

Brief stories: How Travel Connections is helping older people to tackle loneliness with transport

January 2023



Introduction:

This short report is based on monitoring returns from Travel Connections delivery partners, each working within a particular travel theme. Alongside other data and insight, delivery partners summarised ways in which their interventions helped older people to use transport to connect socially. Finding ways for older people to tackle loneliness with transport is the main aim of the Travel Connections programme.

**Please note that all names have been changed in these stories*

Active Travel theme



Nigel's* story

Nigel is a 74 year old man who cycled all his life. He cycled every day on a 14 mile round trip to work and on a weekend he would put the miles in traveling to York and beyond. He was a member of two clubs and enjoyed packing his tent and camping equipment stored in his bike trailer. When he was 67 Nigel had a spinal operation that compromised his mobility and balance which left him unable to cycle. At our Cycle with Confidence event he was

introduced to a recumbent bike which meant that he can sit down and cycle. He found this amazing as he could cycle comfortably without losing balance. Nigel joined the Wheels 4 Fun cycle group to continue using the recumbent bike regularly. Saturdays are “the best day of the week” now as he gets to cycle. He is building the strength in his legs, losing weight and can feel the benefits health wise. He mentioned that he is looking forward to attending Wheels 4 Fun Christmas Party because “it’s not just about the cycling, it’s also the enjoyment of being part of a social circle and forming new friendships”. Nigel is a proper cyclist; he turns up in all weather and enjoys the social interaction. He has embraced the group and has made new friends. Cycling now not only gives Nigel the ability to cycle again but gives him something to look forward to every week

Cycling with Confidence taster session

The day started with introductions and everyone got to know each other. We asked “when was the last time you cycled?” we found out that two participants had never ridden a bicycle and for most it had been decades since last being on a bike. One person who could pinpoint it to 1952.

Even though these participants' cycling ability was limited the enthusiasm was anything but limited – They couldn’t wait to give it a go. Everyone mounted their chosen cycle and the cycling commenced. The non-cyclists tried cycling for the very first time on three-wheel trike bikes. Cara* stated that she didn’t cycle as a child because she was a girl and that’s how it was in her family. She was thrilled to have - at the age of 79 - finally ridden a bike! The enthusiasm was amazing and smiles were on everyone’s faces – everyone was having so much fun.



Sajid’s* story

Sajid is a retired man in his late 60's. He comes on the walks for social interactions and to be amongst people. "I like to come out and talk, it's a nice thing to do to be around people, better than being sat at home bored.

Community Transport theme

Roy's* story

Roy has been a member since before covid - has a befriender that regularly reports that his mood and general enthusiasm is low. He had no interest in joining an activity 'for old folk' and flatly refused. We asked the befriender to show a video clip of the men having a trip out on the minibus and after a lot of persuasion he decided to give it a go. We promised that if he didn't like the bus or the company his befriender would take him straight home in a taxi. The first pick-up he was very quiet - other than a quick introduction Roy didn't speak to any other men.

We weren't sure he would return but the following week we rang and he was up for a second go. Much to our surprise he had listened to all conversations and came prepared with questions for each person on the bus to start conversations! He was so confident and everyone loved talking to him as he asked so many questions and showed interest in everyone. 8 weeks in he is really enjoying the regular trips out. When his befriender called to ask if he could visit on Friday Roy asked him to change the day as he was going to the RAFA club with a fella he met on the trips.



Sara's* story

Sara has been a member since 2021 and took part in activities online. She started attending Monday walking groups sporadically. She then enquired about our group outings and was worried about attending on her own and not knowing anyone. She was encouraged to attend and did so, after her first outing she began to form friendships with various members, and one particular member has become a

close friend and they now book trips together.

Gloria* and Heather's* story

Gloria and Heather met at our carers Christmas lunch. They both have young adult children with neurodiversity and bonded immediately, discussing common issues and also sharing advice. They have since formed a friendship and contact each other outside of our Travel Connections events, chatting and meeting up. Both said they have valued this new connection.

Reading group outing

One reading group is a mixture of members meeting online and on the phone. Members booked a Christmas outing in our Happy Cab and faces were put to voices. This was the first time they had all met up in person since the group started in 2021.

