



A Lifeline In Desperate Times: Lockdown learning from Time to Shine delivery partners

October 2020

About Time to Shine

Led by Leeds Older People's Forum, Time to Shine is one of fourteen areas which form Ageing Better; an ambitious, large scale programme funded and developed by The National Lottery Community Fund. [Ageing Better](#) aims to improve the lives of people aged 50 and over by reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Introduction

From March 2020, during the early stages of lockdown, most Time to Shine delivery partners rapidly adapted their services and support to provide an organisation-wide response to Covid-19. As lockdown eased, we asked Time to Shine delivery partners to reflect on their learning during the pandemic and their plans for future service provision. As, at the time of writing, we go again into increased restrictions, we know that important lessons will continue to emerge. The purpose of this report is to share this learning to help others who need to adapt to a changing situation.



Time to
Shine



“I’m really proud of the way the team rapidly adapted to working in a new way and continued to provide valuable telephone support to people in their most difficult time, even as our staff and volunteers were struggling with and adjusting to life under lockdown themselves.” (SELF)

Evidence

Time to Shine has funded over 100 projects (2015-2020). Delivery partners collect case studies, quotes, insight and learning on a regular basis and share this evidence in quarterly monitoring returns and contract meetings. Research and collaboration is integral to the Time to Shine programme approach. Delivery partners were asked to complete a bespoke survey relating to Covid-19 and to take part in online discussion groups to share their experiences. All the evidence has informed the report.

“The men’s adaption to Zoom has been very impressive. Despite some technical challenges and initial resistance to using an online platform the men are confident sharing stories over Zoom, and the stories that are being shared are perhaps just as deep, if not more so, than if they were face to face.”
(Life, Loss, Learning, & Legacy)



What did people find useful during the early stages of lockdown?

Delivery partner staff appreciated:

- Structured Zoom meetings with peers to share ideas, experiences and for peer support
- Key information and resources collated centrally by the programme team and shared with partners
- The way in which their staff teams pulled together provide a rapid response to the crisis
- Time to Shine's budget flexibility which enabled partners to respond to the needs of their communities and individuals in a way that works for them
- The power of partnerships and Time to Shine's shift from a traditional funder / client relationship
- Added value of collaborative working in their own organisations, at Time to Shine and across the third sector
- Connections sparking ideas which led projects in creative and unexpected ways
- Small, informal WhatsApp groups which delivery partners set up and invited others to
- Space to think about future strategy and priorities if their work isn't frontline
- The opportunity to try things out and learn new things

“Time to Shine has been fantastic in providing clear and concise guidance around lockdown which is adaptable to the needs of older people.”

(The Great Outdoors)

Participants and volunteers appreciated:

- Ongoing contact and support from their project
- Practical help to get access to essentials
- Regular, consistent check-in and befriending calls and doorstep visits
- Intensive IT training and digital help and support from the project team, helping them to get online, stay connected and purchase essentials
- Kind actions, such as the provision of gifts or creative packs, to help reduce boredom and feelings of isolation

“You have not let me feel alone....it's maybe not saved my life, but the call helps get me out of bed and ready.”

(participant, SELF)



Christian Lunde



Sincerely Media

Thematic learning

All Time to Shine delivery partners reconfigured their services and adapted rapidly to changing circumstances. Their main priority initially was to ensure that participants and volunteers had access to food, medicine and money. Contact methods changed to phone, online and socially-distant doorstep visits and policies and procedures changed, for example to fast-track access to telephone befriending. Once people's basic needs were met delivery partners started to provide holistic, person-centred support. Learning from this period is grouped into the following key themes:

Access to essentials

“I was so frightened I might not get any food and die here alone....I couldn't have managed without you being there anytime at the end of the phone, you don't realise how lonely it is when you can't get out to just do normal things like going to the shops.” *(Participant)*

People have been surprised and very grateful at the amount of help that has been made available and it's made a huge difference just to know that someone is thinking of them and can help them get what they need. Families, neighbours and friends have delivered shopping but if additional help was needed delivery partners were able to refer on or arrange this. Withdrawing money from banks or the post office and paying rent or bills caused people to worry in the early stages of lockdown.

The Digital Divide

“We feel that the new online activities we've developed will become part of Sporting Memories 'new normal', enhancing our product and making a difference for older people in Leeds and across the UK.” *(Sporting Memories)*

The digital divide has been more apparent during the lockdown than ever before. It has highlighted a mixed picture of older people who use the internet, those with access but no digital skills, those with skills but no hardware and people without access or any interest at all. Where service users were previously being encouraged by staff to learn and improve their digital skills, many are now asking to learn and have access to the internet as “improving IT skills is now seen as an essential skill to acquire.” For older people with no interest in getting online staff still needed to 'sell' the idea and address concerns, taking a gentle and patient approach to help people learn and gain confidence.

There is an increased demand for IT equipment for people who are not in a position to purchase it themselves. A large number of participants now attend virtual activities. Delivery partners invested a lot of time to coach, train and support people remotely to help them get online through telephone lessons and simple user guides. A lot of older people really pushed themselves as this was the only way to have interaction with other people. When people have at least a basic level of IT ability and access to the internet, partners noted a significant reduction in feelings of social isolation. However, partners made efforts to ensure that those who are not online still had access to resources, activities and support.

