

Evaluation of Age Better in Sheffield

Third annual report: Peer Research

September 2018



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Author(s):

Mohan Babu

Nadia Bashir

Ellen Bennett

Maxine Darwin

Josie Porter

Sue Wood

With Aletheia Gentle and Rachel Needham from South Yorkshire Housing Association

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Executive Summary

Age Better in Sheffield (ABIS) is a six year £6 million investment by the Big Lottery 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 presents the findings from the peer research which has taken place throughout 2018.

The research conducted in 2018 took the form of deep dive case studies exploring two Age Better programme funded schemes: Sheffield Mind Wellbeing Practitioners and Ignite Imaginations Start Up. Peer researchers were involved in designing research tools, conducting the research, analysing the data and contributing to the report writing process.

The deep dive research revealed that awareness of 'Age Better' varied. Some customers had heard about the programme, though word-of-mouth, or via written publicity, whilst others had little or no knowledge. This latter group identified with a particular scheme, and weren't aware of the links to the overarching programme.

With regard to the Wellbeing Practitioner Scheme:

- Customers had found out about the scheme through various sources, such as their G.P., Age UK and Community Support Officers. Others self-referred without prior knowledge of the Age Better funded scheme, but due to their knowledge of Sheffield Mind as a mental health organisation.
- Most participants had become isolated as a result of trauma and bereavement, mental health break down, or their roles as carers. The services they received through the scheme had helped these participants address their social and emotional isolation. In some cases this had led to 'getting out and about', but for others this was more about enabling them to manage their emotional health. An important reflection was that isolation and loneliness isn't always improved by being out of the home.
- Suggested improvements included shorter waiting periods prior to accessing the scheme (although a number of participants were pleased with the speed with which they gained access) and more thought to the phasing out of support.
- There is evidence that participants' involvement in the Wellbeing Practitioner scheme has sometimes led to them going on to access other opportunities, such as volunteering, mentoring and taking up other Age Better provision.

With regard to the event funded through Ignite Imaginations Start Up:

- The isolation experienced by older people and people with disabilities was addressed by the 'Remember When singing event'. They increased their social contact and the event gave them something to look forward to.
- Event attendees learnt about other opportunities for social outings and activities whilst at the event.

- Accounts revealed that the event had a positive impact on the wellbeing of the attendees. Feelings of 'happiness' were shared. Further, the health impacts were evident in the number of people stating that they welcomed the healthy food provided at the event.
- The funding process was described as onerous and there were suggestions for improvements.

Introduction

This report brings together the findings from the research conducted by Age Better Peer Researchers, researchers from Sheffield Hallam University and with some input from staff from South Yorkshire Housing Association (collectively referred to as the 'research team'). The research was conducted between June and September 2018, and involved research into two Age Better programme funded schemes: Sheffield Mind Wellbeing Practitioners and Ignite Imaginations Start Up.

The following themes were explored with Age Better participants:

- Awareness and promotion of Age Better
- People's pathways into and through Age Better
- People's motivations and aspirations for getting involved with Age Better
- Whether Age Better has challenged perceptions of ageing
- Have people had their say in the development of Age Better
- Successes and positive outcomes
- Barriers to getting involved
- How the programme might be improved
- Project specific themes

Within this report, data in the form of direct quotes are used wherever possible, in order to share the voices of those that took part in the evaluation activities. In order to protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms have been used. However, where the participant is a staff member, we have labelled these quotes as 'staff member'.

Methods

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Peer research has been at the heart of the qualitative evaluation activities and has enriched the research process. The wide ranging benefits of peer research have been recognised for some time (Garnett et al, 2009). These include the opportunities for co-learning, the equal contribution between 'professional' and peer researchers and the empowering impact on individuals (Minkler, 2002). It has enabled members of the community to help to shape, and indeed start to take a lead, on aspects of the research.

The research conducted in 2018 enabled the research team to gain a detailed understanding of the two Age Better schemes. In order to do this, a new approach to the qualitative work was adopted, based on learning from previous cycles of research. Research in previous years was conducted with participants and volunteers from across various Age Better schemes. Although this approach enabled the evaluation to draw on a broad range of experiences, it didn't allow us as a research team to build an in-depth picture of particular schemes funded by the Age Better Programme.

Deep dive research relies on using several research methods to develop a detailed understanding of a particular scheme. This involved the following:

- Face-to-face in-depth interviews with participants, volunteers and staff from funded schemes.
- Short snap shot discussions with Age Better participants during an activity/event.
- A focus group with participants.
- Participant observation.

SYHA identified the two schemes within which the research team conducted the deep dives. A manager from each scheme helped to arrange the visits and schedule of research activities. However, in one case a peer researcher initiated an additional strand of the deep dive, by proposing that members of the research team attend a scheme event (the Remember When singing event).

The peer researchers that engaged in the deep dive research had undertaken the researcher training in previous years, and had chosen to remain engaged in the research. One volunteer joined the research team, supporting the research through shadowing interviews and focus groups, and participating in analysis activities.

In order to conduct the deep dive research, the peer researchers engaged in further training on both focus groups and participant observation, which enabled them to develop their research skills and build on their experience from previous years.

The in-depth interviews were conducted with 3 service users, 1 volunteer and 2 staff members. Snap-shot discussions were held with 5 service users. All interviews were conducted by peer researchers and CRESR researchers.

The focus group comprised five participants; two females and three males, aged between 53 and 62. They live in various areas of Sheffield: Firth Park, Mosborough, Norfolk Park, Shirecliffe and Crosspool. Reasons for accessing the scheme ranged from bereavement, mental breakdown due to relationship breakdown, and depression due to isolation.

The focus group was facilitated by a peer researcher, a CRESR researcher and supported by an Age Better volunteer. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to starting the focus group discussion. Analysis by a group of peer researchers, one volunteer, CRESR researchers and SYHA staff involved identifying and writing around the emerging themes.

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Process of Analysis

We used the same process of analysis as last year, which was interactive. Researchers first discussed what they thought the key themes were. They then read the transcripts and cut out any extracts of data that fitted under the identified themes. This data was then collated under the relevant themes [see examples below]. Any additional/new themes which emerged were discussed and gathered. The feedback from the peer researchers was that this approach was easier to engage with. This year, the researchers also wrote sections of the final report. As a result, there is an appetite to do more analytical writing in the future.

In the analysis presented below, all participants have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.

