



ambition
for
ageing

Developing social contact models in a time of social distancing

A response to COVID-19 – Full Report

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Ambition for Ageing is a Greater Manchester wide cross-sector partnership, led by GMCVO and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, aimed at creating more age-friendly places by connecting communities and people through the creation of relationships, development of existing assets and putting people aged over 50 at the heart of designing the places they live.

Ambition for Ageing is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

About this report

This report is designed to help people build more effective social connection projects in a changed operating environment. It contains:

- An overview of policy and some useful concepts
- A checklist of likely challenges
- A set of design principles that can help shape project development
- A series of case studies that can help outline practical approaches

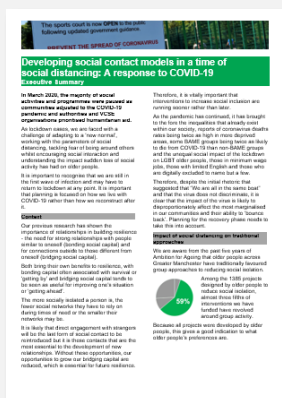
It should be recognised that in order to reduce exposure to the COVID-19 virus some social activities are going to be limited and can't proceed as they once could. There's no one simple trick to addressing these limitations and sometimes it won't be possible to solve new problems we find, although we might be able to reduce the impact of problems that emerge.

It's also important to note that no one guide can contain all possible solutions. Social connection is best developed by taking a person centred approach and there are as many solutions as there are people.

We hope this document will provide a starting point, outline some of the challenges we're likely to face and give new projects the best possible chance of success.

John Hannen
Programme Manager
Ambition for Ageing
July 2020

This document is the full, complete report created by Ambition for Ageing in response to the challenges caused by COVID-19. Due to the size of this document, we have also pulled out sections of this report that can be used independently. The following sections are available separately:



Executive Summary



Design Principles and Challenges Checklist



Projects compatible with social distancing (Case Studies)

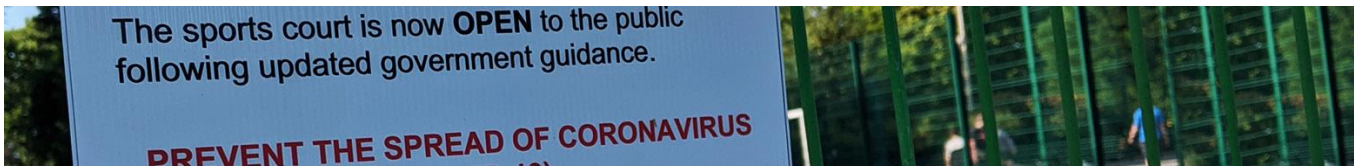
This report and the above separate sections can be downloaded from our website at www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/socialcontact

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The information within this report was gathered, studied and published within a short timeframe, during a time where policy and guidance change on a weekly basis. As a result, our understanding of the current context will evolve and change over time. We share this report based on currently available information.



Executive Summary

In March 2020, the majority of social activities and programmes were paused as communities adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic and authorities and VCSE organisations prioritised humanitarian aid.

As lockdown eases, we are faced with a challenge of adapting to a 'new normal', working with the parameters of social distancing, tackling fear of being around others whilst encouraging social interaction and understanding the impact sudden loss of social activity has had on older people.

It is important to recognise that we are still in the first wave of infection and may have to return to lockdown at any point. It is important that planning is focused on how we live with COVID-19 rather than how we reconstruct after it.

Context

Our previous research has shown the importance of relationships in building resilience - the need for strong relationships with people similar to oneself (bonding social capital) and for connections outside to those different from oneself (bridging social capital).

Both bring their own benefits to resilience, with bonding capital often associated with survival or 'getting by' and bridging social capital tends to be seen as useful for improving one's situation or 'getting ahead'.

The more socially isolated a person is, the fewer social networks they have to rely on during times of need or the smaller their networks may be.

It is likely that direct engagement with strangers will be the last form of social contact to be reintroduced but it is these contacts that are the most essential to the development of new relationships. Without these opportunities, our opportunities to grow our bridging capital are reduced, which is essential for future resilience.

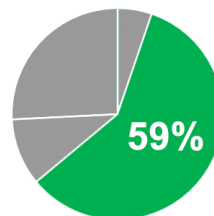
Therefore, it is vitally important that interventions to increase social inclusion are running sooner rather than later.

As the pandemic has continued, it has brought to the fore the inequalities that already exist within our society, reports of coronavirus deaths rates being twice as high in more deprived areas, some BAME groups being twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than non-BAME groups and the unequal social impact of the lockdown on LGBT older people, those in minimum wage jobs, those with limited English and those who are digitally excluded to name but a few.

Therefore, despite the initial rhetoric that suggested that "We are all in the same boat" and that the virus does not discriminate, it is clear that the impact of the virus is likely to disproportionately affect the most marginalised in our communities and their ability to 'bounce back'. Planning for the recovery phase needs to take this into account.

Impact of social distancing on traditional approaches

We are aware from the past five years of Ambition for Ageing that older people across Greater Manchester have traditionally favoured group approaches to reducing social isolation.



Among the 1385 projects designed by older people to reduce social isolation, almost three fifths of interventions we have funded have revolved around group activity.

Because all projects were developed by older people, this gives a good indication to what older people's preferences are.

Specific challenges

Whilst reviewing the projects developed by Ambition for Ageing in the past we identified the following specific challenges. These can help for a checklist of the key issues that will need to be addressed for future projects.

- ☑ **Social Distancing:** How can individuals taking part in activities and maintain a distance of two metres.
- ☑ **Leadership:** Are projects reliant on a small number of key leaders/volunteers who may be at risk of burnout?
- ☑ **IT:** Does the project recognise digital exclusion, cost of getting online, ability to troubleshoot and 'zoom fatigue'?
- ☑ **Shielding:** Does the project balance messaging between reassuring the concerned whilst encouraging positive social contact?
- ☑ **Enclosed spaces:** How will a project manage distancing and wider safety issues inside an enclosed space?
- ☑ **PPE & Hygiene:** Has the project or funder acknowledged the cost of PPE and factored regular cleaning into all activities?
- ☑ **Test & Trace:** Is there a plan to deal with temporary closure? Can the project support people and maintain confidence if participants have been asked to self-isolate?
- ☑ **Formality:** Informal activities will take on an air of formality given the circumstances so what steps have been made to help make people feel comfortable?
- ☑ **Travel:** With many uncomfortable with public transport how will the project reduce the need to travel?
- ☑ **Volunteering:** Many new volunteers and members of mutual aid groups are already returning to work – is the project sustainable if this trend develops further?
- ☑ **Engaging those outside of current social circles:** With social contact within households encouraged and connection between households severely limited how can the project build connections between strangers?

Projects compatible with social distancing

We reviewed a range of projects across Ambition for Ageing areas and found that most of these fall into the following:



Outdoor activities

Outdoor activities may not face as much disruption as others in the 'new normal', given that outdoor spaces are less prone to promote infection provided social distancing rules can be observed.

Indoor projects

We should view our current situation as a transitional phase, with more activities becoming available over time which opens up the potential of projects in enclosed spaces. Whilst not likely in the immediate future, we can start to develop plans and identify the resources needed ahead of implementation.

Projects based in indoor spaces, which are often about eating and socialising, may prove the most challenging to adapt to the 'new normal' as they rely on physical proximity and on groups gathering. These projects will have to rethink their requirements in light of the nature of the space and its particular layout.

Service delivery

Although less empowering than other interventions, service delivery, where an organisation directly provides a service to an individual or a group of individuals will still be relevant in the 'new normal'. It is important in this type of activity that these ideas are implemented alongside older people, rather than seeing them as passive recipients of a service.

Case Studies

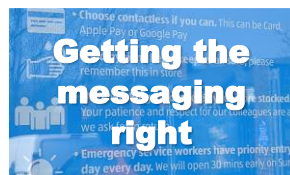
The full report provides a number of case studies to demonstrate the types of activities that fall under each of these categories and to suggest potential for similar projects.

These case studies include examples from within the Ambition for Ageing programme, outside the programme and national examples.

Design principles for social distancing community connection

As we are still in the midst of the pandemic, policy and guidance is constantly changing and evolving, making decision-making at a neighbourhood level difficult.

In response to this, we have taken the approach of identifying four overarching key design principles to support the development and sustainment of social inclusion activities in the context of whatever comes next. These are:



Based on hobbies or shared interest

Developing projects based around hobbies or shared interests can provide a familiar and safe space through which to re-enter society. The activity can be less important than the shared interest – for example people who like gardening may also like to talk about or read about gardening if the ability to garden with each other is limited.

