



 CARE CONNECT

LEEDS OLDER PEOPLE'S FORUM

Time to Shine



BIG LOTTERY FUND

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**Tackling the growing crisis of lonely men:
exploring what works through Time to Shine**

Introduction



Men are living longer; while this is good news, findings show an increase in loneliness among this group. The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness (2017) estimate that eight million men feel lonely at least once a week, while for nearly three million, it's a daily occurrence; one in ten men said they would not admit to feeling lonely. This document explores ways in which Time to Shine (TTS) has successfully

targeted and engaged older men. While social participation among this group will be influenced by a range of factors, such as employment history, health, culture and life changes (e.g. retirement or bereavement), older men have distinct needs that will impact on the success of interventions which aim to reduce loneliness.

The Time to Shine programme

Run by Leeds Older People's Forum TTS aims to tackle social isolation and loneliness amongst the older population in Leeds. Third sector organisations across Leeds are commissioned to deliver a range of projects, locally and citywide, to help people make social connections. TTS is part of the Ageing Better programme, a £82 million investment by the Big Lottery Fund, covering 14 areas of England.

How has Time to Shine Targeted men

A number of TTS projects have successfully engaged men. A few, although aimed at the general population, have successfully attracted a relatively large proportion of men due to what is on offer (such as volunteering for the ICT project, Digital Angels). Other projects have created activities with the needs of older men in mind (Cara and More than a Mealtime), and others have targeted men exclusively (Your Warehouse, That Friday Feeling goes Gardening, Men's breakfast Club, Happy Panda, see timetoshineleeds.org/about/our-delivery-partners for more information).

Main outcomes for older men

Though activities across TTS projects vary, men who were interviewed appreciated having the opportunity to interact with others. Being involved in something (be that volunteering, or attending a group activity) provided company, gave men confidence, and made them happier. Those involved in volunteering reported being more content, focused and active. One man involved in a practical activity (gardening) referred to feeling better in himself:

"I feel I have my self-worth back and equally important I have things to look forward to."

Activities that are of interest to older men

Practical activities

Projects which successfully engaged men offered a range of practical activities, such as gardening and DIY. A man involved in a community gardening project explained how reconnecting with his hobby (which had stopped due to the death of a friend and health problems) had made a difference:

“Suddenly I have new friends with common interests, have somewhere to go, and am doing things again. It's literally changed my life around.”
(That Friday feeling)

Having the opportunity to use skills to support others

Enabling men to share skills was viewed by some as key to building self-esteem; this could be through a group discussion, or being given the opportunity to use existing, and develop new practical skills:

“The funds have...enabled us to equip the men with further knowledge, especially around the growing of veg which some are keen to expand on ... in their own home environments.”

Volunteering

Offering an activity where men felt useful, such as teaching skills to others (ICT training), helping out in a charity shop (Your Warehouse), or being a befriender (Cara), proved to be effective. For example, men encouraged to volunteer in a local charity shop felt happier, as it kept them active and useful.



Group based activities

One project, The Breakfast Club, involves men meeting as a group to play games (such as dominos), read, or simply have a chat. The success of this project shows that despite research identifying that men are less likely to get involved in group activities, they may do so if the right environment is created. In this case, the project supported attendance by providing a free meal, and the coordinator texted men to remind them the activity was taking place (this worked particularly well for those living with dementia, or who struggled to plan due to ill health):