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Presenting the deep dives: Wellbeing Practitioners

Outline of the scheme

Wellbeing Practitioners is a scheme which offers Age Better participants intensive counselling. The service is delivered by professional counsellors at Sheffield Mind. The service is flexible in terms of where the counselling sessions take place, acknowledging that some people feel most comfortable meeting the counsellor in their home, particularly early on in the scheme. Another strand of this service is the referral to Mind's Art Therapy group.

The Research

The deep dive into the Wellbeing Practitioners scheme involved:

- Participant observation at Sheffield Mind;
- 4 in-depth qualitative interviews with clients and staff;
- 1 focus group with 7 Wellbeing Practitioners clients.

These various methods allowed the research team to piece together a detailed project case study which is presented next.

Findings

Participant Observation

When the research team visited Sheffield Mind, we conducted a participant observation of the communal reception and waiting area. This helps us to build a picture of the setting and ambiance.

The Mind centre is bright and welcoming, with staff greeting visitors at the reception desk, and often offering refreshments such as a cup of tea whilst they waited. The atmosphere when entering the building is welcoming and relaxing. There are a number of physical features which support this, such as music playing, different seating areas with comfortable chairs, books available to borrow and plants throughout the communal space. There are lots of pictures and information posters on the walls, which along with the bright colour scheme, support a stimulating but relaxed atmosphere. Members of the researcher team described the atmosphere as calm, peaceful and optimistic.

Interview research with participants and staff of Wellbeing Practitioners

The research team asked participants a series of questions covering the Age Better scheme process, participants' awareness and understanding of Age Better, and their experience of the individual scheme. The findings are discussed next in turn.

Age Better processes

At the outset of the programme, there was a process involved in adapting the established approach Mind took to delivering its counselling service. In the main, the difference was how to incorporate the additional client questionnaire into the process. A staff member reflected that this was an initial barrier, as staff felt that it delayed getting into the actual service that clients needed. However, as the service has become more established, this staff member suggested that they now recognised the benefit of this additional step, and incorporates it into the scheme well. It has been important for staff to understand the significance of the questionnaire, and then to communicate that to the clients.

Promotion

Mind has tried a number of different methods of promoting the scheme, including leaflets and promoting the scheme through G.P. surgeries. The promotion that has really been effective has been the Community Support Workers learning about the programme, and then promoting it through their work:

"What's been successful in the last year is the community support workers who are out in the properties, going to see people who are socially isolated, in the sheltered housing, that type of thing. Over time they've become more aware of our existence and some of the successes we've had, they then start thinking this might be able to help this person, I'll refer them in." (Staff)

Also, a very powerful promotional approach is when clients, or usually ex-clients, share their experiences. Many have become ambassadors for the programme:

"We've been incredibly grateful to clients, they've talked on the radio about their experiences, to ask a client to go and talk about their experiences you'd think it would be 'oh no, no' but they want to cos they want to share the value they've had and for it to carry on, so that's been very useful." (Staff)

As the programme has progressed, Mind has seen a growing number of its clients referred, or self-refer, directly because of the Age Better programme, whereas in the early stages of the programme, very few people had heard of Age Better, and it was Mind that 'allocated' those participants who met the programme criteria onto the Age Better-funded scheme.

How did people hear about the Age Better Programme?

When we asked participants how they had heard about the scheme, responses varied. Some hadn't heard of it before proactively contacting Mind, and then being referred onto the Age Better scheme because of their age. For example, one participant we spoke to, Gill, hadn't heard of the programme before accessing the service at Mind. She initiated the referral herself, by calling Social Services, and asking for support. They then referred her to Mind, and she referred consistently to the service at Mind and in particular her counsellor.

Some participants that we spoke to didn't really know anything about Age Better. For example, Alex wasn't aware of the Age Better, or that the service that she was

receiving had been funded through the programme. She conveyed a strong identification with 'Mind', saying:

"I wasn't aware of anything apart from Mind, I knew Mind, I thought they'll have an idea what to do next, so it was the name Mind, it wasn't about the project, it was about Mind." (Alex)

What did people know about the Age Better Programme?

When we asked people whether they knew about the Age Better programme, responses varied. A number of people stated that they hadn't really heard about the programme at all, whereas some had heard the name but didn't know anything about the details.

One participant, Liz, explained that she had heard of Age Better but didn't "*know much about the details*" of the programme, and how it related to Sheffield Mind. It appears that her therapist had provided information about the programme at the outset of the scheme, but she hadn't necessarily absorbed the information:

"I have heard of it and I've seen it on leaflets. I think my therapist mentioned it to me, but that's all I know" (Liz).

She reiterated that her priority was to improve her emotional wellbeing through the counselling and therefore any information about other Age Better schemes and activities were not at the forefront of her mind and were unlikely to be taken up when she initially accessed Mind.

As we have found in previous stages within the evaluation process, participants seem to have a limited awareness of Age Better itself, but do identify very strongly with the individual scheme they are involved with, and often a key person (whether staff member or volunteer) that they work with. Our research within the Wellbeing Practitioner scheme would confirm that this is still the case.

One participant with a thorough understanding commented,

"I think some of the funding comes from the lottery and it's about getting people out of their isolation, getting people out more, meet others and improve their whole wellbeing".

Whereas other participants' comments included, "I don't know much about Age Better" and "*In terms of Age Better getting the message out there, to be honest I think this is the first time I've come across it today. But then maybe that's cos I don't think I'm elderly*".

Of note, those in their 50s and 60s do not necessarily perceive themselves as old and therefore might not have engaged with any Age Better publicity, hence their limited awareness of the programme.

Further to this, there were a few cases where participants conveyed a lack of awareness of the criteria for accessing the programme, in one instance a participant told us: "*I think it's almost shocking that my G.P. didn't say 'over 50, here's a programme you can get on almost immediately'*".

Clearly, where there was direct experience of accessing Age Better funding for events and activities, there was increased understanding of the programme:

"I took part in something called 'start up your own group' through Ignite Imagination and I think it's all under Age Better Sheffield."

A number of participants showed some awareness of the Age Better programme and how it was funded, whereas others' statements revealed that the source of funding for the programme wasn't completely clear: *"it's a scheme funded by the council I think and some of the funding also comes from the lottery"*.

