



Working with younger older people

**Time to Shine Report
September 2021**



Leeds
CITY COUNCIL



**COMMUNITY
FUND**

Introduction

50-70 is a key transition point for many people as ill health, loss of life partners and redundancy are all increasingly likely events that can trigger social isolation and loneliness.

For many people in their 50s and 60s, even into their 70s, being identified as needing support from an older person's organisation would produce an incredulous response. However, a small number of people in the 50-70 age group do benefit from support. Three projects aimed to work specifically with younger older people (aged 50-70) during the Time to Shine programme. These projects - which originally worked broadly with either predominantly older, or predominantly younger groups - set out to involve people aged 50-70 as they had some experience of working with people from this group and were able to see that these people would also benefit from support.

Other projects also had learning to share.

Evidence

Time to Shine has funded 100 projects (2015-2019). Delivery partners collect case studies, quotes, insights and learning from participants, volunteers and staff. Time to Shine staff worked with delivery partners working with younger older people to identify shared learning. All this evidence has informed this report

Insight from a delivery partner

Don't Call Me Old - part of [Armley Helping Hands](#) - planned to work with younger older people, especially men. They aimed to recruit differently, taking on a member of staff who had not specifically worked with older people before so they would not make assumptions about who and how to recruit. In the event his experience with the prison and probation services proved invaluable as being unemployed turned out to be the least of the needs of many group members. Through referrals from mental health and occupational health practitioners in the local area the project encountered mental health problems, drug and alcohol misuse, social problems, people living alone as a result of divorce and issues related to poverty.

Beneficiaries needed much more support than the older members of Armley Helping Hands, which meant the project was unable to work with as many people as originally planned.

Working with this age group revealed the importance of intersectionality. Additional life factors had an effect similar to that of chronological age, so where the majority of those in their 50s are in work, might be in reasonable health and not in need of additional support, some people in this age group had complex needs relating to their circumstances. For example, being unable to work whilst waiting for an operation can trigger isolation, loneliness and then depression.

How have projects worked with Younger Older people?

Armley Helping Hands is a locally based charity that supports older people. Staff had been aware for a number of years that although they supported a lot of socially isolated people in their 70s and older there was also considerable and different need locally in the 50-70 group.

They set up the **Don't Call Me Old Project** to support this age group, with the thought that it would also benefit their older members to have some younger participants. Following the recruitment of the initial group the project worked using principles of co-production. People identified areas of interest and worked on setting up new activities: they became Digital Champions, set up a local foodbank and started to use the local leisure centre. During lockdown, when Armley Helping Hands became a neighbourhood hub, some of the younger older members proved to be a great resource for the organisation.

[The Conservation Volunteers](#) (TCV) is a local branch of an environmental charity. They set up the **Great Outdoors Project** as they noticed that an increasing number of their practical volunteers were within this age group, and that a high proportion of these older volunteers had a need for support around self-confidence and social isolation after becoming unemployed. They offered people aged 50-70 a chance to join through practical training courses, or walking and social groups. The emphasis was always on undertaking something physical, generally outdoors.

[Canal Connections](#) is a social enterprise based on canal boats. They have a passion for reducing loneliness through conversation on the boat. As they say, "there is nothing much else to do on a canal boat but talk". They wanted to work with younger older (mostly) men by giving them a valuable role to play in **Float your Boat**, making access to their canal boats available to a lot more people. This would also involve a lot of intergenerational work, as the younger older group would facilitate visits from much older groups, and also from groups of young people. Through Float Your Boat they were also focussed on increasing the feeling of self-worth for their beneficiaries by providing a role akin to paid work.



Connections is a project of [Health For All](#) that aimed to help people aged 50+ to make connections and to support them to sustain those connections independently. The project established groups based on people's interests: photography, walking, singing and gardening.

Some groups went on to develop their own constitutions and become independent.