Builds community connection

Being part of community life in the widest sense can be a great help. For those able to, just the ability to be out and about in the neighbourhood can reduce isolation but for those who can't even just knowing what's happening can make a difference. The key is to help people understand what's going on locally so that they feel part of a community, even if they are at the edge of it

Realistic goal setting

Do recognise that we may not be able to address all needs at this time, but that we can ease the situation people are in. Be honest with people about what can or cannot be achieved and look for solutions that at least make visible improvements, even if problems cannot be solved entirely.

Getting the messaging right:

The messaging we use should also be influenced by understanding how people perceive risk. There is a trade-off between providing information for people to be able to prepare and not scaring them to the point at which they feel unable to do anything and therefore do not follow the guidance.



Introduction

In March 2020, the UK went into a state of lockdown in order to reduce transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

At that point most social activities and programmes were paused as communities adjusted to a new situation and authorities and VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) organisations prioritised humanitarian aid. This lockdown has had widespread support among the public which has created a changed approach to social interaction.

Many people in our communities still have a fear of contact with others whilst some are increasingly fatigued by isolation and have a desire to reconnect. Online approaches to connection have helped maintain links but there is a limit in how much this can replace face to face interaction compounded with the issue that older people are among the least likely to use digital communication. Many support providers have noted that whilst online connection helped at the start of the crisis the people they work with are starting to lose motivation as boredom sets in.

Even with a maintenance of contact there is a growing concern for the physical and mental health of those who have significantly reduced their levels of activity, particularly among the shielded group. Carers have seen their responsibilities grow and desperately need respite and care settings themselves have borne the most significant impact of the virus with a tragic number of deaths among the most vulnerable of our population. This sits alongside the high death rates experienced by people in BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity) communities, as the effect of the virus is to amplify existing health inequalities.

We face an unenviable situation where there is a great need for people to leave their homes but where considerable risks remain in social interaction. As the government lifts formal restrictions there will increasingly be a need for individuals and organisations to make their own judgements on risk. However, it is important to recognise that there are no "no risk" options and few where risk is low. This immediately causes issues for the provision of services due to different attitudes to risk among the public. Those comfortable with some level of risk may impatiently rush to connect whilst other community members will require a level of certainty before feeling safe and see this behaviour as dangerous. This can create tensions within groups and communities.

With the potential of a second wave, it is important for us to take the risk of the virus seriously, however, risk is a spectrum rather than a clear binary divide between safe/dangerous and many decisions on risk will need to be person centred, understanding the individual and how they might be affected by isolation. It is important therefore that projects are co-produced alongside participants and that people have choices on how they live and connect with others. A universal approach will not create wide engagement.

This report seeks to give examples of how projects might be developed or adapted to enable a rebuilding of social contact. Ambition for Ageing has been built on the understanding of how isolation causes harm and has a strong base of evidence upon which activities have been built. There are uncertainties with this new virus but we do believe that an understanding of established principles in building resilience, along with a commitment to informed co-production with communities will help us slowly but surely establish new forms of connection which help people thrive.

The importance of social connections during crises

In 2018, we published the report *Resilience in An Ageing Greater Manchester*ⁱ which found that experiences of marginalisation caused by inequality can impact individuals' resilience during times of shock. The report found that social inclusion plays a key part in keeping people resilient; those who are more likely to be socially isolated may also be less resilient during times of shock.

The more socially isolated a person is, the fewer social networks they have to rely on during times of need or the smaller their networks may be. Our report backs up the suggestions from external research that strong social networks may promote resilience. For example, the academic paper, *Mental health and resilience at older ages: bouncing back after adversity in the British Household Panel Survey*ⁱⁱ, suggests that high social support pre-adversity and during adversity increased the likelihood of resilience by 40–60% compared with those with low social support.

How well older people have coped during the COVID-19 pandemic may be closely related to their level of social isolation, with implications for individuals' responses to and ability to engage with the 'new normal'.

Building and maintaining social connections is hence a crucial part of ensuring that older people are as resilient as possible during crises such as the current one. Because VCSE provision provides such connections every effort should be made to maintain and adapt it to the 'new normal'.

Physical distancing, not social distancing: Social Capital

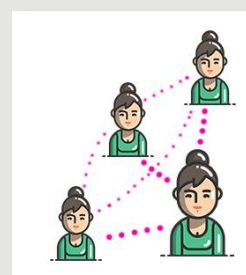
Whilst government guidance covers the need to remain physically apart from others, the need for social connection within our society is likely to grow during times of crisis. Social capital, the relationships between individuals and the benefits these relationships bring, is a key concept to consider when developing plans to increase community cohesion and increase social inclusion.

Often described as two forms, bonding and bridgingⁱⁱⁱ, social capital represents social connections and networks, including social norms, relationships and trust^{iv}

The following diagrams explain the concept, show the positives and negatives of each type of social capital and give some examples of where each type of relationship is beneficial.

Bonding Social Capital

Bonding social capital are the social networks that are built around similarities and reciprocity, typical of familial or close-knit community relationships. Bonding social capital is good for providing access to social support, as well as inspiring a sense of solidarity and belonging, but has the disadvantage that it can be somewhat claustrophobic and stagnant, as well as inadvertently excluding others based on perceived dissimilarity.



For example:

- Belonging to a church group provides the opportunity to spend time with people who share the same beliefs as yourself.
- After a personal disaster, such as a flood or fire, being able to rely on family or friends for both emotional and financial support is beneficial for individuals.

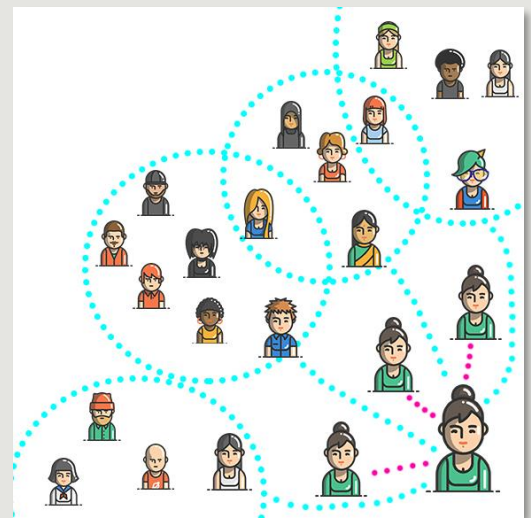
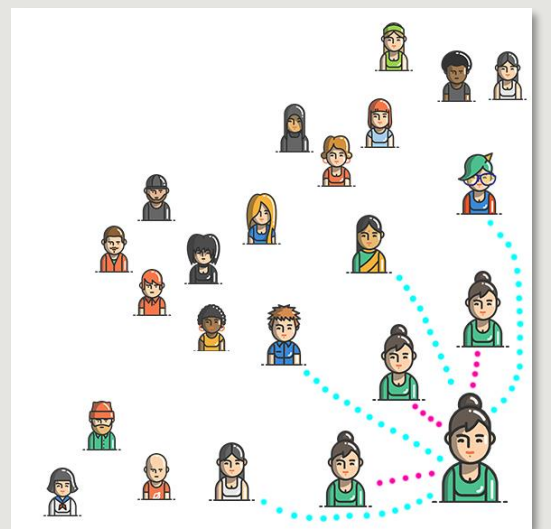
Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital refers to the social networks outside of those built on similarities and reciprocity. Often referred to as weak ties, these are the networks that make it easier to access information, resources and support outside of a person's own group. Bridging social capital is also credited with enhancing community cohesion, because people who form bridges between otherwise unrelated groups can mediate between these groups and mobilise the individuals within them for common causes. These relationships can also be beneficial during times of shock.

Whereas bonding social capital is often associated with survival or 'getting by' bridging social capital tends to be seen as useful for improving one's situation or 'getting ahead'.^v As such, bridging social capital may be the type of social capital that makes it easier to bounce back after shock, because it allows access to information, resources and support from a wider range of places. Bridging social capital allows individuals to reach beyond their own traditional relationships and gain access to resources and information that do not exist so readily in one's own circle.

For example:

- A person looking for a job will benefit from having connections within the field they're looking for work in. If people in their family or in their community mainly work in one particular industry they will need to develop bridging social capital in order to find a job in a different industry.
- During the COVID-19 crisis, those with connections in their wider local community would be more likely to receive information about any support offers that were being organised by community groups compared to those whose connections are limited to family and close friends.



Crises such as the current pandemic pose a particular challenge for social relations. Because physical proximity is seen as a risk it has become virtually impossible for social groups outside of the immediate household to meet.

Although both bonding and bridging social capital are affected by this imposition of social distancing rules, it has become arguably more difficult to maintain contact to people whom one knows casually. For example, older people who attended social groups before the pandemic could rely on meeting people there, without necessarily having names or contact details. It is difficult to maintain such weak ties under conditions of social distancing and even more difficult to forge new ties. Particularly older people for whom neighbourhood-based casual contacts are often very important may now be more confined than before to socialising with people who they know well and who are close to them. This has implications for their likelihood to be exposed to new information and new people, including those who are different.