Pathways into and through the programme

Participants were made aware of the Mind Wellbeing Practitioners service via a number of agencies, including Age UK, the Job Centre and Mind. Two participants self-referred. Referral was often after a mental health crisis or long term illness, for example, a participant reported having *"a mental breakdown"*.

A female participant reported that she had managed to access counselling during difficult times, as soon as she had needed it and did not have to be on a waiting list - *"I self-referred myself and within a week they phoned me and got me in for an assessment"*. Some participants had previously sought help from a G.P/NHS but found the long wait for an appointment unacceptable:

"...once someone's made a decision 'I need help', 2 or 4 months down the line is too late".

Pete had a mental breakdown due to his relationship falling apart. After a long wait for support from the NHS he contacted Mind and got an appointment immediately. He reported, *"three months down the line I ended up phoning Mind and got in straight away which was a saving grace really"*. He stated that their quick response prevented him from taking his own life.

Individuals were initially referred to Mind for counselling/mentoring usually on a one-to-one basis. In a few cases they went on to take part in the Age Better projects as either participants or volunteers supporting others with similar experiences. For example, a female participant became a volunteer for Mind: *"I opted in to become a volunteer which has been enlightening; it's just beyond imagination how much I got out of it when I became a volunteer"*.

Elsa found out about the Wellbeing Practitioners service from Age UK. She spoke about her isolation when caring for her husband who passed away and that she had contemplated suicide:

"I came to Sheffield Mind through Age UK. I'd lost my husband, I'd looked after him for over 10 years, I was at home 24/7 for that 10 years, I only saw my two daughters, all friends and rest of family wouldn't come to see us and we couldn't get out to see them".

David started with group therapy but that didn't work for him, he explained, *"sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't depending on who the people are and whether you feel you can talk"*. Although he persevered, he realised that group therapy wasn't for him. In response to his needs, Mind referred him for one-to-one counselling within their service. In David's view, *"there was an understanding and scope for tailoring to my needs"*.

What did people hope to get out of the activity/project?

We asked people what their aspirations had been when deciding to engage in a funded scheme. The responses we received varied, but a key theme was that someone had experienced a traumatic experience, which they felt had triggered their feelings of isolation, and it was this that had led people to seek help. Participants often wanted to tell us the story of their journey, and this trauma was often the starting point. A number of their stories are presented below:

One participant (Alex) is 69 years old and lives with her husband. She was made redundant and around the same time experienced major bereavement through losing a number of close family and friends over a short period time. This is when she accessed the Wellbeing Practitioner service, explaining that "*I could feel myself getting very depressed and eventually went to the doctor*". She was prescribed medication and referred to a counselling service, but the counselling relationship broke down. In despair, she made contact with Sheffield Mind herself, having seen information on the Mind website. However, she was informed that there was a waiting list: "*they said ok but we have got a waiting list, it'll be a few months, and my heart sank*". Eventually, in March 2017 she accessed 'Mind' for one-to-one counselling for the duration of 24 weeks.

This participant's isolation occurred as a result of the major trauma of losing loved ones:

"I think the isolation was to do with the grief, my mother and brother had suddenly died, my mum's sister who was like a second mother to me and the week before my mother died my best friend died, pneumonia, just died, and I didn't have time to process any of that before it was onto the next one and the next one. I was completely knocked for six, it was like a grenade had gone off I think." (Alex)

The isolation triggered by the trauma had a significant impact on her mental health and prevented her from getting out and about:

I So that was the thing that was stopping you getting out and about?

R Yeah my world had really shrunk down, it's hard to find the words to describe that you can't, I don't know whether it's that you haven't got the energy, it's a big energy zapper, so for a start you haven't got the energy to do things, you haven't got the desire, you don't actually enjoy anything so the only thing that's left is to kind of stay put and find things that might soothe you like reading a book, so gradually it shrinks down and that spark of just being seems to disappear somewhere.

A second participant (Gill) was socially isolated due to family moving abroad, and limited friendships locally. She had suffered from traumatic experiences, and had become very lonely as a result, "*I hadn't done anything for all those years cos I put a steel wall around myself*". This participant self-referred at the point when she felt that she could no longer cope with her complex and traumatic home life, but she talked about her initial self-referral as a need to 'report' her problematic situation. She didn't therefore refer to what she had expected, but rather that she had reached a point where she needed help.

Another participant (Liz) is a 53 year old, living with her partner in Sheffield. Her job as a care worker is demanding and requires working anti-social hours which can sometimes make it difficult for her to see family and friends, and, restricts the activities that she can participate in. She goes to the gym, does yoga, Pilates, and Boxercise; all of this is to keep as busy as possible. This participant's anxiety is related to bereavement and a sense of isolation in that she hasn't had anyone (appropriate or whom she can trust) to talk to about her feelings over the course of her life:

"I have had a bit of a rough background; I've had a lot of loss in my life when I've been very young. I've never been able to grieve properly...I think I've held things in for so long and not been able to... I've just been on autopilot for so many years and I think a lot of that's caused my anxiety cos I've not been able

to get it out cos I haven't had family members to talk to really, lost my mum and dad when I were young" (Liz).

Liz "self-referred" to the 'Mind' service at the end of summer in 2017 and was able to see a Counsellor for one-to-one weekly (50 minutes) support quickly. At the time of her interview she was approaching the end of Counselling sessions (with 2-3 remaining) but would've liked to have continued to receive this support.

Has the Age Better scheme helped people be more in touch with others?

When we asked this question, responses varied. Whilst some people felt that the scheme had supported them to make more social connections, a number of people reflected that they hadn't necessarily been in touch with more people, but that this wasn't really their focus. The extracts below illustrate the range of responses that we received.

One participant (Alex) reflected on the cause of her feelings of isolation, describing them as being irrespective of the company of family members (her husband and children). Here, isolation wasn't as a result of old age, infirmity, or a lack of social contact, it was felt as a result of mental ill health:

"I would think that and think how can I possibly feel isolated, and almost feel guilty, I was valuing my husband, my children, my grandchildren, but why aren't I valuing them so much that I don't feel isolated. I did feel isolated even though I had all that, and I'd feel guilty cos there are people who've got no family, how the hell do they feel, I've no right to feel like this, and that just got me worse and worse".(Alex)

This was reinforced in Liz's account, in that isolation can result from different causes, including mental ill health. Liz has both family and friends but felt unable to share her experiences with them. It was only during the counselling session that she could relax, having developed adequate trust to open up:

"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." (Liz)

The counselling has been provided in a "welcoming" environment encouraging Liz to "talk about things a lot more" and there is some evidence to suggest that her improved mental well-being has helped her to better engage with people.

