



Working with Individuals with Anxiety

Time to Shine toolkit
December 2019

Time to Shine projects aim to involve the most socially isolated and potentially the most lonely individuals. Some projects, especially those working with frail older people, work one to one with individuals to make contact with them in their own homes. The ultimate aim for most people is to help them get out and about again to re-engage with local activities.

Delivery partners found that more of the beneficiaries than they had anticipated were suffering from anxiety, low mood or mental ill health. They thought physical frailty would generally be the barrier preventing people from getting involved in local activities, but this turned out to be wrong in a significant number of cases.



Why have we produced this toolkit?

Staff from a broad swathe of delivery partners estimated the number of beneficiaries with low level mental health issues, like anxiety, to be anything up to 50%. Staff from the projects who were aiming to support the frailest older people (the Supporting Wellbeing projects) estimated 80% of their beneficiaries to have mental ill health, some with severe problems.

This toolkit was developed as a result of discussions with Time to Shine delivery partners who identified these issues and shared their solutions. It aims to look at ways for working to support people with low level mental health problems, NOT those with serious mental illnesses. It is an information sharing resource for those workers and volunteers who are not health professionals.



What challenges are faced by organisations working with this group of older people?

- This can be a hidden group; they often don't attend any activities or service so finding them is hard.
- Expecting individuals who are suffering from anxiety or panic attacks to move straight into large groups – even with support – and to achieve new friendships within those groups is unrealistic.
- Established and large groups can develop cliques which make it hard for new people to join, even if the newcomers have no anxiety. Some groups may be closed to new members, which is OK, but it is necessary to establish when this is the case.
- Neighbourhood Networks already take enquiries locally from family, neighbours and professionals, but for people experiencing anxiety a considerable amount of time and patience is needed to develop trust and enable participation in activities which might improve their quality of life. Not all Neighbourhood Networks have the capacity to commit this much time, especially if they are not aware that poor mental health may be the root of a problem.
- Marketing. Those individuals who might benefit are often likely to perceive themselves as too 'young' for some of the groups and activities, and will perceive them as 'boring' even if this is not the case.
- Younger older people might have more severe problems and may have been referred by organisations that are unable to offer them support because of complexity. One organisation revealed they regularly received referrals for people who could not be helped by other services.
- For older people with learning disabilities or who are on the autism spectrum there seems to be a lack of counsellors with appropriate skills to refer on to, as their symptoms may express in a different way and as individuals they will need different interventions.





What challenges do the individuals face?

- There is more perceived stigma around mental health issues in the older population.
- Some minority groups, including older adults with learning disabilities, have a very high level of anxiety as a result of their previous life experiences. For them anxiety about leaving their homes may have its basis in reality and they may need a different level of support.
- It is not easy to unlearn habitual behaviour and individuals can become entrenched in their isolation as it is easier than changing, even if they are unhappy with it.
- There may be no groups that appeal sufficiently strongly to give an individual the motivation to overcome anxieties about attending. This is particularly the case for younger older people who have different expectations about the activities on offer.
- Travelling to venues may prove more of a challenge for these older people.
- Family opinions can be a barrier– sometimes they don't believe the older person should do something, sometimes they believe they 'ought' to be doing something.
- Individuals may wish to attend single sex groups, for a range of reasons, but these may not be readily available.

Key learning points

Stop anxiety and loss of confidence getting a hold - for those who are already members of Neighbourhood Networks it has become clear that being able to offer swift interventions and a higher level of support for a brief time can result in the member remaining engaged. *“If you offer suitable transport options to individuals soon after an illness or onset of frailty they are more likely to accept this than if they are left inactive for a long period of time”.*

Remember to include mental health in your initial assessment of people, whoever has referred them.

Ask yourself if the reasons for ‘lack of interest’ are the true ones - lack of money, cold weather, or transport are sometimes used as acceptable excuses to discourage probing. Is there an issue they do not wish to share until they trust you? People may use practical excuses to mask anxiety.

Allow extra time once you know mental ill health is an issue as working to a set number of interventions may be ineffective.

Know how local referral systems and advice networks work (see the Sources of help and advice section overleaf for more general advice)

Don’t leave numbers with people to call later because they won’t - you may need to make initial calls to get referrals started.

Taking time to learn about the beneficiary - really knowing the groups you are working with will help you to make successful matches.

Consider creating small groups when it seems appropriate.

Take individuals to groups and support them while they are there, then follow up to ensure their attendance is maintained. It may take some people experiencing anxiety a while to settle in.

Keep trying to find a group or individual match - it will take more than one go in many cases.

Use a strength based approach where you can - build on the positives to encourage people to keep going when they meet setbacks.

Mental Health First Aid training can benefit staff and volunteers, giving them more confidence in difficult circumstances.

You can’t always succeed, and may have to cease your involvement with someone. You may need support from colleagues or your line manager if you need to do this.

Sources of help and advice in Leeds

MindWell is the mental health website for people in Leeds. Funded locally by the NHS in Leeds it provides a 'go to' place for information in the city. It has lots of self-help tools for common problems like anxiety, stress and low moods as well as information about all sorts of services like counselling.

It's simple and easy to use and written in plain English. It can be used by individuals to support themselves and also by professionals - go to the professionals section for resources and referral information. www.mindwelleeds.org.uk

Careview - this is a Leeds Public Health project which is primarily used to help organisations identify areas of potentially high need but it also has a useful section on identifying local sources of help. It looks like an app and is easy to use on a phone so you could have it with you when you are out and about. You need to go to www.leeds.care.vu and follow the instructions to use it on different devices.

Anxiety Leeds is a volunteer run local peer support group. www.anxietyleeds.org.uk/



Sources of help and advice across the UK

Silverline The Silver Line operates the only confidential, free helpline for older people across the UK that's open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year.

They also offer telephone friendship where they match volunteers with older people based on their interests, facilitate group calls, and help to connect people with local services in their area. The Silver Line Helpline number is 0800 4 70 80 90 or visit www.thesilverline.org.uk/

The Samaritans is an organisation that is there to listen to people who are feeling distressed. You can contact them on the phone, by post or by email. It is always free to do even if you have no credit. visit www.samaritans.org/ or call 116123

No Panic is an online service helps people who suffer from Panic Attacks, Phobias, Obsessive Compulsive Disorders and other related anxiety disorders including those people who are trying to give up tranquillizers.

Visit www.nopanic.org.uk/ or you can call them on 0844 967 4848. The Helpline is available everyday 10am-10pm but calls are charged at 5 pence per minute + there is an access charge from your phone company. They are a member organisation who can offer lots of other help to members.

No Panic also provides support for the carers of people who suffer from anxiety disorders.

Mind is a national charity that helps people with mental health problems. visit www.mind.org.uk/ They offer online peer support through **Elefriends**, a supportive on-line community where you can be yourself. It is described as a safe place to listen, share and be heard www.elefriends.org.uk/

For more information please visit www.timetoshineleeds.org/learning



