



## **Time to Shine Evaluation Interim Report Summary: The Beneficiary Experience**

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### **Introduction**

This document provides a summary of the progress achieved by the Time to Shine programme at the end of its first year, drawing on evidence from 8 face to face interviews, 4 focus groups and 308 survey responses. It also includes information provided by 12 delivery organisations which initially received funding, all of which offered a range of activities aimed at reducing social isolation and loneliness among older people in Leeds. This summary outlines the extent to which beneficiaries feel less isolated, more confident getting involved in their communities, and the extent to which older people are actively involved in the programme. Recommendations for the future are provided, based on the feedback provided. It is important to note that the programme is still in its early stages, and the outcomes from the initial commissioning round will not be fully understood until the end of year two.

### ***Outcome 1: Beneficiaries report that they are less isolated as a result of a project intervention***

Many beneficiaries and volunteers identified loneliness as a chief reason for taking part in Time to Shine, referring to a range of triggers, such as bereavement, retirement, family moving away and being diagnosed with a disability or health condition (survey respondents with a health condition were also assessed as more lonely). Perceptions of loneliness was also linked to 'neighbourliness' and the quality of relationships. It was also viewed as being time and context specific. Whilst the survey respondents appeared fairly socially connected, a larger number reported feelings of emotional loneliness.

Many interviewees said that their loneliness had fallen through taking part in Time to Shine, and all one-to-one interviewees agreed that their social network had increased. The individual projects contributed to this through providing the opportunity to go outside and meet new people, increasing confidence to try new things, providing something to do at the weekend (where projects provided activities at this time), and having additional support. Volunteers valued the support they received to enable them to contribute to something and feel useful.

It was expected that through reducing social isolation and loneliness, people would subsequently experience improvements to their health and well-being. The survey findings suggested this was particularly important for people who experience a disability or health condition, who have reported being less satisfied with life. Whilst we are unable to report on changes to satisfaction with life at this stage, interview respondents were unanimous that participation in Time to Shine made them feel happier, with a few saying it had helped to alleviate their depression, as one put it:

*Getting involved has got rid of my depression, my family live far away and I started to become very tearful, but since joining the project I have made lots of friends and I feel happier.*

Retired volunteers also reported benefitting as it had helped them to retain an identity through continuing to be part of a network, for example:

*It made me feel part of something again, and reminded me that I still had something to give, that I am a part of something and of value to someone*

### **Outcome 2: Project beneficiaries feel confident and able to participate in their communities**

Lack of confidence was viewed as a chief barrier to people getting involved in Time to Shine; for a number of reasons, though disability and bereavement were most frequently referred to. A number of interviewees referred to gaining (or regaining) confidence due to participating in Time To Shine projects. For example, one had lost the confidence to go outside due to problems in using public transport, but getting involved as a volunteer had helped her to overcome this. Others reported gaining confidence to try new things. Involvement in new activities such as storytelling, dance and theatre also created a sense of achievement. A participant involved in the 'More than a Mealtime' project said involvement had given her the confidence to go for a coffee or eat out alone, which she had not ever done before. Others also alluded to an increased confidence in going outside and becoming more involved:

*My outlook on life has changed a bit more. I'm a bit more outgoing I suppose. Now it's a wider world, you know what I mean*

Many felt that getting involved in a Time to Shine project had helped them feel more connected to their community, with one feeling it had given her the confidence to get involved where she previously had not done so:

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

### **Outcome 3: Older people have been actively involved in managing, designing, delivering and evaluating the project**

Alongside the initial design and development stages of Time to Shine, many older people are now involved in project delivery, through volunteering, and the evaluation, through facilitating focus groups in a peer researcher role. The latter has included bilingual peer researchers who supported focus groups containing both Punjabi and Cantonese speaking participants. Volunteers are involved in a range of ways, such as befriending, supporting activities, being part of a steering group, assisting with marketing, or hosting events. Some volunteers were involved on a casual, ad hoc basis, whilst others reported significant involvement at a community level. In fact, it was felt by many focus group participants that Time to Shine could not operate without the contribution of volunteers.

Volunteers who were interviewed or took part in focus groups reported that getting involved in Time to Shine had reduced social isolation and increased confidence and well-being, particularly during a transitional life event, such as the death of a partner or person they previously cared for. One volunteer pointed out that despite her disability, she was enabled to contribute to delivery of the project she was involved with. The importance of ensuring that volunteers and peer researchers are offered ongoing training and support was emphasised to ensure retention, as was the opportunity to socialise, and to give regard to their well-being, particularly as some reported being vulnerable due to loneliness and lack of confidence themselves.

## **Suggestions for the future direction of Time to Shine**

### ***Support hard to engage groups***

- Some projects are using volunteers to visit people at home and encourage them to try new things. Whilst it is acknowledged that this extra layer of support would require significant levels of resourcing, feedback identified this as a necessary engagement tool for some groups, such as those who need encouragement to get outside due to ill health or a lack of confidence following bereavement, or cultural barriers.
- The survey and interview data indicated that men are less likely to engage in a group activity. Feedback suggested that activities need to be specifically tailored toward activities that men are more likely to be interested in, such as practical tasks, or activities which take place in pubs.

### ***Offer activities which are flexible, accessible and take account of cultural needs***

- The prevalence of loneliness at weekends and evenings highlight the need to resource projects that can provide activities at these times, though it is necessary to give regard to accessibility, as some expressed concerns around using public transport at night.
- Whilst the longer-term aim should be to ensure various groups feel more confident approaching mainstream services, for some, having the support of others who share their cultural values is seen as important. It was felt that cultural awareness and understanding may be particularly important when offering emotional support, and some suggested that in order to provide this, some services may need to be targeted at specific segments of the population, particularly where English is not the first language of a beneficiary.
- Whilst feedback identified the importance of both citywide and local projects, some felt that activities cannot just be held in a central place, and need to be available in local communities to maximise involvement. It was viewed that local people could help each other if activities were closeby, generating a community spirit and it was also pointed out that some older people may be reluctant to travel far.
- It is important to ensure that projects build up partnerships at a local level, both to promote activities and ensure a wide range of people are engaged.

### ***Develop intergenerational activities***

- Whilst doing so may be challenging, a common thread across discussions was the importance of ensuring projects engage all ages for a true community approach to be successful. Getting younger people involved was also seen as a way of 'breaking down age barriers' and ensuring older people do not lose sight of current developments.