Taxi theme

Three participants were needing transport to attend a regular activity - each had differing needs including mobility, anxiety and mental health issues. The delivery partner knew that the participants lived near to one another and that the three had become friends within the group. An outreach worker encouraged them to support each other on shared taxi journeys: one reminding the other they were in the car with them and the other supporting with her bag so she could use her stick comfortably. The trio have been traveling together for a few months now and a friendly relationship is forming. The Outreach worker is starting to work with the group to build confidence in making their own arrangements for taxi transport so they can use other services available locally.

Bus theme



Together a group of us planned three bus trips with a feedback session after every trip. The focus group met every Thursday and we decided on the following journeys from our local area: Harrogate, Middleton and Leeds city centre.

The journeys were then compared in terms of timing, accessibility and comfort. In addition to this we also reviewed the bus station and will be providing feedback to West Yorkshire Combined Authority. A joint trip to White Rose was made using the

electric bus. Feedback was provided to First Bus and the Director of White Rose.

One participant said "This is a great project. We have had a lot of fun. It would be great if we could review other forms of transport!"

Travel conversations theme



Ahmed's* story

Since losing his leg in 2017 and becoming wheelchair bound Ahmed stopped using public transport. Then his bus pass expired in 2018 and he didn't think to renew because he didn't know how easy it was to access a bus with a wheelchair and thought he would never use a bus again.

We were able to take him to the Let's Talk Transport event at the White Rose Shopping Centre. He did not know about the 'kneeling buses' for disabled access which means that buses could lower their entrance threshold. He didn't know that there is a pull-out ramp that the driver can use to get the wheelchair onto the bus easily.

The Let's Talk Transport project co-ordinator spoke to Ahmed at length at the event and he asked how he can get his bus pass renewed because this could now mean he could travel on buses again. He told the co-ordinator that he will return to going to the supermarket on the bus, because he did try to get there just using his electric chair but the battery ran out on his way home so he was fearful of going again as it was too far. He also mentioned he would travel outside of his local area, so using buses now means he is able to get out more and this is life changing. Since the event he has now renewed his bus pass and uses the bus. He is also applying for a Companions Pass so that he can take a Carer with him on the bus. The co-ordinator said "Meeting this guy and hearing how that day may have changed his life for the better, is the reason why I do my job. 😊"

Person-centred support

Ashley's* story

Ashley was extremely lonely due to months of isolation post covid that had caused severe anxiety and a lack of confidence to go outside alone. They wished to attend an activity but needed support to facilitate. Over a period of 6 weeks, the community connector spent time with Ashley working out a plan of action - first they watched a video of our group, then they joined a quiz via Zoom. The next step was physically attending - the connector arranged a taxi and met Ashley at home to travel with them. On the return journey we introduced another member who lived nearby and the three travelled together. The following week the connector arranged for the two to travel together and then met them when they arrived at the group for

reassurance. The hope is for Ashely to be able/confident to book and take transport independently. Plans are in place for shared transport for the next few weeks.

Digital Inclusion



Shabana's* story

Shabana had very few digital skills and explained that ringing up taxi companies to get places was quite challenging, sometimes they wouldn't pick up the phone. We helped her download apps for two taxi firms onto her phone, showed her how to search for a destination and save a destination so that she could use the app going forward. We helped her add her payment details securely.

She booked her first taxi and loved that she could see the time it would arrive and watch it coming around the corner. It meant she could stay indoors until it was just pulling up outside which made such a difference rather than standing out in the cold.

Shabana is attending the digital support sessions to keep developing her skills and confidence and is now sharing her skills with others showing them how to use the taxi apps. She said "I used to feel anxious waiting for a taxi, having called and 15 minutes later it's still not on its way. Being able to use the taxi app means I can see my taxi is coming rather than waiting and wondering. It's great, I didn't think I'd be able to use the app but with help it's been really simple"

Thanks to The Conservation Volunteers, Cross Gates and District Good Neighbours' Scheme, Leeds Older People's Forum and Feel Good Factor for sharing the photos in this report.