Current policy implications

Policy and guidance on social distancing, both national and local, is constantly changing and evolving, making decision-making at a neighbourhood level difficult.

However, looking to forecasts for change can help us to develop overarching design principles for the development and sustainment of social inclusion activities that can be considered in the context of whatever comes next.

The major concern moving into the 'new normal' is the impact social distancing will have on both the ability to use physical spaces, and the feelings of safety for those using shared spaces with others. For example, pubs, restaurants and cafes have been allowed to re-open from early July but with a maximum cap of 30 customers inside a venue. Cleaning will have to be more frequent and may be more intrusive on social activity. Spaces will need to become more formal and actively managed, for example in the way toilets are accessed. There is also advice to avoid playing music at a volume that can require people to raise voices and potentially create greater infection risk. This can have significant impacts on the economic viability of shared spaces. In addition, many customers may need time to adjust to the changed environment in order to feel comfortable.

Venues have also been asked to collect personal details of people using venues, in case the NHS Test & Trace process is required to find individuals who may have been in contact with a person who has since tested positive for COVID. This will need to be collected in a manner compliant with GDPR (data protection) regulations. However, many traditional community venues may not have the capability to implement this without support and advice. Many commercial establishments are requiring people to book a table and order food/drinks via an app, which has implications for people without smartphones and who primarily use cash.

The Test & Trace process creates other challenges for venues and organisations. At short notice staff may need to self-isolate if they have been in contact with people who have tested positive. Distancing guidelines and appropriate PPE can minimise this, but small slips, for example a short team meeting in a tight space, can result in an entire team having to self-isolate for 14 days, causing a significant disruption to activity. Whilst there is a growing desire to open up more activity it's still really important to keep a 2m distance between people where possible and to have a plan in place for how to support people who may have to self-isolate where this can't be maintained.

Because public transport will likely be reduced to 20% capacity and people will be discouraged from using it there will likely be higher levels of traffic and congestion. In addition, there will be substantial changes to where activity takes place and the ability of people to access cultural venues. Many organisations will react by continuing to have staff work from home and may look to dispose of central office buildings. This may lead to a decline in activity in town centres, city centres and shopping malls, but may cause a growth in activity in more suburban centres and local high streets. New spaces may open and places that could previously be guaranteed to be quiet may become busier.

There will be a number of challenges for relaunching existing, and developing new activities as a result of these (and potential future) policies. We go into further detail on these challenges in the Specific Challenges section of this report (page 8).

Both limits on the use of space and the need to comply with Test & Trace are likely to remain in place for a substantial time even if lockdown measures are further eased. It is important to recognise that, despite current narrative of a future second wave, we are still in the first wave of infection and local lockdowns can happen at any point. It is important that planning is focused on how we live with COVID-19 rather than how we reconstruct after it.

How inequality impacts on resilience

Inequalities directly influence our experience of crisis, the nature of social networks and the ability to adapt to the 'new normal' the crisis is leaving in its wake.

- Data from the ONS is already showing that coronavirus deaths rates are twice as high in more deprived areas^{vi}.
- After accounting for the effect of sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity have around twice the risk of death from COVID-19 when compared to people of White British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity have between 10 and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British^{vii}.
- Those in poverty without access to outside spaces^{viii} will struggle more with social distancing than those with higher incomes with gardens and living in leafier areas^{ix}.
- LGBT older people may not feel safe being 'out' in their immediate area and the impact of self-isolation may be felt more strongly^x.
- Those who work in minimum-wage jobs, such as shop workers, factory workers, cleaners and care assistants are continuing to work during the pandemic whilst many of those in higher income wage brackets are able to work from home.
- Women and BAME people are more likely to be key workers, in caring, cleaning and shop worker roles, and therefore at higher risk of infection.^{xi}

Therefore, despite the initial rhetoric that suggested that "We are all in the same boat" and that the virus does not discriminate, it is clear that the impact of the virus is likely to disproportionately affect the most marginalised in our communities and their ability to 'bounce back'. Planning for the recovery phase needs to take this into account.

In its recent report^{xii}, *Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Communities*, Public Health England made a number of recommendations for addressing inequalities faced by minority ethnic communities, but which can make a difference to wider inequalities as well once implemented. These are summarised as follows:

1. Improve ethnicity data collection and recording. Sharing data with key partners to help inform their actions.
2. Support community participatory research, in which researchers and community stakeholders engage as equal partners in all steps of the research process
3. Improve access, experiences and outcomes of NHS, local government and integrated care systems commissioned services by BAME communities
4. Develop culturally competent occupational risk assessment tools that can be employed in a variety of occupational settings and used to reduce the risk of employee's exposure to and acquisition of COVID-19,
5. Fund, develop and implement culturally competent COVID-19 education and prevention campaigns, working in partnership with communities
6. Accelerate efforts to target culturally competent health promotion and disease prevention programmes for non-communicable diseases
7. Ensure that COVID-19 recovery strategies actively reduce inequalities caused by the wider determinants of health to create long term sustainable change.

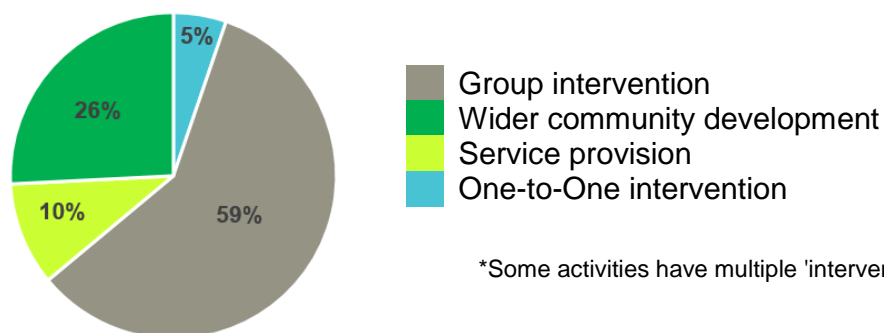
Not all of these will be relevant to local projects that enable increased social contact but it is important to understand where a community project can play its part and feed into wider approaches to reduce inequality.



Impact of social distancing on traditional approaches

Because social capital in all its forms is linked to various types of resilience, from individual mental wellbeing to a community's response to shocks and stresses^{xiii} ^{xiv} it is imperative to continue these relationships during times where individuals are not able to physically interact. VCSE provision such as Ambition for Ageing remains crucial in this, but has been impacted by the incredible speed at which the COVID-19 pandemic and the policy shift towards social distancing, self-isolation and shielding occurred. As a result, services and individuals were unlikely to be able to fully prepare for the huge repercussions this would have on older people in our communities. The overnight change in political and societal messaging to staying inside and self-isolation hence risks turning back the clock on the great work done by local authorities, charities and communities on supporting the most isolated within their communities.

We are aware from the past five years of Ambition for Ageing that older people across Greater Manchester have traditionally favoured group approaches to reducing social isolation. Among the 1385 projects designed by older people to reduce social isolation, almost three fifths of interventions we have funded have revolved around group activity. Because all projects were developed by older people, this gives a good indication to what older people's preferences are.



*Some activities have multiple 'intervention types' allocated to them, and both are included within the figures

The guidance on distancing creates significant barriers for the development and maintenance of relationships. From the start of the crisis we've been asked to stay within our homes and to avoid engagement with those outside our households. We are asked to keep two metres apart from each other when possible (and one metre when not) and shops seek to limit the number of customers at any point in time - commercial spaces are critical to developing a sense of familiarity within a community and this is significantly reduced at present.

The result of this is that unfamiliar people are being presented as a threat to health. Beyond the guidelines and legal requirements this creates a set of social norms that focus on bonds before bridges. It may not be enough to create activities directly aimed at bringing people together, but may be necessary to create foundational projects (those that aim to make long-term change, compared to discrete short-term projects), which help foster a sense of broader connection within a place before attempts to build individual relationships take place.

It is therefore important to not just think of the situation we face now but how we transition to future work. We do face significant restrictions but these will change. We can start planning for the future, and the activity of planning itself can help build and maintain connection. It is important when doing this to understand the types of activity where we may start to see change.

As we are already seeing with the current easing of restrictions, the activities now seen as appropriate focus on engagement with existing family and friends and in economic activity. Initial easing of restrictions focused on the development of "bubbles" where people who know each other socialise only with each other – and in the limited reopening of hospitality venues. Direct engagement with strangers will likely be the last form of social contact to be legitimised but it is the most essential to the development of new relationships. In particular, this reduces the opportunity to grow our bridging capital, essential for future resilience.

It is also important to recognise that following distancing guidance requires a level of formality. Our most successful projects have been more informal and ultimately they are successful because they are fun. In the development of any project it is important to recognise whether, once guidance has been taken into account, the activity is fun to do.