The service Gill has been receiving at Sheffield Mind has helped her to develop the skills and confidence to engage further in wider activities, and pursue friendships. This represents a shift for Gill, she does now recognise that this is important to her, and is finding ways of establishing friendships.

For some participants isolation was the cause of their mental health and for others the experience of isolation during a crisis (not having anyone to talk to) was the cause of mental health. This is evidenced in Pete's account:

"basically all my friends and social group had all moved to Australia or New Zealand and we Skype but not having anyone to talk to one to one who'd known me for 20 years there was no-one to talk to, my wife had stopped communicating with me, felt a bit isolated, well completely isolated and very worthless and if it had not been for Mind stepping in I don't know where I would have gone".

As mentioned earlier, the Mind counselling prevented Pete from committing suicide. He explained that the 30 sessions of counselling were "fantastic, amazing".

The respondents appreciated their access to various positive activities and opportunities, and that the Age Better programme had helped them to alleviate their loneliness.

Kalsoom explained that she had been involved long-term in the Age Better programme shared how from a service user she had become a volunteer (as a Peer Ambassador) for Age Better and supported a woman for considerable time. The Peer Ambassador role provided a sense of purpose and got her out of her home. The pairing had mutual benefit for both volunteer and the individual supported as both were feeling isolated. Over time the volunteer began to notice the positive impact that she was having on the woman she was supporting. When asked what she got out of volunteering, the participant stated:

"It was a two way thing, it was really rewarding for me to meet her and when I first met her she didn't look at me in my eyes, she had a hat on covering her face almost, after a few meetings she was able to look in my face, smiling, she started opening up, talking about her personal life. I think she enjoyed meeting me and I enjoyed meeting her, we learnt a lot about each other."

Elsa, who had contemplated suicide, received counselling and was then mentored through the scheme to get her out of her home to overcome depression and anxiety. Eventually, she became a mentor herself. Again, the mutual benefit of mentoring was emphasised as it had been by Kalsoom. Elsa reported, *"met three ladies and that got me out, they helped me and I helped them"*.

Clearly, participants had heard about and accessed other activities and groups through Mind, for example, during the interview there was a discussion about another Mind service, Friendly Fridays. This was described by one participant as *"an open day when anyone can come in and join the group...there's cake and coffee and lots of people just come to get out of the house, like a social group."*

Kalsoom shared that the counselling had helped her to better manage her mental ill health:

"Through the counselling it didn't completely wipe out my problems and my mental health but it just made me aware of why I think the way I do, why I feel the way I feel and helps me to find strategies to cope with how I feel with depression on a day to day basis, and also to understand others and to sympathise and empathise with people."

Participants concurred that they were reassured that even after the formal support had come to an end someone at Mind would be there for them should they require support again:

"[Ruth] said you're welcome to phone any time you want to have a chat or pop in for a cup of tea and have a chat with herself if she's in or any other [member of staff]."

"It's always made very clear to me that the door's always open, you know that's not gone, if you need to pop in or ring".

Have participants been out and about a bit more?

When we asked this question, we received a range of responses.

Gill talked about the way in which the Wellbeing Practitioners service had helped her to gain in confidence, and that this, alongside her academic interests, had made her feel like trying to go out to the theatre and galleries more often:

"I'm getting more and more interested in things like theatre and gallery visits than I was"

Although she didn't like the idea of doing these things alone, she had forged a friendship on a course which she hoped might last.

However, Gill also made an interesting reflection about the idea of isolation which was echoed by a member of staff within the service. She suggested that isolation isn't always solved by 'getting out and about more', but in fact for her, she felt that she enjoyed being occupied and absorbed in stimulating learning activities within the home.

The counselling has made a difference to Alex's mental wellbeing by helping her to manage her feelings, whereas previously she was *"completely submerged"* by them. It has positively impacted on her social life; rather than shutting herself away, Alex has begun to take up opportunities to keep in touch with people more and socialise:

"Yeah I'm more up for, when people suggest things, saying yeah whereas before I'd say 'I can't make it that night' and now I think don't do that anymore, so I'm now making the effort and discovering that when I make the effort it pays off and I enjoy it so that's something I'm managing to do now which I wasn't doing at all before." (Alex)

One service provider reflected on their perception of how the service was helping clients to get out and about more. He suggested that there were many different ways in which he saw clients starting to seek new experiences during and following the service intervention:

"some clients have gone from being socially isolated to now going out to steering groups, running their own things, people go out to coffee mornings, go on holidays, all this sort of thing, there's massive changes." (Staff)

Do participants think they've learned anything new?

One participant's account reveals how the counselling had impacted on her to begin to explore how her past had influenced her present experiences and feelings. Alex recalled how the counsellor's psycho-dynamic approach allowed her to explore her own history and the impact of losing loved ones on her identity:

"I was really interested and felt a lot of the root of my problems was about feeling abandoned, very suddenly going from identifying myself as a daughter and a sister, I lost my dad years ago" (Alex)

Exploring the feelings of abandonment *"really helped"* Alex to make sense of life and how to move forwards with fewer burdens:

"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." (Alex)

When asked about the Art Therapy group provided through the Wellbeing Practitioners scheme, participants shared that it had allowed them to open up more whilst being creative:

"Well we've been talking about each other's things [personal issues]...I've been doing a lot more writing than I used to do, more creative writing."

"my involvement with the sessions reinvigorated my art and my imagination."

Another participant explained that the art group had helped her to free her mind of her troubles:

"I found it like an escapism, you don't think about anything else except what you're doing in that moment and you're free to do whatever you want."

One participant, David, reported the wider benefits of having a mentor through the Wellbeing Practitioners scheme. Beyond emotional support, David was helped to redevelop the social skills that he had lost during the decline in his mental health. He commented, *"the mentor helped me get out of the house, resurrect my conversation skills basically cos if you're on your own you only have yourself to talk to"*. When recalling his experience being mentored, David stressed the importance of social contact for his own mental wellbeing:

"this was a major thing to get out of the house, talk to someone", and that the programme had "matched me up perfectly."

Another participant explained how he got involved as a mentor and started giving back by supporting others with similar issues from his past, *"I have mentored three; one of them now is a friend"*.

