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**TIME TO SHINE : TIME TO SHARE**

**LYCHEE RED CHINESE SENIORS**

**Introduction:**

A central tenet of Time to Shine is the use of the test and learn approach whereby projects use regular evaluation to learn and develop. The purpose of this independent case study is to contribute to Lychee Red’s own evaluation and to share their recipe with other Time to Shine projects, and new organisations seeking to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst older people in Leeds.

In particular, the case study seeks to understand the challenges presented by older people who speak little or no English, barriers experienced by participants and volunteers, and the most effective activities to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

**Methods:**

Data was collected via scrutiny of documents including CMS monitoring forms, Quarterly Monitoring reports, participant case studies, stories and poems, three visits to the project enabling completion of a focus group with 14 participants and in depth interviews with the Chinese Seniors Activity Worker and the Healthy Communities Service Manager. The focus group of volunteer participants was held after the weekly luncheon club with the help of a translator and peer researcher. Areas of investigation centred on activity involvement, impact, barriers, recommendations for marketing and future project development. The interviews explored project and personal challenges, surprises and impacts, lessons learned and plans for the future.

**Findings – The Lychee Red Menu:**

**Starters.**

Lychee Red grew from an idea of a Chinese volunteer working with the Global Happy Families food poverty project based at Beeston Community Centre under the auspices of Health for All.

In the context of Time to Shine’s Dinner Dates project, having suspected a paucity of provision for Chinese Seniors, a needs analysis was conducted by this volunteer. This included a visit to the Leeds Chinese Community Association’s (LCCA) Luncheon Club to review existing provision and investigate potential partnership working. This identified some reluctance on behalf of LCCA and also the need for additional provision with a focus on fun and activities additional to the meal. A poster/leaflet circulated to restaurants, churches and supermarkets recruited 10 Chinese seniors to discuss their needs and what might be attractive to them. The most important elements identified were fun and chatting in their own language.

The official launch took place in January 2016 attended by more than 40 Chinese older people and volunteers.

**Main Course.**

On the menu is a weekly brunch of tasty Chinese dishes cooked onsite by volunteers, members helping with shopping, cooking, serving and washing up. Regular activities before the meal are traditional games such as Mechang, chess, cards, ping pong, chatting and walking in the local park. Sessions last approximately 4 hours. There is a regular attendance of 30-40 people, more on special festivals such as Chinese New Year and the Moon Festival in September when 65 attended.

Focus group participants spoke enthusiastically about the weekly event, chatting with friends and singing being the most popular activities, followed by shopping, cooking and the raffle. Their delight in singing together came to light accidentally when some participants started to sing to some background music played by the activity worker. It is now a regular activity, and the group was both excited and proud to sing at a Health for All event, an older people’s event at the Civic Hall and the Time to Shine one year anniversary event. Additional activities have been calligraphy, poetry and visits, for example, to China town in Manchester. Trips are popular but the costs prevent some members attending and the Activity Worker does not want to exclude people. On the other hand she wants to widen the offer with more speakers, activities and trips.

Additional activities suggested by members include dancing, Chinese films and English language support for visits to medical services. A partnership with Belle Isle Family Centre has enabled a matinee showing of a Chinese film and it is hoped that this might become a regular event. The lack of Chinese speaking staff at hospitals and emergencies generates considerable anxiety. Generic English sessions are not favoured but those directed to a specific purpose are.

The activity worker spoke of the time needed to identify further activities/opportunities and to seek additional funding requiring many volunteer hours outside her contracted time. On average, each quarter, two additional volunteers aged below 49 have been recruited whilst the number of 50 plus actively volunteering rose to six in the second quarter of 2016. Additional funding from 3rd sector sources had risen from £642 in 2015 to £992 in the first half of 2016.

When asked how involvement in Lychee Red makes them feel, participants said “happy”, “less lonely”, “it lifts my mood”. They like “sharing happiness” and “supporting each other”. They particularly like the fact that the sessions are exclusively for Chinese people as they feel “part of a big family”. Many are in favour of longer hours and indeed a second day, “I wish every day was Monday”. They feel they belong to the Beeston centre and would very much like their own “space” in the centre to which they could come to meet their friends whenever they wanted. The activity worker feels that the project’s biggest achievements have been “to reduce isolation”, “to make life more fun” and “to make members more confident and more valued”. “The Chinese culture is to live together…. Lychee Red is their family”. One early development about which the Healthy Communities Service Manager was proud , was the purchase of sets of chopsticks, bowls and Chinese tea. This has helped reinforce the Chinese Seniors’ sense of belonging. Additionally, a Chinese older volunteer is a member of the Health for All (Leeds) trustee board.