This does highlight that we are in a situation where we are limited in our ability to engage fully within our local communities. We cannot have as much fun and cannot easily develop relationships in a way that we may want. It may not even be possible to start new provision or, for some, to create new relationships at all if they face significant inequalities. It is therefore important to manage expectations and be clear that we can make the best of a bad situation and perhaps at best lay some of the foundations of improvement to come once the crisis truly ends.

Checklist of specific challenges

Whilst reviewing the projects developed by Ambition for Ageing in the past we identified the following specific challenges. These can help for a checklist of the key issues that will need to be addressed for future projects.

- Social Distancing:** How can individuals taking part in activities and maintain a distance of two metres.
- Leadership:** Are projects reliant on a small number of key leaders/volunteers who may be at risk of burnout?
- IT:** Does the project recognise digital exclusion, cost of getting online, ability to troubleshoot and 'zoom fatigue'?
- Shielding:** Does the project balance messaging between reassuring the concerned whilst encouraging positive social contact?
- Enclosed spaces:** How will a project manage distancing and wider safety issues inside an enclosed space?
- PPE & Hygiene:** Has the project or funder acknowledged the cost of PPE and factored regular cleaning into all activities?
- Test & Trace:** Is there a plan to deal with temporary closure? Can the project support people and maintain confidence if participants have been asked to self-isolate?
- Formality:** Informal activities will take on an air of formality given the circumstances so what steps have been made to help make people feel comfortable?
- Travel:** With many uncomfortable with public transport how will the project reduce the need to travel?
- Volunteering:** Many new volunteers and members of mutual aid groups are already returning to work – is the project sustainable if this trend develops further?
- Engaging those outside of current social circles:** With social contact within households encouraged and connection between households severely limited how can the project build connections between strangers?

Design principles for social distancing community connection

As we are reminded constantly, we are living in unprecedented times, and as a result, it is particularly difficult to carry out future planning. As noted in the introduction to this report, policy and guidance is constantly changing and evolving, making decision-making at a neighbourhood level difficult.

In response to this, we have taken the approach of identifying four overarching key design principles to support the development and sustainment of social inclusion activities in the context of whatever comes next. These are:



Based on hobbies or shared interest

Many who are isolated will lack the confidence to engage in unfamiliar activities with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places. Developing projects based around hobbies or shared interests, from crafting, gardening, reading or cooking to heritage, production of community media, quizzes or music, is important to provide a familiar and safe space through which to re-enter society. To develop projects people will engage with, it is important to:

- **Take a person-centred approach and understand what it is individuals like to do.** The more specific the better – many may like the idea of joining a book group but might have very different views of what sort of book they are willing to read. It is better to start with an understanding of what people want and then finding a way to meet it, rather than starting with an idea of what you want to deliver and finding an audience for it. This is the case even for ideas that have worked in other areas.
- **Help people find the familiar in each other.** People may view themselves as very different but have something in common that helps them find a connection. Understanding someone's individual history might help identify a point of connection. For example, people from very different backgrounds may have a memory of a local place that can be shared with others.
- **Link activities to places people know.** A place people feel comfortable in can reduce anxiety and concern that may occur when meeting new people or trying a new activity. If the location of the activity is going to be new to people, explore whether the activity can be promoted in a more familiar place. For example, local shopkeepers may be able to play a role in getting the message out to people in the community.



Builds community connection

Being part of community life in the widest sense can be a great help. The need to feel connected to one's own community ranks highest in our findings on what older people feel makes their area age-friendly^{xv} and appears as one of the eight domains from the World Health Organisation on age-friendly communities. For those able to, just the ability to be out and about in the neighbourhood can reduce isolation. Previous Ambition for Ageing research showed the importance of shared spaces (social infrastructure) on the development and maintenance of social connections, and in particular on bridging social capital^{xvi}.

- **Removing the barriers to accessing parks, shops or other shared spaces can help even if there is no direct connection with people made.** Projects which can add even a small social transaction to being out and about will have a greater impact.
- **Allow opportunities to be involved for those who cannot leave the house.** For those self-isolating it is important to help people feel that they are not invisible and that they are part of a greater whole. Help people submit ideas and make contributions – even if that is just by publishing a poem or picture on a noticeboard or website.
- **Keep people informed.** Providing people with information about their neighbourhood can help people feel connected to a place, even if they need to stay home most of the time. At the very least think about what can be done to help people feel someone is looking out for them and they are not invisible. This will help prepare the ground for a time when restrictions are eased. This can be through online information, phone calls and even traditional newsletters. The key is to help people understand what's going on locally so that they feel part of a community, even if they are at the edge of it.



Realistic goal setting

Do recognise that we may not be able to address all needs at this time, but that we can ease the situation people are in. Be honest with people about what can or cannot be achieved and look for solutions that at least make visible improvements, even if problems cannot be solved entirely.

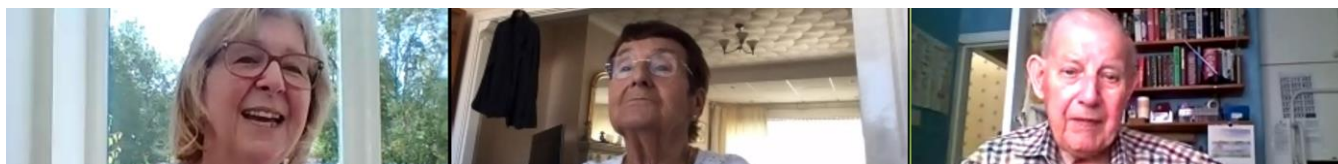
- **The importance of a mixed package of delivery is key within setting realistic goals.** There will be many people who will continue to shield, even after government restrictions have lifted, many whom the trauma of the crisis will have pushed further into physical and social isolation, and others who are having to self-isolate due to having symptoms.
It will be important moving forward, to provide a number of different ways for people to get involved. Even if we cannot include everyone in a group activity, there may be ways in which people can be involved separately while still feeling part of something.
- **This may involve the creation of hybrid-style events,** to include both those who are happy to attend in person and those who are unable to attend, but who may be able to be involved in alternative ways, such as digitally or after the fact. Changes such as these, brought on by the COVID-19 crisis, will also increase accessibility more generally, enabling access to activities that may have previously been inaccessible to more marginalised groups, such as those who struggle to leave the house, or are uncomfortable in large groups of people but more comfortable in online spaces.
- **Keep in mind the impact of restrictions on the nature of activities.** For any social activity to be successful it needs to be fun, and if a more formal approach needs to be taken along with the use of PPE and regular cleaning this will make some activities too unattractive to succeed.
- **Be honest about what can be achieved.** It is important to ensure realistic goals for workers, volunteers and activists as well as participants in projects. Motivation will be lost if unachievable goals are set.

Getting the messaging right:

Communication and messaging lie at the heart of supporting people to get through this period with resilience and bounce back during the times ahead.

Communications must be clear, timely and relevant to be useful. However, we also have to recognise that Government messaging and guidance will always cut through loudest to the majority of people, and especially to those disconnected from their local communities (less bridging capital), as they are less likely to receive local messaging via local networks. There is a challenge to ensure that local messaging matches national messaging, whilst at the same time responding to local concerns and climate.

- **Language matters.** As noted earlier in this report, there is growing concern^{xvii} that the term 'social distancing' is detrimental. Recommendations from the World Health Organization^{xviii} and others are to use the more accurate term 'physical distancing'. Although discussing such semantics appears trivial, the messaging we use is important in ensuring social connection. Even simple messaging can have an impact on individuals' decisions. For example, individuals who require carers told us that they are choosing not to visit shops because they have read statements from supermarkets that only one person per household can visit. The lack of additional information provided with these messages, has created fear, when in reality, supermarket policies made exceptions for those with no other choice, such as people with carers and single parents.
- **The messaging we use should also be influenced by understanding how people perceive risk.** At its core, perceptions of risk are what is driving individuals' decisions during the pandemic and it is the messaging that shapes their view of risk. In a blog from the Behavioural Insights Team^{xix} in February, the author went into detail around how to encourage the right behaviours around pandemics. They pointed out that when people are concerned about a perceived threat, their ability to process information effectively can become severely impaired^{xx} and that in some cases, less rather than more information leads to more accurate judgements^{xxi}. They recommended that communicating simple instructions that are easy to remember makes it more likely that people will follow them.
- **Messaging should be truthful but measured.** There is a trade-off between providing information for people to be able to prepare and not scaring them to the point at which they feel unable to do anything and therefore do not follow the guidance. A study carried out during the outbreak of COVID-19 in the USA^{xxii} showed that two factors had the most robust relationships with people's willingness to take steps to prepare: fear and hope. People who rated themselves as more prepared tended to be those who were more worried about the coronavirus as well as those who said they felt more hopeful. The study concluded that there is a need for an adequate level of fear as a motivator for the concern to be taken seriously, combined with enough hope to believe that reacting will make a difference.
- **Information provided needs to be specific about what actions need to be carried out, using clear and concise instructions in plain language describing what to do and why.** This needs to be embedded in a supporting narrative with honest descriptions of why it is important for guidance to be followed, alongside more hopeful messaging for the future.