How could the service be improved?

Some participants discussed the issues of timescale of services. In Liz's view, the counselling service could be improved if the sessions were longer than the 50 minutes each service user is entitled to. Others discussed the issues relating to the end of services, with people at times expressing anxiety that services would finish.

During the focus group, we asked participants how the Wellbeing Practitioners service could be improved, if at all. One of them told us they would like to have direct contact with the mentor instead of having to go through Sheffield Mind. They said:

"When you have chronic fatigue, it might be a last minute thing and there might not be someone on the phone, there was only one time we nearly missed each other and I thought do you mind if we just contact each other?" (David)

Pete would've liked more counselling but also acknowledged that he had to become more independent, *"I've learnt lots of skills to deal with how to get through the days and eventually you have to be cut free to deal with life on your own"*. He went on to suggest, *"It would be nice to have a stage when you come to the end of 30 weeks then you have one a fortnight, one a month so the continuity keeps going, just to know that's still there as a little safety line."*

Although this phasing-out of involvement would require additional resources, this underscores a suggested improvement which all schemes across the Age Better programme might benefit from.

Has taking part in the scheme opened up other opportunities?

Attending activities such as arts and crafts encouraged conversations between people, and opened up further opportunities for social contact. For example, David confirmed that he had heard about other groups and activities, *"there are the groups around, I hear them talking about it."*

When asked whether they had been signposted to other provision through the Wellbeing Practitioners scheme, Kalsoom relayed her experience in detail:

I So when your mentoring roles came to an end, were you made aware of any other activities or projects that the Age Better programme were running?

P Yeah through I learnt there was a food cycle programme local to myself, I also was told about a cycling group that was taking place in Abbeyfield Park, walking groups, they have definitely introduced me to various things around the city and local to myself.

I Is that from Mind?

P Yeah my counsellor introduced me.

(I = Interviewer; P = Participant)

After accessing the Mind provision, David got involved in another art group, which he thought had been funded by Age Better. The spin-offs from attending this group were shared, and how these, for him, reinforced a sense of purpose and helped overcome his isolation:

"That [group] was really useful cos they had a steering group and I was on that so that was really interesting that I was feeling useful, so that was a natural next step, I didn't ask for it, it just happened again but it fitted nicely with what I'd been through. Then I got involved in the mentoring, so I was a mentor, similar situation to you, not leaving the house, can't go down the street."

Prior to involvement in this group, he had low sense of worth, and this was explained as feeling, *"I don't work anymore, I'm a waste of space, I'm not contributing to society anymore."*

Whilst it was unclear whether Kalsoom had accessed Age Better Start UP funding before or after receiving support at the Wellbeing Practitioners scheme, she did recall how enjoyable the activity had been:

"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."

Have participants benefited in any way that they didn't expect to?

A number of participants discussed the way in which the Wellbeing Practitioner service has supported them to gain in confidence.

One participant has gained a lot from attending the Wellbeing Practitioners service at Mind. She refers to the significant confidence building that she has been supported to achieve, by recognising and valuing her strengths and abilities:

"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." (Gill)

For Gill, this confidence building has led to new ways of dealing with challenging situations:

"during that counselling I had somebody to talk to about it, I didn't have to make decisions for myself, I could come and bring that and that was really useful. I think, I hope it's put an end, or helped me so that next time it comes along I've got tools and the knowledge, cos I really respected the counsellor so it went deep. It will happen cos it's been my fate in life but I look forward to using those new tools and saying no, enough is enough." (Gill)

The counselling sessions have indirectly had a positive impact on Liz's work as a carer, as she suggests that it has enhanced her understanding of mental ill health and isolation. She explained:

"when I've been at work I've used it in, cos the people I look after have dementia or some might have a bit of mental health and are on medication and it's made me understand a bit more about my job role and how it affects people that can't get out." (Liz)

Have participants had a chance to have your say about the project - for example, have they been asked for any feedback?

Participants have been given the opportunity to feedback via service questionnaires, as well as client steering groups.

There is some evidence in Liz's account that she might have been asked to provide feedback on the Mind service.

What are the barriers (if any) in taking part?

One service provider referred to transport as a key barrier to people getting involved. They felt that if people couldn't access the service easily, they might find it too challenging and not actually maintain involvement, or even access the service in the first place.

However, this was then linked to the broader issue of the focus on 'getting people out'. It was suggested by a service provider that the focus on encouraging people to access community-based services was often based on the presumption that to be isolated means that you are not getting out enough. This service provider challenged this as a stereotype, and makes the point that:

"I absolutely understand the theory, they're isolated, that means they're in the house so they need to get out, but what we now get and understand is by us going and talking to them and saying what's going on for you and working with them and them then feeling better, they then go you know what, I might go out or I will say hello to the neighbour or take the dog for a walk or go and catch the bus, cos they've had that thing with us. I think at first we were a bit stuck in the project about we need to get these people out so let's meet people at the community centre, they weren't ready. So I think we've gone right to begin with it's easier if we go, see them at home." (Staff)

Has taking part in the scheme opened up other opportunities such as volunteering?

Participants expressed a range of reflections when asked whether their involvement in Wellbeing Practitioners has provided them with other opportunities. Some suggested that they would hope to move onto other activities as a result of their involvement in Wellbeing Practitioners. For example, Gill is hoping that her current academic course may lead to an opportunity to volunteer in the future, and for Liz, access to the Mind counselling service has opened up opportunities for further involvement in the service as a volunteer. She commented:

"I've actually gone onto the Sheffield Mind website and had a look about volunteering, just to continue, maybe having a bit of input". (Liz)

Liz also indicated that she might look into taking up the 'Art therapy' sessions run at Mind.

At Mind, Alex didn't learn of other Age Better activities or services that she might access, and, although she expressed *"it's always useful"* to obtain such information, it wasn't conveyed as important or a missed opportunity. Her priority was to improve her mental health.

Will the activities that people have been involved with change the way people think about older people?

Gill reflected that she didn't think the programme, or the service she had received, would necessarily change the way that people think about older people. What she did emphasise is the way in which the wellbeing Practitioners service had changed the way that she viewed herself, which was crucial to her happiness, and her ability to cope in the future:

"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." (Gill)

When asked if society views older people differently to younger people, Alex commented, *"you become less visible I suppose, people don't notice you as much"*, and this was perceived as potentially having both positive and negative impacts on older people.

