

“It’s brilliant, I know I can just call and arrange for the car to collect me, the driver is lovely, so friendly and he helps me from my front door to the car and into the centre to my seat. I go to the centre a couple of times a week now.”

Changing journeys: older people and transport

Time to Shine Learning Report
December 2021

About Time to Shine

Time to Shine is one of fourteen areas which form [Ageing Better](#); an ambitious, large scale programme funded and developed by the National Lottery Community Fund. Ageing Better aims to improve the lives of people aged 50 and over by reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Leeds
Older
People's
Forum

Time to
Shine

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Introduction

Transport is one of the issues high on the agenda when you ask a group of older people what helps or hinders them in their daily living. Whether it is attending medical appointments, shopping, meeting friends or joining social activities, being able to get there (and home again) is key. In Leeds, although it was identified as an issue in the development of the Time to Shine Programme, we did not commission a large scale transport project, as the Centre for Ageing Better, in partnership with Leeds City Council, was looking at the issue. Instead, the first round of commissioning had a theme of 'Walk Together' and we commissioned two projects in 2015, [Walk with Me](#) and [Walking with Confidence](#).

This report focuses on the provision of transport options, and the importance that making those options person-centred has on people's lives.

The bulk of this report was written prior to March 2020. Transport for anyone who did not have access to a private car has been particularly difficult during the Covid period. This report does not reflect that period as organisations were unable to reach satisfactory solutions in the time available. Leeds City Council, in partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better, piloted a door-to-door transport service which focused on a technical solution of matching supply (available mini-buses and community transport) with demand (the need for transport). In the first instance the pilot focused on transport to health appointments. The pilot is now paused, due to the impact of covid restrictions and the challenge of creating a large-scale, accessible and effective technical system.

A number of transport projects were funded through the Time to Shine Small Funds programme. These addressed a range of issues around transport:

- Escorted travel
- Provision of bus tickets for destitute Asylum Seekers
- An impartial review of all existing transport within an older people's organisation
- Accessible transport options in-house and externally
- Transport planning.

The Friendly Communities project, part of the Time to Shine programme, also produced a guide for dementia friendly taxi services.

This has all generated learning to help organisations working with older people change the way they provide transport to make things easier for their volunteers and the older people involved. This learning remains valid and can be used by organisations as services resume.



What did Time to Shine transport projects do?

Leeds is covered by [Neighbourhood Networks](#) each of which covers a specific locality with different local transport provision. Between them they used a range of different transport solutions: their own minibuses; rented or leased buses; professional and volunteer drivers; escorts or bus buddies; car sharing, and local taxi companies. They were able to use Time to Shine Small Funds to consider different solutions for their older members. Other organisations were working with groups with specific support needs and were able to do the same.

[Otley Action for Older People](#)

Otley is a market town on the outskirts of north Leeds. OAOP (the local neighbourhood network) had always used two minibuses to support their members and wanted to see if they could make it work better for them.

A realisation in the past few years that the health needs of the neighbourhood network's minibus users had increased, led OAOP to conduct a review of their transport service. They considered the best way to utilise minibus driver and escort volunteers as it was taking the volunteers longer to collect their members, people were spending longer on the bus and they couldn't transport so many people.

They surveyed users and volunteers and were able to implement some immediate actions which improved the service for passengers and reduced the stress for volunteer drivers and escorts. These include assessing whether some journeys needed a second escort, improving parking for the minibuses and giving service users a call 10 minutes before they are collected to minimise waiting on both sides. They also improved training and support for drivers and escorts, and as a result have recruited more of them.

They discovered that meeting and listening to the drivers and escorts improved morale, and regular meetings for drivers and escorts became standard. OAOP hope this means drivers will stay in what can be a stressful role for longer.

In common with [FDM](#) (see below) they have also been able to build relationships with other local organisations who can make good use of the minibuses, which makes them more viable long term, as well as benefiting the local community.



Caring Together Woodhouse and Little London

Caring Together ran a project called “Get there your way” which started with an audit of their provision, looking at it with fresh eyes to see where it could be improved.