Projects compatible with social distancing

Ambition for Ageing has funded many different projects, whose main aim was to reduce social isolation – predominantly by bringing people together in a physical location. By definition many of these are hence about physical proximity. In a crisis that necessitates social distance, we asked ourselves the question of how these projects may be adapted to the ‘new normal’. We reviewed a range of projects across Ambition for Ageing areas and found that most of these fall into the following categories:



Although all Ambition for Ageing projects aim to reduce social isolation, hence emphasising the social aspect, they vary by focus. Many of the projects where socialising itself is key take place in indoor spaces and are accompanied by food. Additionally, there are a host of projects that take place out of doors. Finally, some activities bring together co-production with traditional service delivery, providing services to older people that they need.

Each of these is going to be addressed in turn below, with supporting case studies to demonstrate the types of activities that fall under this category and to suggest potential for similar projects:



Outdoor activities

Outdoor activities may not face as much disruption as others in the ‘new normal’, given that outdoor spaces are less prone to promote infection provided social distancing rules can be observed.

Therefore, in all of these activities it will be necessary to ensure that social distancing is enforced by limiting the number of people in the space, as well as by trying to manage the way people move around the space, particularly at pinch points in the space itself and at entrances/exits.

In spaces that are not continuously supervised, these rules will have to be clearly signposted. For example, Ambition for Ageing had funded a refurbishment of fishing pegs for anglers at a disused park in Wigan. These represent a great asset for anglers to continue their hobby during the ‘new normal’, as long as the number of people allowed per peg is clearly signposted. Ambition for Ageing also funded a small group of men who called themselves Grumpy Old Bees and who were in the habit of doing maintenance work at their local cricket ground in Bury. During and after the work, the group socialised over a cup of tea. Such work would be able to continue, provided that hygiene rules are stated and observed, as well as maintaining an adequate distance between individual group members during the social part of the activity.

As we move towards winter, outdoor activities will face issues due to weather and dark afternoons.

Photograph above courtesy of the Older People’s Network zoom quiz

Case Study: Gardening projects in people's own gardens

Ambition for Ageing supported the resident of a local apartment complex in a deprived area in Radcliffe to develop the common area and the residents' gardens (which backed on to this common area without being fenced off) into a community garden. The group, called Corrie Gardeners, also hosts bespoke activities involving external visitors, but the informal space is mainly intended for the neighbours to interact, as it is essentially made up of people's individual gardens.

Through strong leadership by a local resident and extensive consultation with residents the garden is a success story in an area that used to be notorious for its anti-social behaviour and community tensions. The location on people's doorsteps means that people can surreptitiously be drawn into participation, but it also creates social connections through casual chats. Ultimately, residents choose whether to be involved and at what level, but the scheme has created social support networks through the vehicle of gardening.

Entertaining good relationships with the local community hub, Corrie Gardeners also enjoys a good reputation beyond the local neighbourhood and has a well-developed social media presence.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Corrie Gardeners

Given the difference such projects can make to the local neighbourhood and its wider reputation it would be important to protect the investment in social relations and the resulting norms of behaviour despite the crisis.

- Those driving similar gardening initiatives will need to communicate social distancing guidelines for the space, as well as setting out specific rules for gatherings in the space in consultation with residents. It will be tricky to establish such rules, considering that it is not legitimate to prevent residents from entering their own garden space. Therefore, during a period of social distancing, it may be necessary to resort to formalising slightly what has so far been a fairly informal project.
- Visits of external groups to the space will likely become impossible, but a project such as this may be able to continue to communicate and maintain relationships with the wider community through social media, keeping them informed about the likelihood of future activities on an ongoing basis.
- Communications between residents could also continue to take place on social media, perhaps helping neighbours to navigate the 'new normal', as well as coordinate gardening activities for small groups of residents or allocating tasks that could be done by individuals on their own. Rules have to be devised about ensuring that the shared tools are cleaned in-between uses.
- The 'new normal', with its necessarily restricted menu of options for spending one's leisure time, may provide a good opportunity to get residents involved in gardening who have previously been reluctant. Considering that gardening is an activity that spans all seasons it may be a good alternative for autumn and parts of winter.
- Where there is leadership from residents it would be possible to organise online meetings for groups of neighbours to catch up with each other in the absence of being able to do this face-to-face, or to allow residents to be involved who do not yet feel comfortable with meeting face to face. The shared interest in gardening could provide impetus for such virtual conversations. A focus on what individuals have been up to in their own garden or in the shared space could maintain an interest in the gardens and help with planning the maintenance and development of the gardens, as well as gathering ideas for other activities, going forward. It may also be possible to attract a wider group of residents into these conversations and discuss the needs of the local area and its residents more generally.

Case Study: Gardening projects in residential schemes

Ambition for Ageing in Salford ran a full programme of green and growing groups with over 12 established across Salford, facilitated by Incredible Education. These groups developed and looked after their own green and growing spaces but also came together as one group to learn new growing skills, socialise by going on trips to other green and growing activity and shared their own tips and ideas through social media establishing a green and growing WhatsApp group.

Green and Growing Roman Court is one of these projects, working with group of residents at a sheltered housing scheme in Broughton to transform a green space that was accessible from the building's community room. In partnership with Incredible Education, a Salford-based group that provides gardening support, the space was re-developed not only to be accessible to older people with mobility issues, but also to enable these older people to actively participate in the gardening that took place there. This involved features such as raised beds with built-in seats.

Although the sheltered housing scheme's warden was supportive and advertised the scheme to the residents, it only attracted an existing core group of residents who were already in the habit of socialising.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Green and Growing Roman Court

Given the increasing interest in nature and the outdoors as a result of the epidemic and the restrictions on other activities, it may be reasonable to assume that residents-at-large may now be more interested in the re-developed space, as well as giving gardening a try.

- Attracting residents who have not been previously involved will nevertheless require approaching them directly and encouraging them to use the space, as they may be intimidated by the fact that a pre-existing group of residents is already involved.
- A notice board may be useful to update residents who may be passing by on developments with the garden and how to get involved. This is also where any online meetings and other initiatives could be announced.
- A comment box could be used for residents to post comments and suggestions or even questions about the garden, as well as enabling them to leave contact details if they want to be contacted about the garden. Housing scheme wardens could play a role in maintaining such features.
- Outdoor activities in small groups are compatible with current guidelines, as long as social distancing can be followed. Therefore, access to garden spaces may have to be regulated in order to deal with increased demand. In addition, shared tools have to be wiped in between uses and rules about this have to be clearly posted.
- Re-establishing green and growing groups will require resources to support people to feel safe to connect again in open spaces. Time will need to be invested to explore how social distancing can be maintained particularly as many of those engaged in these activities will have been shielding for long periods of time.
- Entrance into and exit from the garden should be considered to see whether a one-way pattern is possible in order to avoid pinch points. A maximum occupancy should also be determined. Gardening sessions may have to operate in shifts in order to avoid too much proximity.
- At the same time, there could be designated areas where socialising at a distance is possible.

Case Study: Age-friendly walks

Ambition for Ageing funded a series of heritage walks around Failsworth West in Oldham. The project came about from a number of attendees of the Failsworth Friends over Fifties Group identifying a common interest in history and walking. This group suggested to Ambition for Ageing to develop a new project as a splinter group. The group leader received training from Transport for Greater Manchester and historical knowledge was contributed by Failsworth Historical Society.

During the walks, participants capture some of the history of the area and discuss their own memories and knowledge of the local area. The walks also include the location of toilets, benches, and other age-friendly features as identified by the volunteers involved.

A longer-term aim is to link this programme with the 'Let's Go for a Walk' programme and also for the walks to be inclusive for people living with dementia. In addition, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the group aimed to develop a local group of volunteer walk leaders who would be able to support this programme and provide cover for each other.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Age-friendly Walks

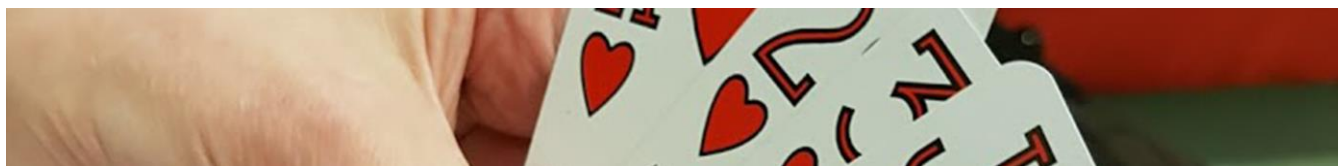
The priority of exercise to support public health makes walking groups a useful conduit for social interaction.

