

A summary of delivery partners' learning

July - September 2021



We collect learning and insight from Time to Shine (TTS) delivery partners as part of their quarterly monitoring returns. Eight delivery partners shared their learning this quarter. The information is summarised below, with quotes from partners in bold. The photo is from [In Mature Company](#) at Yorkshire Dance.

How have TTS delivery partners supported older people to re-engage in activities after shielding or staying at home for long periods due to Covid-19 restrictions?

Delivery partners provide a diverse range of activities and attract a diverse range of participants. In some projects, often involving group activities such as craft or exercise, staff found that participants were keen to re-engage with social distancing in place. In other projects, often containing 1-2-1 support, staff found that participants were more anxious. Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all approach and delivery partners worked in person-centred ways to tailor their work to individuals. At least two delivery partners mentioned each of the following ways that they have helped older people to build the confidence and motivation to re-engage in projects. A cumulative number of nudges probably made the most difference.

1. Arranging local meet ups, sometimes with befrienders, so transport was not an issue.
 2. Personal, handwritten invitations and keeping in touch regularly.
 3. Gradual reintroduction of activities, starting small and building on this:
“We started to re-engage people in activities gradually. We began to have small gatherings, then moved from outdoors to indoors with social distancing in place.”
 4. Asking care home staff to help care home residents join sessions via Zoom.
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5. Organising trips or large, one-off activities to give people a clear reason to attend.
 6. Working at people's own pace and respecting their decisions:
"On average it seems to be 2-3 weeks before people can fully immerse into the group and override their fears about health. Once initial fears have passed it's great to see people having fun and connecting."
 7. Offering specific activities to address issues arising after lockdown:
"Our health champion offers a unique style of exercise to improve wellbeing, not just physically but mentally, enabling people aged 50+ to get out into their communities and engage socially."
 8. Maintaining the offer to let people take part via Zoom, over the phone or face-to-face:
"The ongoing challenge has been for those volunteers and carers who don't wish (or aren't able) to meet in person. We've seen this as an opportunity to match them with volunteers who only want to offer phone support. This means we can still offer support to those who are still anxious about going out or unable to go out."
 9. Word of mouth, buddy systems and peer support to encourage people to support others to join:
"Having spoken to service users it is evident that they would like to come out and join the groups. However, they have been lacking the motivation and willpower to get themselves out. To help people re-engage, existing service users who have returned to attending the sessions were then encouraged to ask their peers to attend and share their experiences with them. Almost getting people to buddy up to get others out of their homes and comfort zone. This was a very positive and a successful technique."
 10. Arranging free transport and offering to accompany people to activities:
"We have encouraged them to attend by attending with them for their first visit back after Covid."
 11. Providing extra 1-2-1 support to people who feel particularly anxious, encouraging people to talk about how they feel: **"It has taken time and 1:1 support such as going shopping or for a walk locally to gain people's confidence. In general people are happier once in the group settings as they feel reassured that they are going through the same fears as others and are able to share with groups how they have got along during the pandemic."**

12. Strictly adhering to guidelines to help people feel safe:

“We have continued to follow all Covid guidelines and wear face masks. All clients participate in Covid screening, maintain social distance and have their temperature taken before participating in a group session.”

How have TTS delivery partners used a flexible and/or test and learn approach, particularly as the Covid-19 pandemic continues and restrictions are subject to change?

All delivery partners regularly adapted all or part of their services according to the changing Covid-19 guidelines. All delivery partners mentioned regular communication with participants and volunteers was vital; working in a person-centered way to understand and respond to their current feelings and offering a choice about how they take part. Crisis support continues for people in need of food or services. Blended delivery models continue so that people can take part in person or over Zoom.

Partners slowly started to trial outdoor meetings in summer, gathering feedback afterwards to see how people felt about them. Next came indoor meetings, risk-assessed first and with clear Covid protocols:

“Following the ease in restrictions and after carrying out a risk assessment Saturday’s social group has moved from the garden to indoors. Masks and sanitiser are provided and we have purchased several hobs for the cooking session so participants have their own workstation.”

Partners are of course aware that the virus is still present and many have plans in place if future lockdowns are announced.

Work in care homes has required a significant amount of flexibility to keep residents safe, and this has been a good learning point for one project:

“With a limited number of weeks where outdoor work was possible, we decided to move to different care homes each week. This provided valuable learning. The roaming session highlighted the variation in Covid regulations and procedures in each home. This made session planning difficult for the artists; in some homes the artists could dance with residents and in others they had to maintain a set distance. These sessions really tested the skills and expertise of the artists but confirmed that the live delivery style can be adapted for different contexts and around different restrictions to create the same impact.”

How have older people felt less isolated as a result of their involvement in TTS projects?

