

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

## April 2023



### **Introduction:**

This short report is based on monitoring returns from Travel Connections delivery partners (January to March 2023), 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**

#### **COWS walking group**

The Carry On Walking group (COWS) was an established walking group but the organisation lost the funding to continue so the group had to go at it independently. Without the staff support they were worried they would have to cancel the group. Thanks to The Great Outdoors project they have had walk leader training and confidence building and are successfully running their own walking group every Tuesday.

## Heather's story\*



Heather cares for her spouse who suffered a large stroke 16 years ago. They felt unable to join in social groups as they felt they had nothing in common with others. Heather joined a Carers' Walk and Talk group and she said that she felt 'young again' being able to exercise with a group of similar-minded people who did not have to explain their circumstances to each other. Heather has never received support for her Carers situation in 16 years, only medical care for her spouse. Through group interaction Heather has realised that she is entitled to support and feels she

may pursue this to enable her to join more groups. When she first joined she said she felt desperately lonely, but did not think there was any alternative. Heather now feels she has the option of socialising more and has already made more connections.

### **Here are two more quotes from Walk and Talk participants at Carers Connecting:**

"Just had my first walk with Cinzia and the ladies. It was great and it makes me feel like there is not only me in this situation. I would love the company of the ladies again, I hope Carers Leeds can continue this service. Many thanks for all your help. My doctor and my friend told me about your service and I feel this will be helpful to me."

"... it was absolutely incredible the whole experience. I can't thank you enough. The last year has been not only tough but very isolating as it's difficult to burden other people with challenges that we face as carers. But what was so lovely was meeting others and speaking to another carer, and immediately we connected and have similar circumstances with our caring. In fact, it felt as though we've known each other for years so I am truly grateful for everything and really really thankful for all that you do. It's incredible."

### **Frida\* and Harold's\* story about attending Senior Spin indoor cycling classes**

A married couple enquired about joining Senior Spin. Frida called and she disclosed that her husband had a very severe stroke a number of years ago which has left him with dementia. She wanted Harold to have a go at cycling as he used to be very active (played professional rugby league) and she thought that sitting on a bike would help to strengthen his leg muscles to aid walking. Frida mentioned that due to her husband's dementia it was very difficult for him to do any exercise classes due to having to follow routines and his poor mobility. Harold had received NHS physio but had long been discharged as they felt his progress was limited.

We agreed that they would come to the first session to see how things went. I met Harold and he was quite a character! We chatted about rugby and cycling and although he struggled with

some conversation his long term memory was still recalling information. I spoke to Frida and it was clear that she had a significant caring role for her husband.

Once on the bike Harold was very happy peddling away and even standing up and peddling. Frida was next to him and for 30 minutes he was no different than anyone else in the class.

I rang Frida afterwards to check everything was ok and she said it was good to do something alongside Harold rather than doing something for him. It also gave her a lift as she enjoyed the exercise and music. I enquired about the support she has and mentioned her local Neighbourhood Network Scheme. I asked if she would like me to pass on their details and someone would contact them about their support and service. Frida agreed and by the following week the couple had received a visit from staff at Cross Gates and District Good Neighbours and had signed up to attend some events. The following week I spoke to the couple and they had attended one of the meal events with Crossgates and Harold loved it.

Due to the complexity of Harold's brain injury left by the stroke he shouts out but doesn't have a filter as to what he says. Frida kept apologising. I asked if it would help if I told the group about Harold's condition then she wouldn't need to feel she had to apologise as it wasn't necessary. Frida said it would be better then she didn't have to worry, so at the start of the next session I explained why Harold shouts out. Everyone embraced Harold's dementia and now attendees make a point of engaging with him before and after class. Every week the couple have come along and have never missed a session.

## **Community Transport theme**

### **Sara's\* story**

Sara recently joined her local Neighbourhood Network Scheme after the death of her husband. She felt lonely and had been encouraged to join so she started attending drop-in coffee mornings. Through other members' recommendations she booked a Shared Outing. Sara was very anxious about being alone, however within an hour she was chatting to different people and had a genuine smile on her face. She expressed how much she felt part of a group and has attended numerous outings since. Sara is now a regular member on our outings.

### **Raj's\* story**

Raj attends every session and states it's the one thing he looks forward to every week - he wishes it could be every day. He has made good friends with two others and they are planning to meet up outside the group for a game of cards - just looking for a 4th fella now!

