your work that could be sold in the neighborhood?

Should we let you know about our next meeting or activity?

Would you be interested in interviewing others:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Interviewer's Name:

Date:

Taken from: John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, GERALYN SHEEHAN, MIKE GREEN AND DEBORAH PUNTENNEY, A GUIDE TO CAPACITY INVENTORIES: MOBILIZING THE

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