- Social distancing measures will need to be adhered to throughout walks.
- For walks that do not already provide them, speakers, megaphone or personal headphones may be beneficial for the guide leaders, as attendees will need to gather further apart. This will also benefit those who may previously have been excluded due to hearing issues. Any equipment would have to be kept separate for individual users, or wiped down between uses in order to reduce the risk of infection
- The need for social distancing may also impact on the role of attendees sharing stories, which could be approached in different ways, such as breaking into smaller groups for conversations about each stop of the walk, rather than big group discussions.
- It is also conceivable that participants of these walks get together online at a later time to perhaps share photos or other impressions from the walks.
- Walks could be recorded and/or produced as self-guided walks for those who do not yet feel comfortable about being in a group. People who are already familiar with the walking route and the points of local interest/history, but who did not participate in the walk, could contribute to this by submitting information or giving feedback to a draft version of the guide before it is finalised. This will depend on the confidence-levels of volunteer walk leaders following the lockdown period.
- Access to walk start points using public transport, availability of toilets and encouraging individuals to bring their own water will need to be taken into account.

Examples of Outdoor Activities from across the UK

Members of the Ageing Better partnership have continued to deliver activities, whether adapting existing, or creating new projects to support those most at risk of social isolation. These are some examples:

- An **allotment group**, funded by Ageing Better Birmingham is continuing to run, but at a safe distance, without sharing tools and making sure that if the watering can is passed between members, that it is thoroughly cleaned beforehand.
- A **housing estate back alleyway** in Middlesbrough that is cared for by residents has made a huge difference during the lockdown, with residents continuing to maintain its upkeep and using the space to have socially distanced catch-ups.



Indoor projects

As mentioned, we should view our current situation as a transitional phase, with more activities becoming available over time. This opens up the potential of running projects in enclosed spaces and, whilst not likely in the immediate future, we can start to develop plans and identify the resources needed ahead of implementation.

However, we should also note that the change in restrictions may not be in one direction. A new wave of infections has already seen local lockdowns put in place. It is therefore important to manage expectations in planning and ensure that there is enough flexibility in funding to delay or pause activities.

Projects based in indoor spaces, which are often about eating and socialising, may prove the most challenging to adapt to the 'new normal' as they rely on physical proximity and on groups gathering. It is therefore not easy to replace them or adapt them. These projects will have to rethink their requirements in light of the nature of the space and its particular layout. Nevertheless, they may be able to utilise a shared activity or interest to keep participants connected whilst being physically apart. Even if everybody pursues the interest separately in their own homes for the time being, knowing that others do so, too, and creating opportunities to share or check-in with each other may still be able to instil a continued sense of belonging to the group.

Considering that almost all of these types of activity take place in groups, the question is whether they may be able to continue with smaller group sizes at some point, wearing face masks and providing hand sanitizer at the door. In the meantime, it would be possible for some of these to be adapted to one-on-one or outdoor activities. Where this is not possible or desired they could be hosted digitally, but this is clearly subject to participants being equipped with the right technology and skills. Alternatively, it is conceivable that outreach methods are used to send materials, ideas and inspiration to older people at home to keep them going until the group can meet again.

Nevertheless, given their similarity, and sometimes co-location, with restaurants or pubs, these projects may be able to use the opening of such venues as a blueprint to refer to. They may be able to adapt their provision following some of the same principles that such venues use, but importantly they may have an advantage over these venues in that they do not rely on making profit and are hence not as dependent on maximising the number of people in the space.

Although these activities do not necessarily rely on profit, they would still want to involve as many people as possible in order to increase their impact on social isolation which is where creative solutions aimed at maintaining social relationships become necessary. It is likely, given the familiarity these projects often have with their users, that they will be able to come up with tailored solutions that do not only look at the numbers of people coming together but also who they are and how they are normally connected. For example, even within relatively small groups there are usually sub-groups of people who interact with each other more. Simple restrictions on group size without awareness of how people usually interact may therefore alter group dynamics significantly. Project organisers will have to draw on their knowledge of their users or, where appropriate, involve them in finding solutions that fit their social requirements.

Additionally, some projects are already predicated on the notion of remote contact. For example, Linking Letters in Tameside was a project that encouraged school children to exchange letters with older people. The project was conceived in response to the observation that many residents of a sheltered housing scheme were either unwilling or unable to leave their apartment to participate in social activities. This intergenerational project required a sheltered housing scheme and a school to work in partnership to match younger and older pen pals. Clearly, this approach would be entirely possible in a new socially distant normal and could be of particular use in a situation where participants are shielding.

Case Study: Exercise group

Cobden Ladies Exercise Group project supported a group of older women from the South Asian community in Bolton to meet for regular chair-based exercise. Establishing the project was a long process, during which the Ambition for Ageing development worker gave intensive and ongoing support and capacity-building to the women. The content of the exercise sessions had to be adapted to a range of individual fitness levels and a tutor had to be sourced who was qualified, willing to take on board the participants' individual concerns and able to speak Gujarati, English and Urdu. Ambition for Ageing was able to recruit such a tutor through connections with Bolton Get Active. Over time, the group has grown from originally five women to 30 participants.

The group is well-connected through WhatsApp and kept in the loop about upcoming sessions by regular emails from the tutor. The group has also made links with the local community centre, providing a link between the centre and the local South Asian community.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Cobden Ladies Exercise Group

Groups like Cobden Ladies constitute a considerable level of social capital, which means that it would seem to be a high priority to ensure that the investment in social relations survives the current crisis. This will be easier where groups are similarly well-connected electronically and the tutor is not only qualified to instruct the participants in exercise, but also willing to coordinate them to some extent.

- There is potential to carry on the exercise sessions online to the extent that participants have access to the necessary technology. It may be possible to offer support to those who are willing to give it a try, in order to connect them to online exercise sessions.
- Participants who are not confident enough with trying online classes may be able to dial into these sessions by phone, along with being provided with a leaflet that could feature a photograph for each exercise. The instructor could follow the same order as on the leaflet, thereby making it easier for those on the other end of the phone to join in.
- Sessions could be recorded and streamed on YouTube – a format that tends to be more accessible than joining online meetings and enables participants to do the exercise in their own time.
- Another consideration is health and safety, looking at the extent to which it is safe to instruct participants remotely. It could potentially be assumed that long-term participants are already used to the exercises, and therefore online tuition would be safe enough to avoid injury – especially if the tutor focusses on exercises that participants are already familiar with. However, there could potentially be an issue for new additions to the group.
- It may be worthwhile exploring whether the group would be willing to try types of exercise that can take place in small groups out of doors, e.g. walking. This could be a way of keeping momentum for those who are losing interest in online sessions and who are able and willing to socialise in smaller groups again. If self-guided descriptions of walks are provided, individuals who do not feel comfortable with socialising in a group could use these to walk on their own or with members of their household, where applicable.
- Group members could call each other to chat about their experience of carrying on exercise under the circumstances, highlighting the benefits and the challenges. This could serve to maintain adherence to the exercise regime, as well as draw attention to problems and possible solutions.
- A group newsletter that allows individuals to share news about their lives that would normally be shared when meeting together as a group could provide a continued sense of social connectedness.
- A WhatsApp group could serve to keep group members connected in-between sessions, generating anticipation for each session in advance, then providing a de-brief and perhaps sharing photos of one's own exercise to bridge the gap between meetings.

Case Study: Weekly colouring sessions for the neighbourhood held in a housing scheme

The Colourful Creations project brings residents of a sheltered housing scheme in Oldham together with those of the local neighbourhood for weekly colouring sessions. Inspired and led by a resident who won a prize in a colouring competition, these sessions were particularly attractive for older people who were looking for a pastime that would allow them to meet others without an immediate commitment to socialise. The nature of the activity itself was hence instrumental in attracting some shy and more reserved participants.

Colouring is often credited with enhancing wellbeing, which means that it is an activity that could be a useful addition for older people who find themselves more isolated than is usually the case. Materials are typically provided for these sessions and participants are charged a small fee.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Colourful Creations

The combination of a solitary activity with an opportunity to socialise as an added bonus rather than the main focus makes such projects relatively adaptable to the 'new normal'. Whether smaller groups of individuals will be able to meet under social distancing arrangements will depend on the policies of individual housing providers regarding communal facilities. Other adaptations may depend on whether scheme managers are working on site to help facilitate.

