

What can we do over the festive season?

November 2020



The information and ideas in this learning briefing are gathered from staff in third sector organisations in Leeds who work with older people, including Neighbourhood Networks and Time to Shine delivery partners.

At time of publication Leeds has just gone into the second national lockdown in England. This is due to finish on December 2. It is impossible to say at the moment what the conditions will be after that date, and at Christmas, in Leeds and nationally. [Full details can be found on the gov.uk website.](#)

The different activities planned depend very much on the current restrictions, and on each organisation, their access to venues and the concerns of their members.

Covid-19, shielding, lockdown and local restrictions have forced us back towards a place of old style charity where older people are more likely to be recipients of services rather than contributors. This is currently often unavoidable but partners agreed that the sector should work in a way that values older people's skills and contributions where possible. It's also important for organisations to be inclusive of a range of celebrations over the festive season, reflecting the traditions of different faiths and cultures.

There was a general feeling that the focus for the festive season would be very much on those individuals or couples who would be on their own and isolated from family or friends. There was a recognition that a number of people would choose to spend their festive season alone, or would see family over the holiday period if not on the day. Those connected digitally may be less isolated and we discussed ways of making people feel connected through online activity rather than viewing passively.

Neighbourhood or street-level support is likely to be as important over the festive season as it was during the first lockdown, so organisations could look to reinvigorate neighbourliness and street activity to support people and make them feel part of their community, using Chanukah, Diwali, Christmas or other celebrations as a hook to get people involved.

The section at the end of this briefing focuses specifically on Christmas but some of the ideas could be adapted to support the celebrations of a diverse range of faiths and cultures.

Physical actions to support people over the festive season

- Partners agreed that it was vital to keep the morale of older people up over winter, but noted that this was very difficult to do remotely, particularly when not knowing how long the restrictions will last. **Small gifts and activity packs** are important as things with thought, care and kindness behind them make a huge difference.
- **Befriending calls** continue to be very important and are well-received - older people still want to receive these calls over the festive season and feel they are very valuable.
- At the most obvious end of the scale there is the delivery of **traditional hot festive meals** to some people. One older people's organisation in South Leeds is planning this and has recently run a volunteer recruitment drive to support them (they deliver hot meals regularly), another organisation is hoping to be able to support a local community group who have always done this in the past. Some organisations plan to deliver food hampers to those most in need.
- Connecting people by post. Two projects have been recruiting or repurposing volunteers to **write letters or make festive cards**, or both, for individuals to open on celebration days. Not everyone is comfortable with telephone befriending so one project has recruited members as penpals for the winter.
- A number of Neighbourhood Networks are considering how to instigate the formation of **new support bubbles** so that people who are on their own can spend time together.
- Organisations which currently encourage their members to **'phone a new friend'** to connect people who are isolated are considering how to extend this activity over winter.
- Leeds Playhouse are **performing** in the car park of a Neighbourhood Network for people to come and watch at a safe distance.

Digital connections over the festive season

- A colleague shared the value of undertaking craft activity simultaneously. This will be something several projects will work on over winter. Partners noticed that the act of all doing the activity at the same time over Zoom did add a dimension of sharing that wasn't there when simply posting a craft kit out for people to use as and when.
- Here is a link to a variety of craft tutorials from the [The Crafts Council](#) website:
 - [Craft Contemporary](#)
 - [The V&A museum's Make Do and Mend series](#)
 - [Skillshare](#)
- The Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) has created a '[Virtual Village Hall](#)' - a useful resource of online activities and courses which organisations and older people may find useful, with classes from technology skills to creative arts & crafts.
- Some projects will be calling people and meeting up via Zoom on celebration days. Others are planning online parties for the groups they work with.
- One project is planning an online bibliotherapy group over Zoom to help people feel connected.
- One idea is to host a small market outside the Neighbourhood Network office, under gazebos and with social distancing, so that people can come and buy small gifts for family and friends. An alternative is for organisations to help with gift shopping for those unable to get out or shop online so that they have gifts to give to family and friends.

Ideas specifically focused on Christmas

- Buy and share Christmas films and music CDs from charity shops.
- Distribute December packs in the weeks before Christmas including activities/quizzes, a decorative item and small Christmas treats.
- Send out Christmas card craft packs for members to make. Christmas crafts such as bauble-making can be done online and offline. Packs containing all the materials and instructions are delivered and a Zoom session is held so that people can make the craft item together - for themselves or as gifts for friends. People who are not online are encouraged to send a photo of their completed item which can be shared in the organisation's newsletter.

- During Christmas week staff could dress up and deliver activity packs and food with a small 'Secret Santa' present, playing Christmas music whilst they do so - it's important to remember to help make Christmas fun for staff and volunteers too.
- Support and encourage doorstep singsongs, perhaps in conjunction with a local school or choir (if restrictions allow), with a street gathering to sing Christmas Carols from a set songsheet.
- There are a number of ways people could get involved or listen to music over Christmas too. Here are some resources, including links for serious singers, those who want a bit of fun and the listening audience too.
 - [From Couch to Chorus: The Festive Edition](#)
 - [Age UK Leeds Christmas Sing-Along group](#)
 - [Carol services and Christmas concerts available to watch online this Christmas](#)
- Use Zoom to bring a Christmas Day to those identified as most vulnerable, supporting them beforehand to access zoom for a shared Christmas dinner and party.
- Partner with the local pub (Covid guidelines allowing) for the pub to provide a dinner on Christmas Day or Boxing Day.
- Replace the usual Zoom quizzes with a Christmas quiz or watch a mini pantomime together online.
- Some Neighbourhood Networks plan to include a January calendar of events in their Christmas newsletter to spread positivity and give members something to look forward to once Christmas is over.

It continues to be a really challenging time but the discussions showed the energy and enthusiasm partners have to continue trying to make things better for older people in Leeds. Although we may not be able to maintain the usual festive traditions this year, partners agreed that taking time to help older people feel connected, cared for, appreciated and supported could help them to make the best of a very difficult situation.