## Ray's\* story



Ray joined his local Neighbourhood Network Scheme in February 2022 and has been a regular attender of Tuesday drop in coffee mornings. He is living alone as his wife is currently in care.

Ray has recently had to give up his car due to health problems and a recommendation from his GP. He started taking part in Shared Outings on the men only trips but was reluctant at first to attend trips due to medical problems and self-confidence. However, over the last few months Ray has accessed a number of trips for men only. He struggled to make conversation with unfamiliar people, however, due to accessing the men-only trips, he has gained confidence with the men who regularly attend the outings. He has now built a friendship with a particular member who also goes on some of the outings.

## Gloria's\* story

Gloria has been a member for some time and attends some groups. She started joining Shared Outings back in June 2022. Gloria has mobility issues along with other long term health problems which limits her capabilities and restricts her access to social gatherings. Due to having the minibus and the facility to pick up and drop off from home, along with the space for either a walker or a wheelchair, Gloria attends trips on a monthly basis. She enjoys being able to attend various trips including exhibitions, meals out and garden centres.

## Ani's\* story

Ani lives in an area where the bus only runs every hour. Unfortunately if the bus misses this has stopped her from attending appointments or taking part in our activities. Her poor mobility and hearing difficulties make it difficult for her to cross busy roads safely.

The access bus has been a lifeline for Ani as she is now able to come and see friends and get the support she requires, as she is caring for her husband who has dementia and heart problems.

Without being able to attend these groups her mental, emotional and physical health and wellbeing have been severely affected. The access bus is the only way Ani has been able to access practical support and the friendship that she needed.

## Lillian's\* story

I booked a Happy Cab trip for Lillian and her neighbour as Lillian had not socialised for a while since her husband had passed away. Lillian felt intimidated by large groups and these two ladies did not know where they wanted to go except for a meal out. Between us all we arranged a mystery trip and I invited a couple of other members to join in. They chose their destination from 3 sealed envelopes - when this was explained to them beforehand they all seemed quite excited. So on the day our driver picked them all up and gave them the envelopes, they ended up in Queensbury for the garden centre, café and bakery. The ladies hit it off together and were chatting and laughing continuously from start to finish and even went to a micro pub (not planned) on the way back! The atmosphere in the Happy Cab was infectious and Lillian totally enjoyed herself and can't wait to book the next trip.

## Pat's\* story



Pat has always enjoyed our trips, but she had found a carvery place that also did bingo and a bit of a dance. Pat enjoyed it so much that she actively encouraged more new members to use the Happy Cab so they could all attend. The group became too big for the Happy Cab and moved onto using a minibus.

## Benny's\* story

Benny was invited to attend our men's outings after a recent bereavement - he has received lots of one-to-one support through our outreach but was nervous about coming to the group. He said "everyone made me feel welcome and there are others there who have lost their wives too so are in the same boat and understand."

## Taxi theme

## Jonty's\* story

Jonty has a place in a popular social group but there is no room for him on the regular minibus transport. We are supporting Jonty to attend using a shared taxi although he states he would prefer the bus because of the camaraderie onboard. However, he is grateful that he doesn't

have to wait around and using another form of transport has allowed him to access the group. Jonty said “the idea of sharing a taxi means I have another person to talk to on the journey.”

### Trisha’s\* story



Trisha was anxious about joining a group and being on a busy bus - we supported by offering a meet-up with a community connector who met Trisha at home and then got a taxi with her to the group. The community connector introduced Trisha to a number of members and supported their initial conversations. Trisha now shares a taxi with another participant and attends regularly. She said she would not have come without that support as she would have hated walking into a bus/room full of unknown people.

### Bus theme

#### Group outings using public transport

A group of our members meet monthly and they pick a well-known public house chain to visit out of their local area for lunch and a spot of shopping. This has enabled them to be more active and social and has helped with isolation and their wellbeing. The ladies feel safer using the public transport due to them being together in a small group. One said that they "felt like schoolgirls again sat at the back of the bus having a giggle".

Another group visited Whitby even though it is a long bus journey from Leeds. With the cost of energy bills rising it was a fun way of being out for the day and not incurring heating charges at home. The group enjoyed having fish & chips at the seaside with a group of friends.

### Travel conversations theme

“I attended the discussion at my local drop-in to discuss transport over a cup of tea, just to have a moan about things. However, it was good to find out that there were other things going on locally and I signed up for a couple of local trips that I didn't know about”.



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