A service provider reflected on society's perception of ageing, and suggested that as a society, we don't like to talk about ageing, and this can lead to isolation, as people don't know how to talk about their feelings.

When asked how older people were viewed in society Liz commented, *"I don't think they're respected."* (Liz)

Deep dive summary

Based on in-depth interviews with four clients and one in-depth focus group with 5 clients the following summary outlines the headline findings:

- People found out about the Wellbeing Practitioner Scheme through various sources, such as their G.P., Age UK and Community Support Officers. Others self-referred without prior knowledge of the Age Better funded scheme, but due to their knowledge of Sheffield Mind as a mental health organisation.

- Awareness of Age Better varied, particularly because participants had such a strong association with Sheffield Mind as a long-established organisation with a national profile.
- Most participants had become isolated as a result of trauma and bereavement, mental health break down, or their roles as carers. The services they received through the scheme had helped these participants address their social and emotional isolation. In some cases this had led to 'getting out and about', but for others this was more about enabling them to manage their emotional health. An important reflection was that isolation and loneliness isn't always improved by being out of the home.
- Suggested improvements included shorter waiting periods prior to accessing the scheme (although a number of participants were pleased with the speed with which they gained access) and more thought to the phasing out of support.
- There is evidence that participants' involvement in the Wellbeing Practitioner scheme has sometimes led to them going on to access other opportunities, such as volunteering, mentoring and taking up other Age Better provision.

Ignite Imaginations

Outline of the scheme

Ignite Imagination is a Sheffield based charity which aims *"to celebrate and connect communities through art and creativity...and support individuals to gain new skills and confidence"*. The charity supports activities and events across Sheffield city that address social isolation in older people (aged 50 plus). Using Age Better in Sheffield funding, the charity supports older people to overcome social isolation through three projects; 'Start Up', 'Sporting Memories' and 'We Are Makers'. This evaluation has explored the impacts of the Start Up project, which *"supports older people to start activities, events or groups in their local community"*. £200 is available to support the start-up of each venture.

The research with the Ignite Imaginations scheme is presented in two sections. The first provides insight into the Ignite Imaginations scheme generally; so reflecting on issues of process as well as overarching reflections from two participants and one scheme manager. The second section is an in-depth study of one activity which was funded through Ignite Imaginations, the 'Remember When Café'.

Age Better Process

The fact that this is a 3-year pot of funding is extremely important for Ignite Imaginations, particularly in terms of being able to secure a staff post for this length of time.

In terms of the process of applying for the funding, and the ongoing reporting requirements, Ignite Imaginations has been able to discuss adapting the initial outcomes plan in order to be more appropriate for this particular scheme.

There is a particular challenge regarding the degree of reporting requirements across the Age Better programme, which relates to the size of the delivery partner. Ignite Imaginations is one of the smaller delivery partner in Sheffield, and the reporting requirements are the same as those faced by much larger organisations. Although people understood the necessity of thorough reporting, there is a question around whether there is a way of designing more proportionate processes (reporting but also wider programme engagement activities), which take into account the scale and resources of the partners. If this could be achieved, it may indeed encourage a greater range of smaller groups to consider applying to be part of the programme.

Due to the nature of the Ignite Imaginations scheme, each funded activity is different, and can set its own process of engagement with the scheme. In this way, staff suggested that applicants are able to shape the way that they interact with the scheme and the support and interventions received, and work can therefore be tailored to each funded activity.

Promotion

Some beneficiaries hear about the scheme through word-of-mouth, often via other Start Up projects, or through meeting representatives of Ignite Imaginations at events and activities around the city. There is also evidence that Ignite Imaginations reaches into those communities that are often perceived as 'hard to reach', via channels such as local community radio stations (e.g. Pakistan Muslim Centre's Link fm radio station):

"I was doing admin on a radio show, so it was a community show, so I was researching things like that, I had a lady from Ignite Imagination in on a show once" (Barry, research participant)

Another participant found out about Age Better, and Ignite Imaginations, through an advert which came through the Volunteer Centre.

.It is interesting to note that very few successful referrals come through other Age Better funded schemes. This is an important reflection for the programme overall, as it is hoped that schemes will cross-refer, thus enabling people to move through different 'levels' of Age Better over time.

What did people hope to get out of the Ignite Imaginations funded activities?

When participants reflected on the Ignite Imaginations scheme, they expressed that the idea of providing small amounts of funding to try new activities and ideas was a positive way of encouraging people to get involved:

"the ideas of having a bit of funding so we could do different things was a great idea" (Chris, participant).

Two participants discussed how funded activities had helped them to have more contact with others, and motivated them to get out and about more. It's interesting to note how important the company of others is for these participants, as they discuss their involvement:

"It's always good to go with more people, occasionally you don't mind going on your own but it was quite a family oriented thing...I'd have stuck out on my own, so it was good to have people there to talk with and travel there with" (Chris, participant)

These are important reflections for a programme such as Age Better. Chris describes himself as feeling fairly young, and having ideas for activities he'd like to pursue, but feels limited on his own. He reflects that the funded activity encourages him to *"actually do things I've been talking about doing for a long time"*.

Have participants been out and about a bit more?

One participant reflected that health problems had led to a sense of isolation, which had built-up over time and seems to have become habitual:

"...you tend to get into a bit of a rut and don't have long conversations and things" (Chris, Participant).

Another participant discussed how funded activities had enabled him to visit places in Sheffield that he hadn't experienced before.

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Has taking part in the scheme opened up other opportunities?

One participant discussed how an initial funded activity has now led on to a sustainable group which meets regularly. The funded activity was a sports discussion group, called 'Love Sports', and it was set-up at Woodhouse Library. Initially 3 to 4 people attended the group, but this has since expanded to 12 participants. This funded activity has become sustainable through donations from members for basic costs such as refreshments. This has been unexpected, and an extremely positive outcome from the initial Ignite Imaginations funding.

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Presenting the deep dive

The research

Exploration into the Ignite Imaginations scheme focused on conducting a deep dive in one project funded by Start Up which was the 'Remember When singing event'. This involved:

- Participant observation at the event.
- Short snapshot discussions.
- Two interviews; one with the event convener and one with a staff member from Ignite Imaginations.

These various methods allowed the research team to piece together a detailed case study which is presented next.