- For those who cherish the opportunity to socialise, pairs of two could be formed who could meet and colour together in a venue that permits appropriate social distancing. Alternatively, it would be possible for pairs of people to chat on WhatsApp while colouring. These may be good options for participants who feel intimidated by socialising in bigger groups.
- For those with digital means, bigger online meetings during which they simultaneously draw with each other may be an option. Alternatively, individual members could colour in their own time and then meet online to share, compare and comment on their work. Social media, email or even a notice board on the housing scheme premises could serve as channels for members of the group to share their work with each other and the wider community.
- Particularly complex colouring patterns or a book of themed colouring patterns could be completed collectively by passing it from person to person, with each person completing part of the pattern. Themed displays of drawings could be created, with individuals colouring different patterns that are thematically related.
- Colouring competitions could also be hosted virtually.
- Alternatively, weather permitting, sessions may be able to meet out of doors. However, this would clearly require a suitable space that is equipped with tables and chairs and that is big enough to promote safe distances between participants. However, weather is unpredictable by definition, therefore making such solutions unreliable. Where sessions normally take place in communal spaces of a sheltered housing scheme, improvements to an outdoors space may be possible that allow people to take cover against the rain under a canopy or big umbrella.
- Paying for equipment may raise issues if people are unable to go outside to access cash. It would be necessary to ascertain whether participants are in a position to purchase their own materials or need to be provided with them. In the latter case, an arrangement for paying the fee needs to be made. This could perhaps be facilitated with the help of the housing scheme manager, if online payments prove to be a barrier to some.

Case Study: Intergenerational drumming sessions

Ambition for Ageing worked with the Nigerian Community Association in Rochdale to provide intergenerational drumming sessions. The programme's micro-funding approach seemed particularly suitable for an emerging group that represents a minority within the borough's BAME community.

The long-standing presence of Nigerians in the borough meant that there was a young generation who had grown up in England and there was a sense that these young people were losing touch with their Nigerian roots. The drumming lessons were intended to rekindle this connection and enable Nigerian elders to pass on their knowledge to the Nigerian youth.

An investment was made into commissioning a London-based expert for African drums to create several authentic instruments. The lessons proved popular, but it turned out that they attracted a more diverse age group as teachers than originally intended.

This example illustrates the potential for music as a conduit for social interaction, in using music as a means to bring connection to culture and between generations.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Nigerian Community Association Drumming Sessions

It is quite easy to imagine that a music-based project like this could be adapted to the 'new normal'.

- One-to-one instruction could be delivered in a venue that permits an appropriate measure of social distance or via WhatsApp or online meeting platforms.
- Group sessions could be held online or, weather permitting, at a local park under social distancing conditions.
- Participants who are not comfortable to participate online could dial into these session using one of the numbers that are usually provided by the meeting platforms. It has to be taken into account that participants will have to be muted and will therefore not hear each other playing. Instead, each participant will effectively play along with the instructor – the only person who is not muted. However, online meetings are a good way of continuing group relations, if a social element is included, when participants stop playing and are unmuted and are free to chat.
- There are also ways of producing group videos by editing together individual contributions in order to re-create the joint experience of playing in concert.
- Participants could be sent instructions to practice in their own time in-between meetings or if they do not feel comfortable with joining them. They could call their instructor, play the piece and receive feedback. Alternatively, they may be able to make a recording of their drumming on their phone and send it to the instructor and/or the group on WhatsApp.
- Perhaps music instruction could be mixed up with more light-hearted social activities, such as online or phone quizzes on Nigerian heritage or music. Such quizzes/puzzles could also be distributed to individuals in hard copy to complete in their own time.

Case Study: Community library held with a primary school

Ambition for Ageing worked with a local primary school in Bolton's Tongue Moor area to develop a community library, called Friends of Moorgate, on the school's premises in order to replace the former public library, which had been closed down. The library had played a vital role for older residents who used it as a space for socialising.

For security reasons, there is a signing in process and visitors are escorted to and from the library by school staff. This access protocol means that visitors typically arrive when the library opens and leave when it closes, rather than dropping in. The fact that there is a stable group of library users helps with this or may be a result of this regime.

Co-locating the library with the school, which many of the older residents had personal connections with, seems to have encouraged older people to come who would not normally attend social groups. This may be why socialising is still the most important focus of the group, despite the fact that the area has a few other social groups on offer.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Friends of Moorgate

Despite being more difficult to adapt than previous examples due to taking place indoors, projects like these, where access is already strictly regulated and very predictable are positioned relatively well for the 'new normal', compared to indoor projects that rely on drop-in access and encourage free movement during sessions, rather than sitting down.

Because schools have already started to re-open, projects co-located with schools are not affected by the same uncertainties as those hosted at other venues. In the 'new normal', bringing older people together with children may still not be advised, however, as long as direct contact is avoided there should not be a problem.

- The staff who are in control of the project could design it in a way that ensures social distancing. New rules may have to be introduced to regulate the spatial arrangement of waiting in the school's lobby and walking to the venue
- The capacity of the indoor space will have to be assessed to determine how many people can safely be in it and what the seating arrangements should be to allow social distancing whilst still enabling people to chat. To satisfy demand from all the regulars, it may be necessary to operate a shift system, open the space on additional days or introduce a booking system.
- Hand washing procedures will need to be introduced to curb spread of the virus in addition to peace of mind for those who are using the space and the school. The space will have to be ventilated appropriately and regularly.
- Project leads may want to think about ways in which the continuation of these relationships could be facilitated outside of the space to keep the disruption of social bonds to a minimum. The fact that they are likely very familiar with the people who use the space regularly may make it easier to understand who is connected to whom and how social relationships could be encouraged in the absence of physical group meetings or for people who do not feel safe enough to join others in an indoor space.
- In light of the fact that socialising indoors will not be straightforward for some time in the 'new normal', it may be worth considering whether reading or an interest in local history could be used as a vehicle for bringing participants together. Interested participants could form a book club that meets virtually. Given participants' personal connection to the school, it may be possible to interest them in working together to plan and locate materials for a history display about the school. This could include individuals' photos and memories of the school.

Case Study: Coffee mornings held in a charity shop

Ambition for Ageing funded SAWN, an organisation that normally provides support for asylum-seekers, to provide a drop-in at their charity shop in the Eldon Street area of Oldham. The area's demographics included a large proportion of long-term residents along with some new communities, such as the Black African community that SAWN originally came out of.


In response to feedback from older local residents the drop-in later became a regular coffee morning. This allowed the organisation to build relationships beyond its original group of users and establish a good reputation and reach into a geographical community whose access to the town centre is hampered by a large roundabout, despite geographical proximity.

The venue is a very cramped space, where before COVID-19 those attending the coffee mornings rubbed shoulders with customers of the shop – something that created conducive conditions for attracting a wide variety of local residents and hence bringing different types of residents together. It allowed for local residents to investigate informally what was happening by browsing charity shop items and join in or be invited by participants subsequently. However, in the 'new normal' the very intimacy of this space poses problems.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to SAWN Coffee Mornings

Activities such as the SAWN Coffee Mornings may appear to be near impossible within the immediate 'new normal', given their drop-in nature and the challenges presented by their venue. However, the benefit that these types of activities have on reducing social isolation among older people mean that it would be important for the provision to continue in some form, in this case because the Eldon Street area does not have much to offer to its older residents. As we adjust to a future where social distancing procedures are the norm, these types of activities may be beneficial to re-emerge in their adapted form, six to twelve months from now.

- Co-locating events with a charity shop may also have an advantage, as retail environments will be among the first venues that will be accessible to the public again. However, it is clear that there would have to be restrictions in place with regard to the maximum number of people who can be in the venue at any one time. This calls into question the simultaneous hosting of a coffee morning during shop opening hours, hence reducing the chance of attracting shoppers to the social group serendipitously. In small venues, coffee morning attendees having to spread out further in order to allow for social distancing would mean that the shop would likely have to be closed on those mornings.
- The venue also needs to be examined in light of whether it is possible to provide adequate ventilation during and in-between uses.
- Further, the number of attendees of the social group may have to be decreased. There may be an initial period of confusion when prospective shoppers may find themselves turned away because the coffee morning is in session or when coffee morning visitors find that the venue is already full when they arrive. Where organisations have similarly good relationships in their local area as SAWN they may be well-positioned to co-produce a model that works for everyone with local residents.
- Clear communication, potentially including a booking system, will be vital in light of the fact that some visitors may travel to the coffee morning and would not want to make the journey in vain, especially if they have mobility issues or need support by a volunteer.
- The project also tended to encourage volunteers to make bus journeys with some participants. Bus journeys will become more difficult in the 'new normal', highlighting the need to find alternative ways of enabling these visitors to attend. Volunteer car schemes may be an alternative, but would only be possible if cars were sufficiently big to allow for social distancing and face masks were worn.
- Participants who are unable to access the venue or unwilling to do so for safety reasons could be involved remotely, if coffee mornings were run similarly to an online meeting, only that it would be attended by some on the premises of the usual venue and by others in their homes. An alternative is to use part of the physical meeting to create a message for those not being able to attend in order to update them on significant news from group members.



They could then respond to that by sending their own messages, thus making it possible to create a sense of group continuity. This may also be a useful practice during times of bad weather, even once the crisis is over.