As a Neighbourhood Network covering a geographically small inner city area close to Leeds city centre, they found having a minibus didn't work for them, but their members still struggled with limited bus routes and very low rates of car ownership. They decided to approach the issue with a combination of individual needs assessments, and innovative solutions, including using volunteers to walk with members, local taxi services and using the Community Transport accessible minibus. They also moved some of their activities to venues closer to bus routes, and ensured that activities were spread across the district so people had the option of an activity close to home.

They identified that if they were able to change someone's transport support quickly it prevented their exclusion from activities and the resultant loss of social isolation and loss of confidence. “Caring Together was there before I was unwell, they were there while I was in hospital and they were there waiting for me when I got out.... a combination of the social support offered by the volunteer... and organised transport of my choice, has helped me to get back on my feet.”

STEP

Another Neighbourhood Network, based in a north Leeds suburb, offered a Car Buddy scheme. This enabled many more people to access the STEP centre. They had identified there were a number of people who felt unable to join their activities as they needed support getting to and from a car or taxi. The buddy project provided a member of staff who was able to collect and then accompany people to activities using a car belonging to the project. The buddy was also able to take people into events and help them to settle, which was valuable for new members who were less physically frail, but more anxious, who might then progress to some other form of transport.

The simplicity of the scheme worked very well; people just rang the office and booked transport. STEP plans to fundraise to recreate the role and will use it to help them include more older people who are frail.



[The Association of Blind Asians](#)

The Fair Ride project aimed to set up a sustainable volunteer-based car scheme modelled on similar schemes run by other organisations across the country.

Volunteer drivers were vetted and trained so that they could provide the appropriate support for people who live with sight loss and may have other conditions such as dementia or reduced mobility.

The project worked with other similar schemes in outlying areas of the city to identify how they supported and trained drivers, and set up a database to manage passengers, so people would not need to keep repeating their additional requirements. It did however require a human at the centre, as it was clear during consultation the majority of potential users had no interest in booking online or using an app. (Asking people to book using an app was also a stumbling block for the Ageing Better Door-to-Door pilot.)

The customers it did serve really appreciated how it worked and the level of training the drivers had, which made them feel safe, but it struggled to recruit and train drivers as they found the training a barrier, and after the first year it was still not viable.

[Damasq](#)

Damasq primarily works to support Syrian refugees. The project used transport as a hook to engage in intercultural activity.

They noted that older people in their area needed help getting to the local shops and set up a system using volunteer drivers recruited from amongst the Syrian community to help older people of all backgrounds to get out independently. They had an issue recruiting sufficient women drivers, as many women in the Syrian community do not drive, but older women preferred a female driver.

[Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network](#)

LASSN ran the Out and About project.

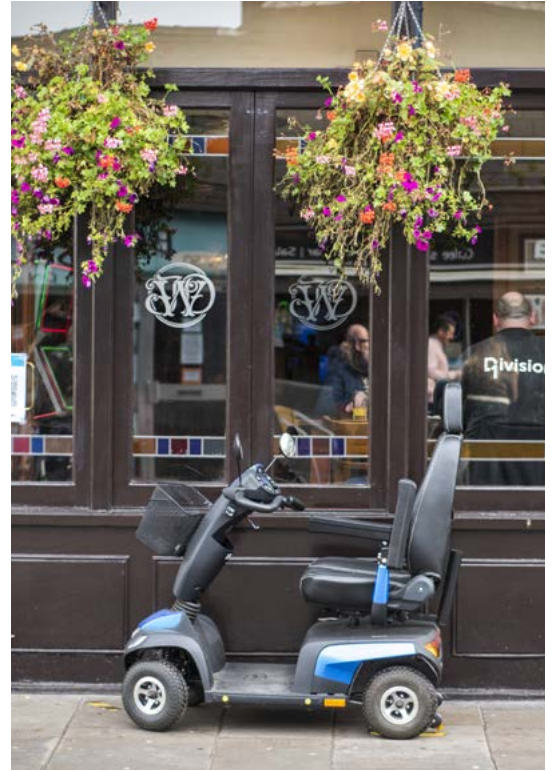
Asylum seekers over the age of 55 are a fast growing group in Leeds. Without entitlement to any public benefits, they rely on charitable organisations and volunteer hosts for the very basic necessities. Even if asylum seekers were of pensionable age they could not access the free bus pass. Maintaining social connections in such circumstances was a challenge, especially when a host's location might be miles away from centres of social activities, like a place of worship or a weekly choir.