Background: The Remember When Café

The café was established mid 2017 in response to there being inadequate places for people with memory loss to go. Information is shared at the café; ranging from health information to support organisations, and, of the bygone era to stimulate memories. A friendship circle puts older people who are socially isolated in contact with each other. In the main, women visit the café. It is wheelchair accessible.

At the time of interview, the owner of the café had secured Ignite Imaginations funding for a fourth event to be run on a Friday afternoon as the previous ones had been. These are one-off events where a singer is bought in as entertainment for older people. The organiser (who is the owner of the café) explained that the £200 funding covers the following: *"it pays for Russ [the singer] to come and it helps me pay for the food I provide, things like transport"*.

The organiser was able to access funding through Ignite Imaginations due to her awareness of the Age Better programme. In her view, the wider principles of the programme are concerned with *"trying to keep people well as they age...trying to keep people fit and active in the community longer"*.

The café usually seats 22 people but additional people are accommodated as it is always oversubscribed. The organiser explained, *"we only have 22 seats, but to maximise it I bring extra tables and chairs in so it's organising that, and we have to take bookings for that, we get bookings for about 33 but then at the last one seven people turned up and we were trying to squeeze everyone in, so bearing in mind we normally seat 22 and it was nearly 40 people"*. Clearly, there is significant demand for the event and the high turnout requires some adjustments to accommodate wheelchairs and keep access open in line with health and safety requirements.

Findings

According to the organiser, the event works well as a small intimate gathering rather than larger numbers which could inadvertently deter older people due to the noise levels - *"it would be too loud, too much and then that would put off the people you want there cos if you're stuck at home and not used to seeing people and not talking you can't walk into a room of 500, a room of 30 is a bit easier"*. There is demand for the event to be run on a monthly basis but the organiser stressed that it wouldn't be possible to put on the event without the funding.

Impact

The event serves to trigger memories for those with dementia - of past music, songs, fashions and traditions - to help them reconnect with their experiences. For those individuals with significant memory loss the event itself, the setting, and key characteristics stick in peoples' minds. The event organiser recalled the case of one woman - *"she lives in a care home not far away and her memory's declining and she always remembers us as the place with the big field cos we're by the cricket pitch and when she comes in she always remembers things, she remembers the singer"*.

Multiple positive impacts of the event were relayed by the event organiser, for example, as increasing *"confidence and a bit of a buzz"* and the fun and happiness was conveyed as lifting peoples' spirits during difficult times when individuals were struggling with ill health:

"One mum used to bring the granddad and he walked in one day and he looked so pale and old but by the time he went out his cheeks were flushed, he was smiling, clapping along to the music" (organiser).

Attendees are provided a wholesome meal as part of the event. The organiser emphasised that people with dementia can lose their appetite, *"people can either lose their taste and when you've lost your taste you're not interested...With some people the carer will say 'do you want a scone?' and they don't remember what a scone is so they again don't fancy it, but as you get further down the journey you lose your appetite anyway cos you're less active and so on"*. However, the organiser's narrative revealed that during the event older people ate more because they were enjoying themselves, she commented, *"they tend to eat more when they're having fun and singing along, they tend to eat either without realising or cos eating's part of the activity"*. A specific example was provided of how having fun during the event correlated with eating and drinking more:

"The first one [funded event] we did a couple walked in off the street and hadn't booked and said 'we're trying it for the first time' and I said 'well you picked a day when it's not normally like this' and they sat down and her husband had a hot chocolate and she got hold of my hand and started crying and said 'that's the first drink he's finished for months', again it's just cos they enjoyed it." (Organiser)

Could anything be improved?

Despite the organiser of the café accessing Start Up project funding to put on a musical/singing event, mainly for older people, her age (under 50 years) restricted her from applying for the funding. She explained, *"I'm 48 but to get Ignite Imagination funding you have to be over 50, so I work with people who already help out in the café...they're already involved in the café and they've done the formal side of it [applied for funding], they're over 50"*. Further, the same applicant cannot reapply for funding as the criteria for funding stipulates that someone different is required to apply each time. The process would be improved by permitting the 'lead person' or event organiser to apply repeatedly.

Finding cover to run the café to accommodate the visit from Ignite Imaginations and the applicant to complete the application form for funding proved difficult, that is, *"the hard thing of juggling people to meet at the same time"*. The inconvenience of the onerous process i.e. completion of two forms and face-to-face meetings was also stressed. Instead, completion over-the-phone or on the day of the event/activity was a suggested improvement to the process.

Deep dive visit: the live singing event at the 'Remember When café' on the 10th August 2018

The following narrative is based on researcher observations and snapshot interviews (a CRESR researcher & a peer researcher) gathered during the event at the café.

Participant observations

The setting

The small café is located at the Frecheville Community Sports Ground, Sheffield, with far reaching views over the grounds. It is full with no capacity for additional attendees - attendance is strictly by prior booking. An entire wall of framed images, memory books, and a record player with vinyl records serve as a reminder of the bygone era. Chandeliers light up the small space and add to the atmosphere. The traditional linen and crockery reflects the past and the knitted blankets on the back of chairs, throws and cushions to ensure a comforting, warm and cosy feel.



The room is full of older people and a few younger disabled people; some with carers others without. We (the researchers) are told that some people are purposefully seated with those they haven't met before to encourage new interactions / friendships. From the comments made, clearly, a lot of people like the food that is provided and feel that they are getting a good (nutritious) home-made meal.

There are people dancing, singing and the sound of talking and laughter fills the room. Older people join in singing with Russ, the singer. He clearly knows members of the audience well - addressing them by their first names. He encourages audience participation, regularly asking the audience questions about the songs he is performing to jog their memories. Conversations between people sitting at the same tables (who, in some cases, don't know each other) are prompted by him when he asks questions about past musicians and bands. Members of the audience are delighted to receive prizes (chocolate and wine) from Russ for participating in competitions at the previous event.

The following clip captures Russ singing and the energy in the room:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhTX4khd1vU&feature=youtu.be>

Russ informs the audience about social events and activities. There is a trip to Mablethorpe amongst other day trips. He shares details of the transport, emphasising that it is wheelchair accessible. Information is imparted face-to-face rather than using leaflets, which don't always get read.

Clearly, the café is a family-run business; three generations work together to serve food and make people comfortable. Although it is noisy due to so many people talking loudly to be heard over the music, people seem relaxed and are having fun.