Connections was open to everyone over 50. Whilst people aged 70+ often entered the project readily, those in their 50s and 60s often needed more help and took longer to develop trust, before impactful and sustained engagement began.

Those in this age group, particularly men, had complex needs - such as anxiety, depression, chronic illness, addictions and poverty - that have acted as barriers to engagement. A number of younger older people accessed the project as volunteers. The project recognised that people had varying motivations for volunteering, including being part of the team, helping others and taking part without appearing to be 'in need', some volunteers required considerable support themselves.

Transitions into Later Life - Time to Shine took part in a pilot study Transitions into Later Life, which offered pre-retirement training to people. It was able to use a Leeds City Council early leavers initiative (ELI) to recruit participants. Qualitative feedback was very positive but it proved difficult to recruit people to the course outside the ELI. Evaluation demonstrated it could be an effective long term intervention but was not viable at present.



The New Wortley Supper Club was a project which was set up in response to a request for something to do in the evenings. It was aimed chiefly at men, some of whom were still working but had few friends and others who were unable to socialise in the evening because of financial constraints. They worked closely with Armley Helping Hands to provide members with a chance to socialise at a lonely time of day.

Key messages

Chronic ill health and complexity

Although the Don't Call Me Old project had anticipated some of the issues in working with this age group they had not been able to accurately predict the level of additional complexity and need. This meant their worker was unable to support as many people as had initially been expected. Needs included chronic mental health issues, substance abuse, and precarious finances.

Other people had been out of the labour market whilst awaiting health treatment and found themselves suffering from depression and anxiety as a result.

Selling the project to participants

Don't Call Me Old found they did not need to run evening services as many of their participants were available in the daytime. Other projects found evening activities like the Supper Club were very popular. Organisations were generally careful, when not using referrals from local professionals or outreach, to market opportunities around the activities available. As a result there was some resistance when the evaluation tools asked questions about loneliness, as participants were unaware of that aspect of funding.

Don't Call Me Old has been successful in running co-produced activities; members have steered the ideas for projects and groups. [New Wortley Community Centre](#) found that some of their new members were full of ideas for activities and were able to run things themselves.

Conversely, both Float your Boat and the Great Outdoors Project, found that people were interested in the specific activities they had signed up to and really wanted to stick with those projects - this was noticeable even after Covid-19 meant that activities had to be cancelled. People preferred to wait until they could resume the practical activities rather than meet in another way.

Poverty and lack of resilience

These projects were based generally in wards with high levels of deprivation and many of the younger older people supported were in considerable poverty. Those who have been unemployed for a while have few reserves of savings and their income is considerably less on universal credit than the basic state pension¹, and they have no access to 'extras' like free bus passes. Their housing is often precarious and expensive; single men can be especially vulnerable as they do not have easy access to social housing.



¹ Basic state pension £179.60 per week.

Universal Credit £411.51 per month (this is higher than it was before Covid-19). Amounts at 31 August 2021

Armley Helping Hands identified that popular and affordable trips for their older members in receipt of a pension were out of reach to many of the Don't Call Me Old beneficiaries. For example going to the seaside at Bridlington might cost £25 for a day trip.

Some people were suffering benefit sanctions as a result of missed appointments: often because mobiles had been pawned to bring in enough money to be able to pay other bills at the end of the month

The work Don't Call Me Old got involved in during lockdown revealed many younger older members lacked the skills to cook for themselves and some had no cooking facilities.

New Wortley Community Centre Supper Club set up a project with the aim of engaging older working men who were being referred to their counselling services as well as older unemployed men. They all found the evenings very hard.

“The yearly subscription of £12 – this was difficult for those who had limited funds and we did not want this to put off those we really wanted to engage and would benefit from the project by insisting they had to pay this. Trips had to be very carefully planned not to exclude those unable to afford an entry fee.” *Project Worker*

Redundancy in your 50s is an issue

Ageism meant younger older people faced issues around re-employment. Don't Call Me Old was based in a predominantly working class area; the men they worked with had lost physical labouring jobs which either no longer existed, or they were considered too old, or had insufficient physical strength to continue. They are expected to re-enter the labour market without the skills they need or the confidence to acquire them.