Mental health, physical health and wellbeing

“Many carers are reporting a decline in both their physical and mental health. Whilst many people have been able to go for daily walks, many carers cannot due to the health of the person they care for, their own health or a new fear of being outside and contracting the virus.” *(Carers Connections)*

Delivery partners report that the telephone and online contact has uncovered issues such as increased feelings of anxiety and hopelessness and other mental health concerns. Not being able to go out or see family and friends has resulted in a noticeable loss of confidence in some individuals who worry that they may never get out again, get on public transport or go on holiday safely again. Mobility has also declined due to limited physical activity. One delivery partner provided practical and emotional support to four clients who had thoughts of ending their life due to despair and the side effects of medication.

Time to Shine delivery partners did what they could to help older participants maintain levels of physical and mental health, posting things out or dropping things off if a person wasn't online. Activities included Zoom quizzes and socials, craft packs, afternoon tea, treats or small gifts, gardening supplies, gentle exercise plans, 'build your own bird feeder' and sewing kits, quizzes, street bingo, online book clubs, book swaps, DVD lending service, matchstick modelling, sequin art and training equipment for walking football. One delivery partner moved all their courses online so that people across Leeds could join in Reiki, mindfulness, singing and other activities which boosted wellbeing.



Social connection, social isolation and loneliness

“While some clients have avoided picking up the phone due to low mood, others have opened up more as they feel they can’t see the person they are speaking to, which reduces the fear of being judged.” (S.E.L.F)

Many Time to Shine participants were already isolated prior to the pandemic and their ongoing involvement in projects reaped rewards when support was much needed. The social connections they developed helped them to stay connected, check in on each other’s health and wellbeing and provide support. Many participants accepted delivery partner’s offers of regular welfare, check-in or befriending calls from staff or volunteers. One delivery partner estimated that they called approximately 30 people a week. The calls were much appreciated and have really helped to reduce social isolation.

Loneliness has certainly increased and is reported by participants as well as volunteers of all ages. Befriending calls often centred on the feelings of isolation and it was sometimes a challenge to help the participant notice something more positive. As activities moved online people said that they missed physical contact and face-to-face interactions.

Residents in care homes faced additional challenges as social contact was very strictly controlled. Residents living with dementia may have struggled to retain information about the pandemic and to understand why they were confined to their room and unable to receive visits.

Responding to the needs of diverse communities

“We provided culturally sensitive support by delivering CRAIC packs which entailed a food parcel being made up of Irish food products; giving older Irish people a taste of home and linking them back to the homeland.” (Cara Too)

Delivery partners reported that they tailored their shopping services for members of diverse communities who were on special diets for either cultural or religious reasons. Multi-lingual staff and volunteers provided support and assistance and a range of services and activities.



Challenges

Aside from the obvious challenges that lockdown brought, delivery partners noted that sometimes bureaucracy hindered support:

“[Helpline staff] wouldn’t speak with us because we were not the person. This is obviously a challenge because the person in question has difficulty speaking so they would find it very hard to initiate a conversation with the Council around food deliveries.” *(Speak with IT)*

Staff, volunteers and participants all had to adapt to lockdown simultaneously so time to pause, reflect and plan was severely limited. For staff working on the frontline, the scale and pace of work was overwhelming and teams were working flat out for long hours, sometimes seven days a week. This is not sustainable in the longer term and has a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

Opportunities

In one organisation volunteers stepped up to help increase the frequency of meetings to weekly as they realised members needed more support.

Some large organisations identified better cross-departmental working either as a result of practical activity (food parcel delivery to all vulnerable clients, not just older people) or whole staff meetings which were made possible by Zoom.

Organisations formed better relationships with others in their local area, sharing volunteers and working together.

“Volunteers were also supported to be part of the council’s volunteering cohort with one participant volunteering with Bramley Elderly Action to deliver food parcels in their local area.” *(The Great Outdoors)*



Legacy

“I’m extremely proud of our service users who have kept connected via the WhatsApp social group, providing peer support helping out with shopping and running errands for one another. They have built and maintained independent friendships from this group and are going out of their way to deliver food and check in on one another.” *(Choices)*

Many positives can be drawn from the way in which delivery partners and colleagues across the third sector in Leeds responded to the Covid-19 crisis, and the way in which whole communities came together.

Partners have identified a range of new approaches that they plan to continue through the recovery period, many of which will help older people to maintain social contact during the dark days of winter or in the event of further Covid-19 restrictions or lockdown. These include:

- Continuing to offer a blended service delivery, mixing options for online, phone and face-to-face activities
- Increasing the frequency of sessions due to the efficiency of meeting online
- Continuing to use Zoom or similar online platforms
- Recruiting volunteers from all over the region to help with online service provision
- Taking time out as a team to pause and reset, and being open minded about the possibilities and new ways of working
- Encouraging participants to find ways to look out for and help each other
- Reflecting on the way in which staff communicate with older people – partners tell us that they have worked hard on their telephone skills to improve their conversations
- Using a questionnaire to gather the ideas and opinions to plan the next stages of service delivery

“Time to Shine continues to support us via Zoom meetings where we have the opportunity to share our new skills and knowledge and encourage each other to explore new ways of bringing our clients together.

I think there will be lasting changes brought about by both Time to Shine and Covid-19. I think we have definitely tapped into some unmet needs in the community. We have taken on new participants and increased our reach. It has also made me realise how much can be done remotely with service users.”

(Making a Match)

Resources

1. Key learning from the Covid-19 crisis from Time to Shine and other Ageing Better programmes <https://timetoshineleeds.org/what-weve-learned/key-learning-covid-19-crisis>
2. Telephone befriending guide [‘Compassionate and informative telephone calls during Covid-19’](#)