What we learn from the participant observation

Clearly, the décor creates a welcoming ambience, but, most significantly, it helps to connect people with failing memory with their pasts. This is aided by Russ and the songs he sings; older people can be heard trying to recall the names of various singers and the decades when the songs were released. During this process, some conversations are started with new people, helping to establish new friendships. In addition to stimulating memories through a fun and entertaining event, people are made aware of other opportunities for social interaction to overcome their isolation; they are connected with other people and other opportunities that get them out of their homes, such as day trips.



Arguably, the event enhances emotional and physical wellbeing; people are laughing, singing, talking to others, and a few of them get up for a dance. The meals are reasonably priced and wholesome and nutritious. The positive outcomes are corroborated in the snapshots in the following section.

Snapshots interviews

Researchers were mindful not to distract event attendees or disrupt the flow of the event by their presence. They were conscious that people attending the event were there for their personal benefit and not primarily to satisfy the aims of the research. Therefore, instead of conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews which can be time consuming in terms of interviewee participation, the research team decided to gain snapshots from short conversations with participants. Written and verbal consent was gained prior to asking any questions. The following six basic questions were asked:

1. Please tell me a little bit about why you are attending this event?
2. How much social contact do you have day-to-day – is it enough, or, do you want more?
3. How does an event like this help, if at all, with social contact?
4. What impact (positive or negative) does this event have on you?
5. Could anything be done differently to improve the event?
6. This event is funded by the Age Better programme, what do you know about the programme?

In total, responses were gained from five participants before capacity of the room and noise levels prevented any further views from being garnered. The views of the five participants are outlined next.

Reasons for attending the event

When asked about their motivations for attending the event, responses from participants were quite similar.

Pearl said, *"I haven't got much contact, I haven't got any family near me...I come of a big family so I don't like being on my own"*. In her case, it was the social aspect that was important and she shared her reasons, **"company, meeting people, otherwise I'm on my own"**. This prompted her to attend the event. She met Dorothy at the café and became friends, and since they have attended the event together.

Dorothy responded, *"I've been a widow nearly 30 years, she's [Pearl] a new widow"*. She reiterated the importance of the event for creating opportunities for social contact for the isolated, she commented, *"sometimes I'm the only one that you [Pearl] see"*.

Susan's reasons for attending the event were influenced by her desire to meet others and to **support the sustainability of the event**, *"it's a fantastic community event and we need to keep the [event] open"*. She travels considerable distance (14-15 miles) to overcome her *"social isolation"*.

Jean and Elizabeth (who has dementia) explained, *"we come here because it gives us the opportunity to meet other people and also the food's really good"*. They went on to explain:

"We like it here...it's a good atmosphere"

"We came to this [event] because we came to the last one and we thoroughly enjoyed it".

Impact

Friends through the event - Pearl & Dorothy- attend the 'Remember When café' every week on a Monday. The healthy homemade food provided by the organiser was appreciated by both - *"I appreciate her food"*. Dorothy commented, *"I look forward to it and I don't have to cook a meal because I get it here. It's not nice cooking for one when you are used to cooking for two"*. Pearl went on to explain that she had *"always had people in the house"* and how this had changed over time as her four children moved out and her husband died young.

When asked about the impact of the event, Dorothy reported, "*well it's **very enjoyable***", particularly the 30s, 40s and 50s songs that are played which the elderly can remember. Attendees can participate in the event, either sing along or get up and have a dance. The atmosphere was appreciated and recognised as contributing positively to feelings ("*happier*"). More relaxed and shy/reserved individuals were reported as "*opening up*" more. Pearl even won a bottle of wine playing Bingo during the event.

When asked how they would feel without the event, Pearl stated, "I would miss it [the event] - anything to get out somewhere".

Now their friendship has led to **other social opportunities** and they have begun to share other fun times together outside the event, for example, they discussed plans to go to the seaside together in a few weeks and stay together in Cornwall next year.

Susan on the other hand, when describing the impact of the event, which she was attending for the first time, commented, "*making people happy in a community [environment] where they can get a decent drink*". A wider benefit of getting to know people through attending the café was that in one instance they were able to raise an alarm when a regular attendee didn't turn up and that individual did require medical attention.

The multiple benefits of the event were described by Jean and Elizabeth as both social and emotional, "*it's **social and also it's sort of emotional** as well because we leave here - we always feel good don't we*" (Jean). Other benefits outlined by Jean and Elizabeth included:

Jean reported that activities are organised that **help with memory**, "*something that makes you think a bit and remember...from the past*"

"*At an event like this we usually sit on a table with different people as well that we haven't met before and so then we can have some interaction*"

"*We can sing along to the songs because they're all sort of from our era*"

The suitability of the singer was commended by both women, who reported, "*he's really good at **getting people involved***" Jean explained why they had both enjoyed the event so much: "*he [the singer] came and he sang to us personally*". They conveyed their appreciation of the small and intimate nature of the event.

Awareness of Age Better

Dorothy picked up some information about the event at her local post office and decided to go along so that she could get out of the house. Pearl only heard about the Age Better programme when she started to attend the event.

Although Susan claimed that she hadn't heard of Age Better she was able to recount the target group that the programme was aimed at, and therefore clearly had some awareness of the programme. She didn't qualify for Age Better support last year even though she required it as a disabled person. She emphasised, "*there isn't really any support for younger disabled people unless they're in care*".

Both Jean & Elizabeth concurred that it was the first time they were learning about the Age Better programme as a result of the information provided by the peer research team.

Deep dive summary

Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews with four clients and one in-depth focus group with seven clients the following summary outlines the headline findings:

- Most people either hadn't heard of Age Better or had limited understanding of the programme.
- The isolation experienced by older people and people with disabilities was addressed by the 'Remember When singing event'. They increased their social contact and the event gave them something to look forward to.
- Event attendees learnt about other opportunities for social outings and activities whilst at the event.
- Accounts revealed that the event had a positive impact on the wellbeing of the attendees. Feelings of 'happiness' were shared. Further, the health impacts were evident in the number of people stating that they welcomed the healthy food provided at the event.
- The funding process was onerous and there were suggestions for improvements.

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Sheffield Hallam University

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BABU, Mohan, BASHIR, Nadia <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1384-4849>>, BENNETT, Ellen <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3271-8757>>, DARWIN, Maxine, PORTER, Josie, WOOD, Sue, GENTLE, Aletheia and NEEDHAM, Rachel

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