The Great Outdoors Project engaged many people through the Adult and Community Learning Service funded courses. These offered very practical training (woodwork, gardening) to those who had often not been in a classroom since they were teenagers. The courses were designed to give adult learners confidence to retrain.



“I would just like to say that you have been a breath of fresh air. I am extremely grateful that you provided me with an opportunity to get back on a road to health and possible employment. I am a 59 year old person that thought my recent disability would prevent me from joining in with others both socially and in employment. TCV at Hollybush have created a means to an end for me and many others in a very relevant and understanding way.”

Still seeking a role in life

Float Your Boat found that meaningful activity was a strong motivating factor for the men who volunteered. They had to undergo training and were then able to feel they were doing a job for the day, albeit unpaid.

The value of meaningful activity was again amply demonstrated when in 2019 Don't Call Me Old volunteers suggested they help set up a local food bank, and then in 2020 stepped up during the Covid crisis to collect, sort and deliver food parcels as their parent organisation became a ward hub.

Once the group was under way the Supper Club used members' own skills to run talks, find speakers and set up outings. Some beneficiaries were pleased to step up and volunteer to help run the club.

Case studies

A woman who took part in the Don't Call me Old project was able to move from a position of extreme isolation and financial abuse from family members to being able to help the sessional computer trainer. This was a result of her being able to start in a small way, receive a very positive planned welcome to a craft group, build trust with the worker and then join other groups. She joined the computer course despite family members calling her “thick”, and found she was in fact able to help other group members, so the project worker asked if she would like to volunteer. This was a good example of progression but it required a sympathetic ear and was not a quick fix: if she had just been provided with the contact details for the first group, a positive outcome would have been unlikely.



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Graham started to volunteer with Float Your Boat after his mother died; he found it gave him the experience of work, and a bit of humour with work-mates, which he had sorely missed. To do this he undertook training, although he doubted his ability to learn new skills.

He was helping to crew the boat when a group of young people with learning disabilities travelled with them. After talking to their teacher, and reflecting on a family member who had been ‘different’ but never formally diagnosed, he enrolled on a college course to find out more about working with children with autism. He found the course valuable, even struggling through the homework and then said “when I had completed the course, I had gained so much confidence I did what I had wanted to do for a long time, I started another course on creative writing”. He is now volunteering for another charity and stated that finding a useful role in life had helped to “cleansed his soul”.

Top Tips

- When working with people in this age group you may find they need more support than you think.
- Working with people on insecure and low levels of benefit poses budgetary challenges.
- Recruit people through activity, even more so that you do for other groups.
- They are generally good at co-production once their confidence levels have been raised, and are likely to bring a lot of current skills.
- Many people are looking for an opportunity to help others rather than receive help themselves, so make sure they have a chance to reciprocate.
- You might need to do a lot of signposting to places you don't usually think of, including colleges and other volunteering opportunities.
- Be prepared to work outside 9-5

Resources

Float your boat: encouraging people to talk on the waterways - end of project report (Time to Shine, August 2021)

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

Trigger points - report (Time to Shine, July 2020)

Trigger points - toolkit (Time to Shine, July 2020)

[Value of Working With Volunteers Toolkit](#) (Time To Shine, December 2019)

Find out more about Armley Helping Hands - armleyhelpinghands.org.uk/

Find out more about Canal Connections - canal-connections.com/blog

Find out more about Health for All - healthforall.org.uk/

Find out more about New Wortley Community Association - newwortleycc.org/

Find out more about The Conservation Volunteers - www.tcv.org.uk/hollybush/

Find these reports and other resources on the Leeds Older People's Forum website

www.opforum.org.uk/resources

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