- Drop-in groups such as coffee mornings potentially face a challenge in that the organisers may not necessarily be in possession of the contact details of those who usually attend. Therefore, it may be more challenging to find ways of connecting to the usual attendees in the first place. Considering that coming to the venue is the way people normally connect, it may be most useful to clearly signpost any publicity about future plans at the venue itself or distribute information about these to residents in the local area.
- It is also likely that the ability to brew up and share food at the coffee mornings may be inhibited or made more complicated by regulations.

Examples of Indoor Activities from across the UK

Members of the Ageing Better partnership have continued to deliver activities, whether adapting existing, or creating new projects to support those most at risk of social isolation. These are some examples:

- Ageing Better Middlesbrough '**Crafty Capers**' group have knitted teddy bears, hearts, twiddlemuffs, and over 200 comfort and scrub bags for patients at their local hospital. The group chat via Whatsapp while they knit from their own homes.
- **Connect Hackney's media groups** are still writing stories and poems for Hackney Senior magazine but are now engaging via Zoom and WhatsApp with each session's theme sent in advance via podcast and video. The distribution of the magazine has altered given the number of community centres, libraries and offices that are closed, with focus continuing on delivering as usual to care homes and to individual residents addresses and also using organisations that are delivering food. The media groups have also started a book club - the groups choose a book and Connect Hackney had copies delivered to their homes - they discuss the book's themes and plots online.
- Henna Asian Women's Centre, connected to Ageing Better in Camden, are continuing their **Art, Freedom and Creativity course** by post and online. In May 2020, they posted out jewellery making materials and the tutor delivered the course by video call.
- Holborn Community Association, who are connected to Ageing Better in Camden, are continuing their **creative writing group** by post. They post out writing exercises to anyone who would like them and members receive feedback from the tutor also by post.
- A **theatre group for deaf and hearing adults**, that received funding from Ageing Better in Birmingham are continuing to rehearse on-line and will be launching their first play online later in the summer.
- A **cookery group** funded by Ageing Better in Birmingham has adapted by having members choose a recipe, another member makes sure ingredients are sent out to everyone and then the group convenes on WhatsApp by sharing pictures of their results and having a chat.
- Holborn Community Association, one of the Ageing Better in Camden delivery agencies, are running an **intergenerational postcard club**. Children can drop off their postcards to the centre, and they will get sent to HCA's older members by post.



Service Delivery

Although less empowering than the interventions illustrated above, service delivery, where an organisation directly provides a service to an individual or a group of individuals will still be relevant in the 'new normal'.

This may include activities such as volunteers or professionals providing befriending, emotional support and respite. This type of delivery has grown in response to the pandemic, as it is the easiest to deliver quickly. Because many volunteers have recently been recruited to do precisely this in the current situation, there is likely already guidance available for delivering this type of intervention.

It is important in this type of activity that these ideas are implemented alongside older people, rather than seeing them as passive recipients of a service. Working with organisations with a history of co-production and involvement, such as local Age UKs, Healthwatch and local VCSE organisations can help mitigate this risk.

A blog published by Liz Gadd at New Philanthropy Capital ^{xxiii} suggests three practical ways we can effectively implement meaningful user involvement during the immediate crisis and in planning for the 'new normal':

- being pragmatic around what can be achieved;
- asking your target audience what next;
- and maximising digital opportunities.

Service delivery, where participants are in receipt of a service, such as telephone befriending support or food delivery should be seen as complimentary to activities where they are active participants the activity. As we move out of lockdown and into the 'new normal', delivering services can provide support for those unable or unwilling to risk attending physical activities in the short term, while looking to engage more fully in the long term.

Case Study: Cracking Good Food

Cracking Good Food is a social enterprise and community interest company that uses the revenue generated by their Cookery School to help support their core running costs, enabling them to focus exclusively on a range of commissioned and funded community projects. They deliver a number of programmes, teaching how to cook affordable, healthy and tasty food from scratch within communities experiencing food & fuel poverty, as well as continually campaigning against food poverty, food waste and for the importance of a Living Wage.

The social enterprise also cooks with residents from hostels across Manchester (as part of Manchester Adult Education Service), as well as the Longford Centre, a homeless prevention centre, bringing residents who are on the brink of homelessness together socially to cook affordable, tasty food from scratch. The majority of the food produced by Cracking Good Food is produced from surplus, unwanted food gained by Fareshare Greater Manchester. Inspiring and empowering individuals to feel they are able to eat well on an extremely tight budget is also positive for participants' mental health, especially when eating together at the end.

In addition, Cracking Good Food deliver independently funded projects, such as the Ambition for Ageing social eating scaled programme, which delivered social eating activities and fed into the creation of a guide for organisations wanting to delivery their own social eating programmes.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Cracking Good Food

Throughout the pandemic, like many food-production organisations, Cracking Good Food supplied nutritious meals to the residents they once cooked with, which helped not only with diet but social isolation; deliveries of the meals by volunteers often meant that long and much needed conversations took place on the doorstep. This meant changing the model entirely from always cooking 'with' the residents in a social eating capacity, to providing much needed fully nutritious meals 'for' them instead.

- As the lockdown eases, food-producing organisations such as Cracking Good Food are likely to continue to be needed to deliver food to those most at need, although production will reduce.
- Funding will be an issue for social enterprises, most of which will have lost income during the lockdown. For many similar projects, identifying sources of income will have to be prioritised^{xxiv}.
- Community outreach programmes will need redesigning to meet social distancing regulations in addition to tackling fears people may have around cooking and eating together. However, food production organisations will already hold knowledge around good hygiene, which will benefit them in ensuring high levels of health and safety in delivery.
- Re-deployment of volunteers may benefit activities based around social eating, encouraging volunteers who were previously cooking and delivering cooked meals to support in cooking and serving food as social eating groups start to be set up again.
- Reopening similar projects will also depend on the size of the kitchen and whether social distancing is possible. Projects like this could compare notes with professional kitchens, and possibly draw on government guidance about opening eating establishments.

Case Study: Being There

Being There supports people living with cancer, strokes, heart, respiratory and other life limiting illnesses in Great Manchester. It provides one-to-one support including, respite sitting for carers, befriending and emotional support, small tasks such as shopping and transport to medical appointments.

Support is provided by specially recruited and trained volunteers, managed by a branch manager. Being There received funding from Ambition for Ageing to pilot their volunteering opportunities and services in Denton South so that they could provide more support for people living with life limiting illnesses in those areas. Their volunteers are mainly people over the age of 50 and their clients tend to be over the age of 55. The funding also allowed Being There to run some social events for their volunteers to celebrate their volunteering, share their experiences and thank them for their efforts.

Being There achieved the Age-friendly Quality Award in January 2020, which recognises their commitment to providing age-friendly places and volunteer opportunities for older people across Tameside.

Possible adaptations for projects similar to Being There

Because these types of projects often have a clear decision maker (usually a member of staff) and clear procedures in place (in comparison to the more informal nature of activities such as friendship groups or hobby activities), many service delivery activities have managed to make adaptations to the services already. The risk that comes with the speed of change is a lack of co-production, as decisions have to be made quickly in response to a crisis, rather than via robust consultation with services users. However, these do not need to be mutually exclusive, and changes to service delivery within the 'new normal' allows organisations the opportunity to test and learn alongside service users.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Being There switched to running an online counselling service via Zoom with professional counsellors and also developed a telephone listening line to offer emotional support to existing and new clients. They are also looking to set up a project that would match volunteer digital experts with clients alongside easy to use kit to get people up and running as easily and quickly as possible as well as a pen-pals scheme.
- The future for services such as Being There could include befriending delivered via walking in the park or sitting in a service user's garden to follow social distancing guidance. The use of technology and telephone befriending could continue to be used by those who are more digitally included. Some carers respite can still be provided with robust hand washing and cleaning procedures in place.
- There is also a recognition that there is no substitute for face-to-face support which makes befriending services so effective. There is a need for organisations like Being There to work quickly towards re-instating this support, whilst minimising the risk and protecting the vulnerable.
- The group celebrations for volunteers will be harder to maintain within the 'new normal', however these could still be achieved through outside activities, online events, or rewarding volunteers in some other way.

Examples of Service Delivery from across the UK

Members of the Ageing Better partnership have continued to deliver activities, whether adapting existing, or creating new projects to support those most at risk of social isolation. These are some examples:

- TED Ageing Better in East Lindsey and Ageing Better Middlesbrough are sending out **activity packs** to older people they are in contact with.
- Age Better in Sheffield have produced **Neighbour Boxes** (based on their Neighbourhood toolkit work) which are pizza box sized and contain ideas for crafts, post cards and stamps, a tea bag and ideas as to how to be more active in the home.
- Several Ageing Better partnerships, including in East Lindsey, Camden, Middlesbrough (under the #HereForYou campaign) and Birmingham have launched offers of **regular befriending calls**.
- Abbey Community Centre, one of the Ageing Better in Camden delivery agencies, is coordinating a **Tech Buddies scheme**, offering phone calls to help older people to get online.

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