Something as simple as a weekly bus pass, plus the confidence to use public transport to get around the city, made a huge difference. LASSN provided passes for asylum seekers, and volunteer hosts supported them to build confidence in traveling independently, leading to a more fulfilling daily life. The project changed people's lives; individuals had been walking for up to two hours to attend support meetings or visit a doctor, and had very few social contacts. LASSN planned to use the proof of concept to make applications for grants to support asylum seekers in this way in future.

For Disability Mobility and the LS27 Club

Originally set up to benefit the residents of one local authority care home in the 1990s, the group realised they could make much better use of their minibuses in the local community. As part of the Time to Shine programme the project set out to develop a social club for LS27 residents aged 50+ who were unable to get out of their homes easily or who were otherwise isolated. They use two fully adapted minibuses and volunteer drivers to enable older isolated people to go out, meet new people, make friends and visit places or do activities they would not normally be able to.

Time to Shine Small Funds enabled them to recruit extra drivers and publicise the club to local people. They were also able to spend some time building relationships with nearby organisations that have been able to use the buses.



Little London Arts Cultural and Social Visits

This was a group set up specifically to offer people a chance to make friends through travel and visits to cultural and natural sites outside the city; places which are impossible to reach without a car. Such visits were much appreciated, providing intellectual stimulation.

The number of people accessing trips improved when they offered two pick-up points, one of which was in the city centre, so easy to get to from buses across the city. The transport was easy to arrange as the group used a local community transport organisation, but was expensive. Trips also took a lot of organisation as many of the venues were not set up to deal with groups of older people. Although trips were very popular and people would be prepared to make a contribution, it seemed unlikely this sort of activity would be viable without grant aid, so when they received a National Lottery Community Fund award to continue at the end of the Time to Shine Small Funds their members were very happy.



What did other Time to Shine projects tell us about transport?

Bollywood Dance

[D Dance Theatre](#) CIC ran this dance project in a village just outside Leeds. This dance project identified one of the keys to the sustainability of the group was the willingness of group members who could drive to pick up other members who could not walk to the venue. They actively promoted this informal system as it also supported the creation of friendships outside the group.

[Lychee Red](#)

is a project involving elders from the Chinese Community. Although the project was initially concerned they might not be accessible for individuals across the city they discovered that there were few barriers to using public transport. Group members expressed that they had always had to travel to socialise as the Chinese community in Leeds was widely spread, and had grown confident using public transport before reaching older age.

[Hamara, Health for All](#)

and other organisations working with older South Asian women have told us accessing transport can be a barrier. There are cultural and confidence barriers which prevent many women from using service buses, and language issues make it hard for them to book the access bus. If they are only able to go out in a taxi they may not have the funds to do this.




Top tips

- The learning from across the range of small projects reinforced the importance of transport in engaging the most socially-isolated older people.
- Remember the person-centred approach - people's needs change over time and they might not want to ask for more help. Review someone's transport needs regularly and offer them options to keep them engaged.
- Consider your local context. A brilliant solution for one organisation might not work elsewhere - if car ownership locally isn't high then a volunteer car-based scheme might not help, if your organisation lacks the capacity to run a minibus - note that it's complicated and expensive and needs to be used a lot to make it worthwhile - then a simpler solution might be the one for you.
- Partners noted the importance of timely transport support and flexibility; discovering that putting in additional support as needs changed could prevent members losing confidence and disengaging from activities.
- Financial restrictions around transport were important for some groups, whether they were unable to access free bus passes, or unable to use public transport for any reason.
- Language and culture could be a barrier to using public transport for some groups, though not all.
- Volunteers, in both formal and informal settings are key to making transport work for older people.
- Look after your volunteer drivers and escorts. It is a responsible role which involves both people and technical skills, and it's easy to overlook the regular commitment they put in. Driver availability is more likely to be a limiting factor than vehicle availability.
- Following both physical illness and Covid restrictions, projects have found they are able to help people become confident walking again if they can offer someone to walk with people initially.

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