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LEEDS OLDER PEOPLE'S FORUM

Time to Shine

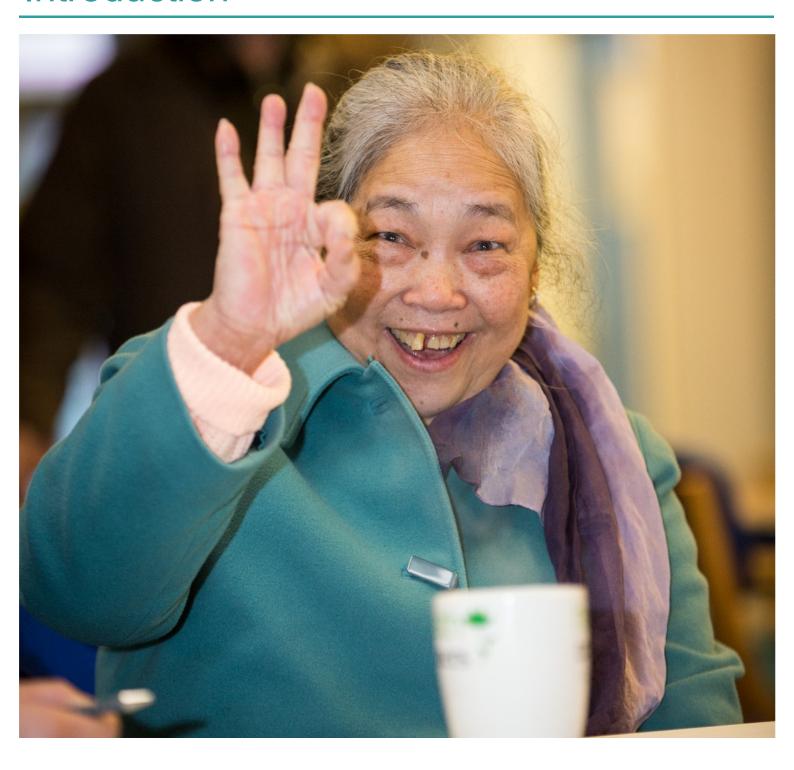BIG LOTTERY FUND

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Thinking of running an activity to reduce loneliness? Get Inspired by Time to Shine.

Introduction

The Time to Shine (TTS) programme works with a number of third sector organisations to help reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people across the city of Leeds. It is run by Leeds Older People's Forum and funded by the BIG Lottery as part of the Ageing Better programme, which has seen an investment of £82 million across 14 areas in England. This document provides a few suggestions, based on the TTS learning gathered to date, for those wishing to run similar initiatives.

Think about who you want to help

While the needs of the older population are diverse, TTS has found that particular subgroups, such as men, LGBT and BME groups respond well when interventions are tailored to their needs, both in terms of staff and volunteer support (LGBT, BME) and the types of activities run (men).

So if you intend to work with a particular group of older people, it is a good idea to think about how well placed your organisation is to meet any specific needs.

For example, beneficiaries of a project aimed at Punjabi speaking people said it was important that staff and/or volunteers could speak their language.

"They prefer local activities and in their own culture, we have organised focus group sessions, try to mix, but language is an issue… they prefer their own language."

Older LGBT participants said they felt they had experienced discrimination when using services aimed at the general older population, and that they valued a safe space set up specifically to cater for their needs.

Workers involved with projects aimed at older men found that a sense of pride meant this group were often reluctant to admit they needed help and tended to have a preference for more practical or useful activities.

Consider what you plan to offer

To help you decide what kinds of services to offer, you could ask different community organisations and individuals, in particular the people you are looking to work with, what they would like. A number of TTS projects asked their service users and older people in the local area what they wanted to do, and used these ideas to develop targeted activities.

However, it must be kept in mind, that ensuring the older person feels confident approaching an organisation in the first place can be just as important, if not more, than the kinds of activities offered.

And in terms of sustaining involvement once people have become engaged, supporting friendships between like-minded people, or those with similar issues/interests, can help in the longer term:

"I feel hopeful that there is something there I can be part of. It's about building a social network."

"I knew people by name or in passing, but now I feel I have much deeper connections as a result of spending time with small groups."

Though more resource intensive, projects that involve the wider community are proving a particularly useful way of building deeper connections:

"I have lived in the same village for 40 years, I knew nobody, everything I did was outside of my village, but now I am a complete part of the community…[The project] opened the door and let me into the village, it makes me feel welcome."

It's also worth thinking about the times that the activities are offered, as many older TTS participants stated that they appreciate activities that are offered when they feel most lonely, at evenings and weekends.

One way of achieving this can be through training volunteers, such as one TTS project which has volunteers who host tables in a local pub or restaurant, so people who live alone can go out and share a meal with others.

Use appropriate marketing and language

TTS projects have identified the importance of effective marketing, so that sufficient numbers of the target group attend early on. Some avoid using terms such as loneliness, and instead focus on the social interaction element and opportunity to get involved in something new.

Projects targeted at men found that marketing which used positive language, and initiatives which offered volunteering opportunities, or suggested that the participants were doing the organisation a favour worked particularly well.

Time to Shine

Making Leeds less isolated, one older person at a time

June 2016

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Capture learning

Ensuring that learning is captured at the start, particularly feedback on what is being offered, and how the project is run, will provide valuable insights that can be used to improve existing, and inform new, projects.

The TTS programme follows a test and learn approach, which has helped inform ongoing projects about the most effective ways of engaging particular groups.

Perhaps more importantly it encourages organisations to discuss what has not worked so well, to ensure this is taken on board on an ongoing basis, rather than waiting until the end of a project.

"I feel it is a great way to work, it stops you worrying about it failing, it gives you scope to say if it doesn't work, you can learn from it and move forward."

You also need to think about how you will monitor your project, and factor in time to collect any information that you will need for this, particularly if staff or volunteers will be required to gather data, such as through surveys.

Factor in sufficient lead in time

TTS projects which have involved community development, provided more intensive support to the most isolated, trained up volunteers, or consulted with the wider community generally took longer than expected to get off the ground, with one taking over a year to get fully established. So make sure you allow sufficient lead in time for the type of project you are developing.

Links to other reports and further information:

Alden, S and Wigfield, A. 2016, Time to Shine Evaluation Interim Report: The Beneficiary Experience, Available online at https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.667374!/file/TtoS.full.report.pdf [Accessed 10 June 2017).

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