When asked how her involvement as a volunteer and then paid activity worker had made her feel, she said, “very passionate, proud…. Yes, that I have changed people’s lives. I feel valued. They treat me like a family member – like their daughter. My involvement has given value to my life.” She feels that she is a role model for her children as they visit the centre after school.

Whilst members enjoyed seeing the youngsters, interest in meeting younger people was mixed. Some felt it would bring more “energy”, others were concerned about communication difficulties. The local primary school was not entirely in favour of the centre in general and its plans for development, but the Healthy Communities Service Manager recognised that an invitation to teachers to share a meal with Chinese seniors could be a way to break down barriers and stimulate some intergenerational activity perhaps around food or singing.

When asked what barriers to participation exist, members identified distance as most significant. Currently Chinese seniors travel to Beeston from a considerable distance necessitating two or more bus journeys. Mobility difficulties would be an obvious deterrent for some so the provision of transport especially in winter could be helpful. The activity worker has supported by phone and at home any club members unable to attend through illness. The geographic spread also makes it difficult for the Activity worker to know about, and communicate opportunities for activity within members’ local communities. The activity worker makes the members aware of those that live in the same neighbourhood. About half of the focus group members were in touch with each other outside the weekly meeting. They also felt that prospective members might lack confidence and consequently felt ‘word of mouth’ to be the best means of attracting new members. This had been the most common way that current members had learnt about Lychee Red. They did not believe that advertising via medical services would be fruitful. This may be because of the communication difficulties they experience there.

The activity worker and an older volunteer from the group have visited Mary Sunley House in Roundhay where a number of Chinese seniors live in sheltered housing, to discuss how they might participate in the project. There is now a monthly lunch serving Chinese food and a singing activity at Mary Sunley House.

The majority of attendees at the Monday club are women partly because traditionally, Chinese men see groups as for women. Thought is being given to activities which might be more attractive to men eg. martial arts alongside the recruitment of more male volunteers. One male volunteer has taken the lead in developing an independent community group – Happy Panda specifically for Chinese older men.

**Afters**

When asked, “if the clocks were turned back would anything have been done differently”, the response was that they felt proud of what they had done. They had been surprised by the lack of trust shown by a sister organisation but feel that now they are established, more cooperation will be possible. The biggest challenge Lychee Red faces is sustaining the group “keeping the group stable and financially sustainable, and trying to bring more fun and different activities,” - activities which are culturally meaningful and meet their language abilities. The development of satellite centres in other areas of Leeds and West Yorkshire is an aspiration but this will need considerable additional funding.

A specific plan being considered is to cater for further Chinese cultures/languages, for example, by piloting a Mandarin speaking group on another day. Once established, there could be special celebrations or activities together to help break down barriers between the different Chinese cultures.

The possibility of offering a dedicated space for the Chinese community and a suitable space for counselling/advisory services may be possible with the proposed new build of the Beeston Centre. An area of concern for group members is preparing for dying, and information on sheltered housing and care homes is desired. In the focus group, members spoke of their wish for a care home catering specifically for the Chinese community. Meanwhile, efforts to involve isolated Chinese residents in sheltered housing and care homes with Lychee Red will be continued.

Now that the group is well established, confidence to disclose and share skills is developing and might enable an expansion of activities on offer at the same time as valuing individuals. Particular skill in art and poetry has been evidenced through the production of life stories/poems (see appendix 1). During the focus group, one participant voiced his feelings for Lychee Red with a drawing (see appendix 2). The accompanying words were:

“Lychee Red I love you. You make me happy and healthy.

Thank you

I hope you will support us and get rid of boring, lonely life.”

**Time to Share: ingredients of success and lessons to learn.**

1. Recruit a passionate, enthusiastic and caring leader who understands the nature and needs of the group.
2. Use a community development approach which listens to and nurtures your activity participants, workers and volunteers.
3. Ensure your premises offer access to all and encourage amongst members a sense of ownership, mutual support and belonging.
4. Don’t expect working with others to be easy. Recognise that other providers may feel threatened – trust takes time to develop.
5. Make contact with other Time to Shine projects to share activities especially those that do not create language difficulties such as singing, movement and craft.
6. Make links with Chinese communities, businesses and educational establishments teaching Chinese language, or delivering courses to Chinese students for financial support and volunteer recruitment.
7. Make links with providers for Chinese seniors in other cities.
8. Identify the problems faced by older non- English speaking people in everyday activities and seek to introduce wider social change eg. alert GP surgeries and hospitals to language barriers and encourage them to provide symptom guides in a range of languages.
9. Identify Chinese Seniors living with families and in care homes.
10. Market Lychee Red through ‘Connect Well’ Well-being Coordinators.
11. Alert home care services in appropriate areas about Lychee Red.
12. Identify the best geographic location for a second centre to expand provision and reduce travel barriers.

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Time to Shine Internal Evaluation Team 24.11.16