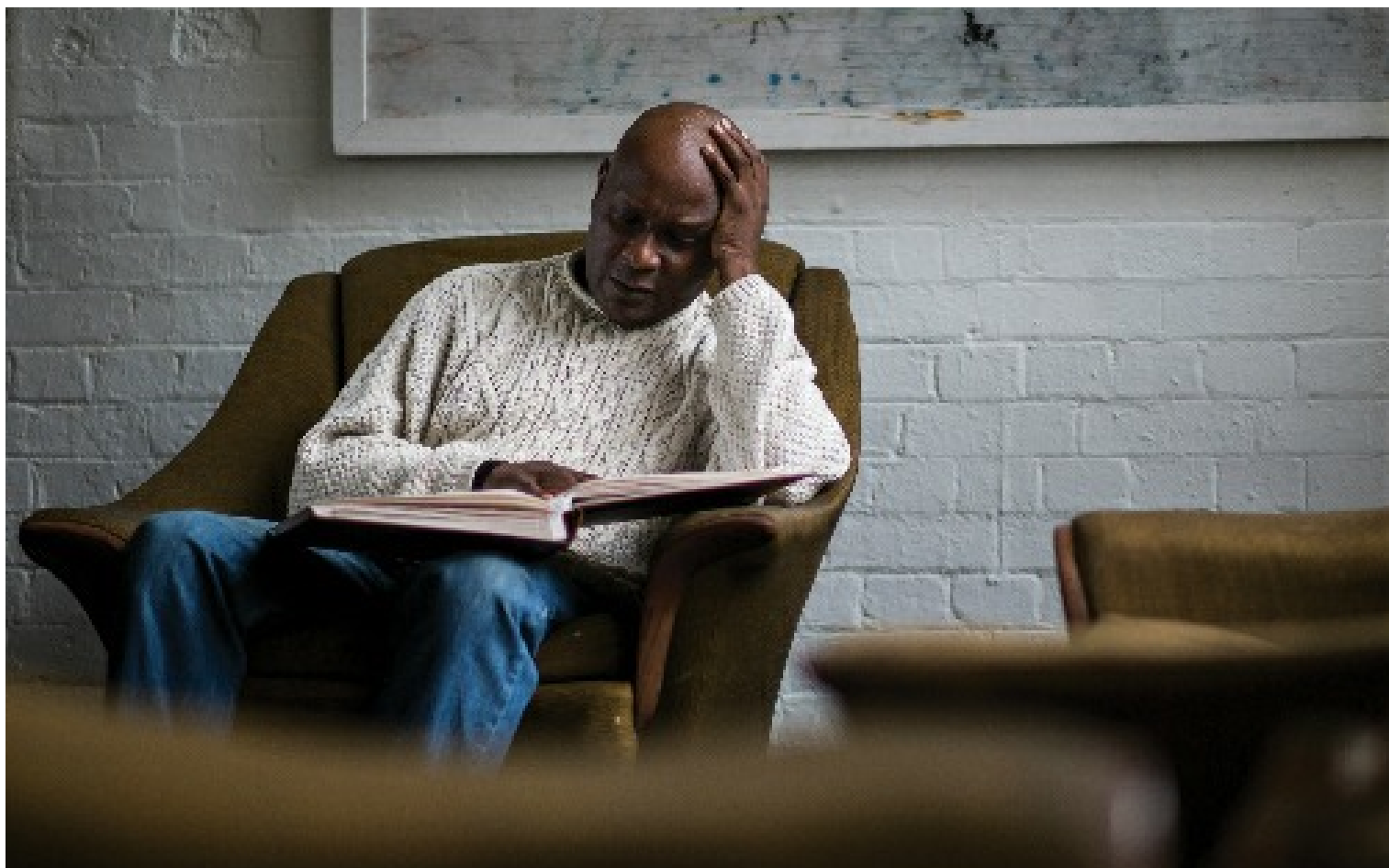
“I would not be able to attend an earlier event without food being provided, as due to health issues by the time [I’d] got out of bed, got ready, and had food, it would be too late.”

Activities that factor in cultural preferences

Participants involved with Cara, a project aimed at older Irish men, felt that feelings of loneliness were linked to cultural factors. For example, a male participant referred to the importance of hearing an Irish voice on the radio. The project therefore facilitates a range of activities designed to offer broad appeal to Irish men, focusing on both culture (i.e. Irish heritage) and gender, such as showing Irish films, or holding events in an Irish pub.



Engaging older men



Positive Promotion

We found that offering activities which appeal to men is not sufficient, with an interviewee saying that the hardest part was getting men to give something a go in the first place.

Good practice examples relate to going where men go, such as the pub, working men's club, or even places such as the local supermarket.

Both participants and staff felt it important to avoid using terms with negative connotations (when promoting an activity), particularly as some men were viewed as being too proud to ask for help:

“There is a stigma as loneliness is associated with failure, some do not ask for help due to pride.”

Provide a supportive environment

To ensure men continue to attend activities, participants and workers often referred to the importance of providing a supportive environment:

“[The men] live on their own and don't see family often so they value somewhere they feel comfortable.”

Another found engagement increased if extra encouragement was given at early stages:

“Men have needed support ... to attend, this might be a phone call through to support in getting to the group.”

Another discussed how little touches can increase ongoing engagement through ensuring men feel valued:

“The extra touches such as cards when individuals are unwell, or home visits has meant the over 50s men feel appreciated and valued for the help they are giving.”

Ensure men feel they have something to offer

Examples include presenting an activity as if the person is doing a favour for the organisation; this worked especially well for an intervention where men were encouraged to volunteer in a charity shop:

“One day the staff were struggling to get something down off a shelf and asked if I could help and it just took off from there ...now they can't get rid of me!”



Summary



While men may not all enjoy the same things, offering practical activities, volunteering opportunities, and ongoing support proved particularly

effective. It is also necessary to think about how to encourage men to get involved in the first place.

Links to other reports and further information:

Wigfield, A and Alden, S. 2017 Evaluation of Time to Shine: Year 2: Interim Findings
<https://timetoshineleeds.org/projects/local-evaluation>.

Also check out the Time to Shine programme website on:
<https://www.timetoshineleeds.org>