Delivery partners are keeping in touch with participants regularly over Zoom, the phone, social media, letters, texts, 1-2-1 and group work as they did during the pandemic. Over half of the delivery partners said this quarter that they had noted independent friendships developing between project participants. There is a sense that people have a renewed appreciation for social contact as we emerge from the pandemic:

“It has been moving to see people greeting others that they have not seen for many months and hearing the chatter and excitement of people reconnecting.”

As a result, many participants are taking the initiative to arrange their own meetups and encourage other older people to take part.

Delivery partners are focused on reducing social isolation, as this is the main aim of TTS, so social activities act as a catalyst for friendship in two main ways:

1. Activities are planned and delivered in a careful way:

“All activities have been tailored to encourage communication and interpersonal interaction. Activities such as word games are designed to be inclusive so that all beneficiaries can take part. The games are set up in groups or pairs. It helps people to develop self-confidence and allows beneficiaries to get to know other members from the group.”

2. Delivery partners are proactive in encouraging group members to take the next step and swap numbers with other participants:

“We arranged a meetup at the end of the Doodlebook project where members were encouraged to share their work in person and exchange numbers to keep in touch.”

How have TTS delivery partners helped older people to participate in their communities?

This has been a particular challenge for care home residents, but one project reframed their work to help residents participate:

“Residents in care homes have not taken part in external activities for over a year. Our Zoom sessions and outdoor sessions have encouraged connection within the care home between residents and between residents and staff.”

For community-based projects, delivery partners helped older people to participate in their communities in five main ways this quarter:

1. Working in partnership with other organisations to create activities out in the local community, for example volunteers tending flower beds outside GPs and community centres.

2. Arranging local walks and meet ups:

“Befrienders are now meeting carers in their own communities and are able to explore local venues and places to walk to encourage the carers to learn more about their local area and create opportunities to connect with other locals.”

3. Designing activities which encourage local people to meet:

“Our intergenerational work connects older people with the school community and younger people with older people.”

4. Creating accessible volunteering opportunities and ways to help others such as helping with shopping and hospital visits, teaching craft skills, donating presents, homemade goods or time to plan Christmas festivities, or through regular phone calls:

“We have now gathered four members who help us make befriending calls. They reported to us that they are getting benefits from these calls because they also feel less lonely.”

5. Personal invites from staff and volunteers:

“We’ve been struck by the power of handwriting. It’s been important to give people a sense of belonging – a personal invitation gives people a reason to meet and to go out and they know they’ll be warmly welcomed.”

How have older people co-produced their TTS project’s design, delivery and evaluation?

All delivery partners continue to work in person-centred ways and regularly ask for ideas, input and feedback – formally and informally- so that participants can help shape their programme of activities:

“We hold sub-group meetings so our older people, volunteers, staff and board members can get together and share ideas. This has led to us setting up new groups and meetings in the community.”

Most TTS projects involve older volunteers who help to shape and deliver activities or steer the project:

“One older volunteer put himself forward to chair the peer meetings so that the group is fully run by volunteers. He receives regular support from the volunteer coordinator and has regular opportunities to discuss any issues or actions raised by the volunteers.”

What have delivery partners learned about the key issues, challenges or concerns faced by older people over the last three months?

Delivery partners noted a wide range of issues which were mainly negative but with the occasional positives identified. Access to medical services is a big cause for concern as highlighted by two delivery partners:

“People are suffering from multiple health issues. Participants feel they will miss out on their hospital appointments because of Covid. They are struggling to book face-to-face appointments with their GP. They feel neglected and sidelined. Not feeling valued, this then has a domino effect on their health, mobility, independence. For some it becomes a determining factor as to whether they will leave the house to engage in activities or stay indoors. Poor health means more challenges.”

The second delivery partner noted that:

“There is not enough support for people who are struggling with their mental health. Doctors are not answering their phones or replying to messages and are letting people go online for help or appointments. We have to email doctors surgeries to raise our concerns for people.”

Delivery partners also mentioned the following: low motivation; lack of confidence; frailty; bereavement; poor mental and physical health; paranoia; weight-gain; money worries; poor mobility; lack of fitness; anxiety; limited family support; loneliness; uncertainty and the continuing threat of the virus:

“People are aware, and scared, that Covid-19 is still present. They think we’ll go into another lockdown and are confused with government warnings.”

There were some positive points identified. Partners noted how valuable their projects were to the community. They observed the benefits of people being outdoors in nature and of increased social contact:

“We have noticed that mental health and general spirit is rising amongst the groups, especially for people who have been attending for a couple of months. People seem to be keen to try new things and to support each other within the groups.”

Older people are seeing the benefits of getting back to a ‘normal routine’ and some have spent time reflecting on life and appreciating good health.

