

## **Choosing the standard measure for loneliness for Leeds**

### **Background**

At an Age Friendly Leeds consultation event, whilst discussing possible Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to measure the success of the Age Friendly Leeds plan, it became clear that a range of Leeds-based funders and commissioners had a focus on reducing loneliness. We thought that a KPI relating to loneliness in Leeds would work well if lots of projects used the same standard measure, instead of making up their own. This discussion was timely as some commissioners and funders were reviewing their monitoring and evaluation methods and had scope to introduce an agreed standard measure. A working group was formed, including representatives from Time to Shine at Leeds Older Peoples' Forum, Leeds City Council, a Neighbourhood Network, Leeds Community Foundation, the Centre for Ageing Better, Public Health, and the University of Sheffield.

### **Consultation**

5 options were considered by the working group. Two were multi-part questions measuring loneliness and 3 were single questions. Within the 5 options were a set of national loneliness measures recommended by the government and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Members of the working group asked colleagues, including the National Lottery Community Fund and some Neighbourhood Network managers, for their views on each of the options.

### **Challenges**

The big challenge was that ANY question about loneliness can be difficult to ask or to answer as it can be an emotive issue. No measure is perfect. One of the multi-part questions used more positive language than the other question and this was the preferred measure for a number of Neighbourhood Network managers and many of the working group members. The downside is that this question hasn't been tested for comparability to other scales, it isn't widely used, can't be compared to national data and hasn't been translated into community languages. The other multi-part question, however, has...but it is worded more negatively and therefore it wasn't the preferred measure for a lot of people.

### **Chosen measure**

After weighing up the pros and cons we chose the following standard loneliness measure for Leeds. It is a set of two questions (one multi-part and one single) and both or either questions can be asked, depending on the situation:

#### **UCLA 3-item loneliness scale**

- 1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?**
- 2. How often do you feel left out?**
- 3. How often do you feel isolated from others?**

Response categories: Hardly ever / Some of the time / Often

### **Single-item question:**

#### **How often do you feel lonely?**

Response categories: Hardly ever or never / Some of the time / Often

### **Reasons for choosing this set of two questions**

- Together they make up the national measure for loneliness recommended by the government and the ONS so they will be used nationally for many years to gather data
- They are an 'off the shelf' set which have been considered carefully by experts before being recommended as the national measure
- The ONS recommends using both questions but there is an option to only use the single-item question if time is limited or if this is more appropriate for individuals.
- Loneliness data from Leeds can be benchmarked against other cities and compared with the national results which may have strategic benefits for Leeds.
- Over time, funders or commissioners may use the ONS recommended measures more regularly so if a different question is chosen for Leeds this may mean that partners have additional monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- Time to Shine has translations of the UCLA scale into 16 community languages
- Training, inductions and peer support can help to overcome some of the challenges that workers face when asking negatively worded or emotive evaluation questions.
- The UCLA scale:
  - Is well-established and academically robust
  - Has a high degree of fidelity as it is generally accepted that the questions do accurately measure loneliness
  - Is already widely used nationally, including in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing and the National Lottery Community Fund's Ageing Better programme
  - Has been validated for use with all people over the age of 16
  - Has been used by Time to Shine since 2015 and by Public Health on the SWIFt service since 2016 so data has already been collected for Leeds.
  - Has been tested for comparability to other scales
  - Provides a numerical score to measure impact, which commissioners and funders often need in addition to case studies and quotes.

### **Next steps**

From September, commissioners and funders will start to incorporate the standard loneliness measure into monitoring and evaluation processes in Leeds, where appropriate. The working group will meet again in Autumn 2019 to consider the methods for data entry, KPI reporting and other practicalities relating to the standard measure for loneliness for Leeds.