



Evaluation of Age Better in Sheffield: Key Findings Summary (2015-18)

March 2019

Age Better in Sheffield (ABiS) is a six year £6 million investment by the National Lottery Community Fund to reduce isolation and loneliness amongst older people in the City. It is being led by South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) and delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector, public sector, and older people across the City. This report summarises the key evaluation findings for the first three years of the project (April 2015 - June 2018).

“ I’ve discovered that there’s another way to look at life and I don’t have to be everybody’s carer and I don’t have to take on everybody else’s problems all the time, which is what I’d been doing all the time. ”

What is the reach of Age Better in Sheffield?

The project has reached a wide range of older people from across the City. Overall, 2,865 people engaged with at least one of the project’s commissioned services between 2015-2018. The evaluation findings show that a significant proportion of these participants had experienced high levels of loneliness and isolation: more than a quarter (26 per cent) were classified amongst the

‘most lonely’¹ and almost three-fifths (59 per cent) reported high levels of loneliness. This is much higher than the wider population of older people in ‘hot spot’ areas being targeted across the City. Also, participants tend to report lower levels of health and wellbeing than the general population.

Have there been any outcomes for Age Better in Sheffield participants?

The early signs are positive. Levels of loneliness had reduced for nearly half of participants (45 per cent) six months after first engaging with the project, with levels of ‘emotional’ loneliness reducing by a greater amount than levels of ‘social’ loneliness. Also, two-thirds of participants (67 per cent) reported improved mental wellbeing with less than a quarter (23 per cent) reporting a reduction.

“ I took part in something called start up your own group through Ignite Imagination and I think it’s all under Age Better Sheffield. I arranged for a group of ladies from different ethnic backgrounds, 50+, and we went out for a meal...we just talked about our experiences, background and we just had a lovely day out, it was just one off, it didn’t have to be a long term thing. ”

¹ According to the De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale.

² Emotional loneliness is defined as when you miss an “intimate relationship”. Social loneliness is defined as when you miss a wider “social network”.

“ I think it was confidence building really because [Counsellor] always seemed to understand and appreciate the work I was putting in and the hours I was putting in, she was only reflecting back what I said but she made me see how determined I am, how organised I am, which I never really thought of. ”

What factors are associated with outcome change?

Exploratory analysis indicates that:

- Gender was associated with loneliness outcomes, with females more likely to report a reduction than males.
- People with caring responsibilities were more likely to experience positive outcomes in terms of loneliness and isolation, and wellbeing, compared with non-carers.
- Outcomes for some participants may be 'harder to shift': people with disabilities were less likely to report reductions in loneliness than healthier people; and fewer people in deprived areas reported reduced loneliness and improved wellbeing than people in better-off areas of the city.

“ For me, I know it's only once a week, but I look forward to coming cos that 50 minutes is somewhere I can just relax, let my feelings out and talk about things that I couldn't really mention to anybody else, or wouldn't feel comfortable mentioning. You've got friends, you might talk about things but it's that trust, you know it's confidential. ”

What do participants say about their experiences of Age Better in Sheffield?

The Evaluation Team has supported peer-researchers to undertake qualitative research into people's experiences of engaging with the project and its various funded interventions. A range of quotes from that research are interspersed throughout this report. The findings from this research support and provide added depth to the quantitative findings. Collectively, this research has demonstrated the success of the project in addressing people's isolation through opportunities

to develop social contacts and social networks, including building the confidence to get out of the house in the first place. Participants have also talked about how taking part in Age Better activities has positively affected their wellbeing by providing them with a sense of purpose.

The qualitative research has also highlighted the importance of the project for people at a very low ebb. A number of participants the peer-researchers spoke to had become isolated as a result of trauma and bereavement, mental health breakdown, or their roles as carers, and these participants told us how the project had been instrumental in their efforts to rebuild their emotional health.

“ From the Circles Friendship Group...I do things now. I go to a reading group once a month, like a book group called Bookworms, run by U3A...I go to a social café on Monday mornings and see people there regularly and have lunch there and chat...and Thursdays I go to Slimming World Club. ”

What next for the evaluation of Age Better in Sheffield?

The focus for the remainder of the evaluation, which runs until 2021, will be twofold. First, it will seek to gather a more in-depth understanding of older people's experiences of isolation and loneliness, and the contribution the project has made to outcomes for people in a range of different circumstances. This will involve further quantitative analysis of survey data alongside additional qualitative research with a wider range of project participants. Second, it will explore and identify lessons from the project's approach to co-production, something that has been a defining feature of the project. This programme of evaluation activity has been co-designed with the Age Better in Sheffield Team and Core Partners to help shape the legacy of the programme.

“ I think I still look old to people, I live on a council estate, so I think I'm put in that box, people see me as a certain type of person. But what's changed radically is the way I see myself, it's given me confidence to live the rest of my life in the way that I want and they can think what they want. ”

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