



# Sunshine in Leeds: supporting the most lonely older people

Time to Shine end of project report  
June 2022



## Summary

The Sunshine In Leeds project was run by Health for All, a Leeds-based community organisation with many years of experience in supporting local people through community activity. Their experience with the BAME Seniors' Network project showed them that many of the most lonely older people found it difficult to leave their homes for physical and mental health reasons.

They aimed to work with a wide demographic including people from African and Eastern European communities who had not been engaged during the first Time to Shine commissioning round.

Sunshine in Leeds set out to find people, taking referrals from family and neighbours and making partnerships with organisations in health, faith and civil society. They started by visiting people in their own homes to find out what they needed or wished to do. They worked with volunteers and staff who spoke community languages and they helped people to get out and about again. Sunshine in Leeds employed an occupational therapist who was able to offer both the staff team and individual beneficiaries help and advice around mobility, self-care and daily tasks. They also offered befriending at home for those who were unable to leave their own homes easily.

The trusted relationships Sunshine in Leeds formed with older people meant they were able to offer support throughout the pandemic. This helped people to regain confidence and slowly re-engage in activities as restrictions eased.

## Sunshine in Leeds in numbers

210 people took part in Sunshine in Leeds between 2018 and 2022, with 204 older people participating regularly.

Demographic data was collected for 181 people, of whom:

- 55% were of White British heritage
- 17% were of Asian / Asian UK heritage
- 11% were of Irish / Irish Traveller / Gypsy / Other White heritage
- 8% were of Eastern European heritage
- 8% were of Black African / Caribbean / Black UK heritage
- 1% were of Other Ethnic heritage
- 26% identified as male

Sunshine in Leeds was supported by 14 older volunteers (aged 50 and older) and 1 younger volunteer (aged under 49) and together they gave 261 hours of their time to support the project

9 case studies and test and learn case studies were written to share the project's learning and experiences

## Ethos

Sunshine In Leeds set out to provide a very practical service that would work with people to help them get out of their homes, and respect that some people would be unable to do this but would still be able to benefit from support. They had previously identified that older people in sheltered housing and some care homes might still be lonely despite the proximity of other older people. The team set out to do group work in those settings as well as work with individuals.

They worked with people from the security of their own homes initially. Those who felt very lonely and isolated really appreciated the befriending service and they were then able to identify those who wished to go out, and help them to do so safely with advice and support from the project's occupational therapist. Sunshine in Leeds staff also took project activities into care homes, where they organised gentle chair-based exercise sessions and the staff facilitated reminiscence sessions.

The team continued to visit a number of people at their homes; people who were having treatment for cancer; with COPD; mental health problems; anxiety; panic attacks; epilepsy and other illnesses. For those older people who wished to go out but chose not to be part of a larger group they offered one-to-one support and a friendly buddy service to take them to local parks for a stroll and a coffee.



# Activities

## Home Visits

Most people who were referred to Sunshine in Leeds received a number of visits at home. This enabled the team to build a bond with the person, to find out what they really wanted to do, and what support they might need to help them achieve this. It really helped new members to engage with the service, and they were often able to help with small tasks which were difficult challenges to some people. They could help with reading or translation, and the occupational therapist was able to make suggestions about equipment they might try. After a few visits staff would try to engage people in visits and activities outside the home, but for some this wasn't possible. In those cases they were able to continue with befriending visits.

*We began with regular phone calls for both befriending and occupational therapy support with everyday things like pacing her activities and sleep advice. Eventually we got to meet in person and began practising going up and down her stairs in order to get outside for some fresh air and a short walk. JH was then introduced to other beneficiaries of the project via a weekly zoom meeting, and later was able to get out further afield and meet these people in real life, on an outing to Roundhay Park.*

*We have seen JH's confidence grow and mobility improve - the support and friendships she has made through SIL have made a positive difference to her life. She keeps up the friendships outside of the project and has made plans to meet up independently.*



## Local supported visits

These included supporting people to go out for coffee, to the shops, the bank, and the gym. They also helped people to arrange GP appointments and helped translate paperwork. People's needs were many and varied. Motivation was often the key to these, and that meant a very person-centred approach as different people had different priorities.

**“Thank you for helping me to join the gym, I go to gym regularly now and my diabetes has improved!”.**

A lady of 106 shared her desire to simply go out for a coffee and cake. Her family visited and provided help with practical things like appointments, but she missed an independent social life and really enjoyed being taken out by a care worker to a shopping centre nearby, to meet the Sunshine in Leeds befriender for a coffee and cake.

## Social Meetings

Sunshine in Leeds started to arrange a number of different social events to offer people the chance to get out and meet some new people. They tried a number of activities but the thing that really took off came to be known as coffee meetings. The format varied a little, sometimes they had meetings at the White Rose Centre (a large shopping mall on the outskirts of Leeds). People could do a little shopping together and meet up for a coffee. The second popular venue was the large lakeside cafe at Roundhay Park, where people really enjoyed meeting there and started to make friends.

They included various 'get-to-know-one-another' activities, such as friendly quizzes as a way of starting conversations (for example, "what was the name of your best friend at school?" and "what were you doing the year this pound coin was produced?"). People also brought poetry and there was also singing for those interested. On one occasion the group used a ball to play a gentle game of catch outside the cafe - using this as a way to get to know more about each other - asking questions such as "what were you doing in 1967?" whilst passing the ball.

