



# **Trigger points:** **How might people fall into isolation and how we can help them re-connect**

## **A Time to Shine toolkit July 2020**

There are recognised trigger points for social isolation which can occur across the lifespan of an individual.

The Time to Shine projects working with socially isolated and lonely older people have also been able to identify some of the mechanisms that help people to join activities and reduce their social isolation.

This toolkit helps you recognise the trigger points and shares some strategies we might all use to help reconnect people.

*July 2020*



**Time to  
Shine**



# What are the trigger points for social isolation and loneliness?

Trigger points for social isolation and loneliness are generally times when our identity changes or becomes uncertain. These are some of the common triggers for older people

- Bereavement
- Divorce or loss of a life partner,
- Illness – in themselves or a loved one - leading to reduction in mobility or loss of confidence
- Retirement or redundancy
- Moving house – even a short distance can break local ties if you are not able to drive or walk easily
- Issues with appropriate transport
- Struggles with finances
- Language difficulties

# What have we found out about how we can support people to reconnect?

Projects did identify helpful ways of working, barriers to engagement and ways of bridging those barriers. However, all of the techniques used could probably have been predicted and are used commonly by some organisations.

This toolkit looks at a range of actions organisations took, summarised as

- prompt action
- kindness
- flexibility
- a person-centred approach
- practical help through mechanisms like transport

Information has been gathered using the data from evaluation forms, case studies, and stories gathered by Volunteer Listeners who asked the questions during guided interviews. Many of you may support older people at work, but it is also worth considering what we can all do individually to support people, as relatives, friends and neighbours, and also how individuals can act to help their future selves.



# What can organisations do?

**Step in quickly** Don't Call me Old members at Armley Helping Hands were able quickly to offer friendship and support to a terminally ill man which improved the quality of his last months of life.

**Hold people's hands through the processes while they regain confidence** Working with someone through the practical processes of having grab rails fitted, and making an application for DLA meant he was able to tell the IAPT (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies) provider he no longer needed the psychological support he had requested when the process started.

**Help them to deal with practical issues** Supported Wellbeing at Bramley Elderly Action enabled a housebound gentleman to get out to local shops on his scooter, and improved his housing situation. They logged 16 visits, 33 phone calls and 13 emails on his behalf, as his social worker had closed his case when district nursing care was in place. Amongst other issues his housing was still inappropriate, he needed an eye test, his bins weren't being collected and he needed help to replace a mobile phone - he was unable to help himself as he couldn't make or receive calls easily.

**Be flexible & creative about how they engage people** Bramley Elderly Action Supported Wellbeing took time to identify a small group of women who shared a common experience with anxiety, and who either lived quite near each other or who attended activities at the same time but had not spent time together before. The women were keen to get involved with the group and one offered their home to host the afternoon tea and natter.

**Be persistent** It took Supported Wellbeing staff at Opal several visits to help D to engage with an activity. She finally joined a shopping trip with other older people, and gained sufficient confidence and enjoyment to return, she has now started to attend a luncheon club and has asked for help in finding a mobile hairdresser.

**Take time finding the right place for someone** Some people need to do something locally, others will travel to find an activity that suits them.

Many of the members of the Great Outdoors Project (TCV) joined because they wanted to work with wood, some Float Your Boat Volunteers are motivated by an interest in the boat and the mechanics. Carers Leeds were able to place people from bereavement programmes into local groups where they could make friends they might see independently.

**Offer gentle encouragement** Phone calls on the day gently reminded and encouraged women to come to Shantona. They recognised that some of the women they worked with did not have a proper routine in their lives; attending sessions once a week gave them a reason to get ready on time and restored a routine.

**Use languages other than English** Shantona used volunteers to help with interpreting whenever they could, and specifically recruited a sessional worker with a Bangladeshi background at one point. They found having someone with language skills on a regular basis, encouraged Bengali women to attend and engage.

**Personalise the transport offer** Caring Together Woodhouse and Little London found that a large percentage of their new referrals stated that the offer of transport of their choice to activities had been the deciding factor in whether they engage with the services provided. They were also able to quickly adjust the transport offer when circumstances changed to facilitate continued attendance.

**Spend time forming relationships & treat people as individuals** OPAL staff found that time spent befriending and getting to know a person was crucial in building trust and encouraging people to engage, particularly if they lacked confidence in services.



## What can we do as family, friends and neighbours?

Comments made by many of the participants and volunteers on projects tell us either how they found themselves encouraged to join, or how they are now recruiting others who are equally isolated. As family and friends we sometimes have the advantage of knowing what interests the individual has and might respond to, things it will take a project worker time to learn.

### Notice how people are feeling

“Her son was concerned for her health and recognised that his mother would benefit from, and enjoy some additional social groups during the week” *Feel Good Factor*

“If I have any trouble others will help me. We all help each other” *Don't Call Me Old*

### Help people find out about activities

Some people need to be motivated by very specific activities. This often seems to be the case with men, so keep trying.

Some of the music and dance activities found that people were particularly motivated by interests from earlier years. “I love music, and when I was living in India, I was learning an instrument and I also love singing” *Fever Dosti radio project*. For another lady, the hook was Bollywood movies.

### Be encouraging

Fever Dosti “I found out from my closest friend and she has more confidence than me that I will do this programme. I am very grateful that I join Fever Dosti activities”

“I lost my husband 20 years ago and I still miss him. My daughter lives in Birmingham (so isn't close by), by helping people you learn more. I'm encouraging others to come and join us. I've brought two people here.” *Fever Dosti radio project*

### Be persistent

“If they don't see you for a while they will give you a ring, and may pop in to visit” *Feel Good Factor*

### Have conversations about engaging in activities

“People persuaded me by saying I would enjoy it – the initial going I needed help with – now I try to persuade others to come and bring them here and help them - like people did for me.” *Feel Good Factor*

## Resources

Volunteer Listeners Report <http://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/6580/>