Everyone had different abilities and varied in age too. Some chose to go for a short walk around the lake after coffee, whilst others sat on the bench in the sunshine chatting away. The Occupational Therapist had been able to advise and/or assess safer ways of accessing the café from clients' various homes, as well as being able to assist clients mobilising safely where necessary. People made their way there in taxis, using their own transport, and the Access Bus. Each meeting was with a different and varied group of clients. Some people came alone, others brought their spouses, and friendships were sparked!

They also took advantage of the wishes of older people to share their skills. Group members showed others how to knit, make pizza and speak Polish.

**“Thank you for organising activities, It is so nice to meet people from different backgrounds!”**

## Project adaptations following lockdowns and pandemic responses

In the initial stages of the pandemic the Sunshine in Leeds project moved almost entirely to weekly befriending phone calls. Very few of their members had access to or knowledge of digital technology, although some had smartphones which made WhatsApp possible. Staff also did shopping and delivered food parcels to those who were shielding and people enjoyed doorstep chats during delivery. They also helped people to book medical appointments, liaised with adult social care about increasing care arrangements and made referrals to mental health, dietitian and the eating disorder teams.

After this initial emergency response staff were able to offer support and training to help people to get online, with a very popular fortnightly Zoom social group coming together. Now everyone wanted to learn about Zoom but WhatsApp proved very popular with those who just liked to chat.

As restrictions eased some people enjoyed socially-distanced walking on a one-to-one basis in local parks and in the local neighbourhood. The organisation referred some people for weekly food parcels, cooked meals and access to community services.

Sunshine in Leeds also dropped a surprise Christmas gift and card - over 60 altogether - to their members' doorsteps. They felt this was very important for their members as it ensured they felt connected.

They continued to support individuals to access services, particularly those with health problems and language barriers. An example of this is that a client, who had anxiety, asked for an appointment with his doctor. Sunshine In Leeds staff helped him to fill the forms, read letters and contact the surgery. He later said his anxiety has reduced after receiving this support.

During 2021 Sunshine in Leeds worked hard to help people re-engage with activities. Zoom meetings continued for some, with social activity, but also chair-based exercise to increase people's fitness and confidence. They resumed the social gatherings in the café in Roundhay Park and they set up a walking group to encourage people to undertake physical activity. People made real bonds in this group and organised to get together to walk on another day of the week.

Sunshine in Leeds staff offered support to members of the BAME Seniors Network (a previous Time to Shine project). During 2021 the connections made between members in both groups flourished with visits organised and activities shared. Independent friendships grew as a result.



## Legacy

One of the simple changes Sunshine in Leeds has made to Health for All is in asking clients about their preferences, and offering a service accordingly. This means people get the service that suits them best, whether it is home visits, wellbeing calls, befriending calls, buddy service, or a social gathering. They intend to continue this person-centred approach in future projects.

The project made an excellent range of contacts in health and social care during the first two years of activity; these contacts proved invaluable during the pandemic as the team were able to make a range of referrals. These close connections will continue to prove useful to Health for All as they continue with community-based work.

## Learning

Sunshine in Leeds had taken a lot of learning from the work they did with the BAME network members, they were quickly able to set up the model of meeting older people in their own homes, and followed this with the use of small social gatherings.

One of the keys to getting frail older people out of the house is support with transport. Sunshine in Leeds staff found that just providing transport to the door was not sufficient as people lacked the confidence to use it. This was particularly the case where people spoke little English.

- After a failed outing where older people were unable to use the minibus the project re-ran the trip with escort support and people had a great time.
- A Christmas party ran well with support from 8 volunteers from the Co-op who were able to help with transport, providing one-to-one support to get 35 older people onto community buses to take them to and from the event.
- The project gave extra time to pick up older people who were very frail, with a staff member present to help them to get into a taxi.



## Case study: How do you get people to try something new?

Sunshine in Leeds had been put in touch with a Chinese man who lived alone and struggled with ill health. Health for All were able to offer him some help and provide an interpreter.

At one point his neighbours contacted Health for All because they were worried that they had not seen him for a few days.

The Sunshine in Leeds project worker then visited, with a volunteer who was able to speak his language. He didn't open the door although he knew the project worker was coming, despite them knocking a few times. The staff were worried as they had spoken to him recently, so they called emergency service.

The paramedic broke into the house and found the client was lying on the bed upstairs and was very ill. He was taken to the hospital for further treatment, followed up with the hospital adult social care support. Due to the language barrier and low self-esteem, he refused all services despite health professions providing an interpreter, however the Sunshine in Leeds project worker and volunteer continued to offer a door-step well-being check to ensure he was okay and eventually, staff were invited in. It became apparent that he had many other issues, such as large amounts of debt from household bills, letters not being opened, his daily medication had stopped for a few months, and he hadn't had his first Covid jab yet!


Sunshine in Leeds offered a transport service and got his first Covid vaccine. He was able to follow up with the second one and the booster by making arrangements with his local surgery. He was also referred to Leeds Adult Social Care for long-term care needs.

Now he is in safe hands with his family support. He visited the Lychee Red service and was very thankful for the services that have helped him get through a difficult time.

## Contact us

To find out more about Health for All go to <https://www.healthforall.org.uk/>

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