Tackling social isolation and loneliness across the life course What works well and why?

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Charlene Martin and Andrea Wigfield
Centre for Loneliness Studies
The University of Sheffield

Issues to Cover

- **The Centre for Loneliness Studies**
  - Mission
  - Vision
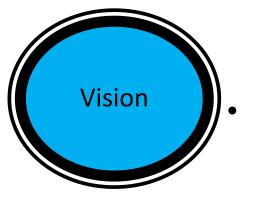 - Research projects

- **Time to Shine Programme, Leeds UK**

- **Tips for setting up and running an effective loneliness service**

Centre for Loneliness Studies

- Innovative, multidisciplinary approach to loneliness research

- Drawing on over 50 academics and researchers across many disciplines

- Supported by a network of external partners and experts by experience (people who have experienced/are experiencing loneliness)

"To be at the forefront of knowledge, drawing together interdisciplinary and world leading research which is informed by, but can also positively influence, policy and practice to support effective social relationships by using latest evidence on loneliness across the life course"

Vision

- We want to see the Centre for Loneliness Studies fulfil its potential and play a leading role in having a connected society

- We want to support researchers, policy makers, industry partners, practitioners and volunteers to help develop communities to be places where we can all have meaningful relationships

Recent Projects

- Evaluation of Time to Shine, Leeds Older People's Forum, 2015-2021

- Typologies of Loneliness interventions, National Lottery Community Fund 2018-2020

- Understanding barriers to connection for people experiencing loneliness at key life transitions, British Red Cross & Co-op 2018-19

- Understanding barriers faced by BAME communities in accessing loneliness services, British Red Cross & Co-op 2018-19

Recent Projects

- Review of the impact of loneliness and social isolation on health and well-being and whether people who experience loneliness/social isolation have higher use of public services, Welsh Government report (2018-19)

- Review of key mechanisms in intergenerational practices, and their effectiveness at reducing loneliness/social isolation, Welsh Government report (2018-19)

Evaluation of Time to Shine, Leeds Older People's Forum 2015-2021

- Aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness in later life in Leeds

- Independent evaluation conducted by University of Sheffield, Leeds Trinity and Leeds Beckett.

- PhD Research: 'The role of co-production in combating social isolation and loneliness in later life: a case study of the Time to Shine programme' (Louise Whitehead, University of Sheffield)

Six top tips for setting up and running an effective loneliness service

World class research, making a difference

Tip 1: Think about who you want to help and tailor services accordingly

- The needs of lonely, isolated people are diverse

- Some groups are more effectively reached when services are tailored to their needs – BME, Men, LGBT

- Utilize appropriate staff, volunteers and activities

- Older men in Leeds, for example, have been attracted to practical activities involving volunteering such as DIY or gardening

Example of good practice in tailoring services for BME communities

BME communities in different parts of the UK have emphasised the importance of locally provided services which are culturally sensitive. provided by staff, volunteers and outreach workers who speak various community languages, and offer a range of activities and foods which are appropriate for different cultures.

Tip 2: Co-design, co-deliver and co-evaluate services

- Ask potential service users what they want/need, especially important (and most difficult) for those most isolated and lonely

- Involve them in designing, producing, and evaluating the services/activities

- Co-production of service in the Time to Shine programme

Example of good practice in co-designing services: Time To Shine in Leeds

Co-Designing Time to Shine in Leeds

- Series of open meetings & consultations (7 months)

- 656 older people and carers consulted

- 207 paid workers and volunteers consulted

- Surveys, interviews, focus groups, workshops, observations.

- Alternative sessions for hard to reach

Outcome: a co-produced programme designed by key stakeholders and older people in Leeds

Example of good practice in co-producing services: Time To Shine in Leeds

Co-producing the delivery of Time To Shine services by involving older people:

- Core Partnership and steering groups

- Designing and delivering activities and events

- Commissioning

- 176 older people were involved in focus groups to design, develop and refine an Age Friendly Charter for Leeds

Example of good practice in co-evaluating services: Time To Shine in Leeds

- **Peer Researchers**
  - On-going continuous support
  - Facilitation of focus groups
  - Participation in events
  - Feedback on evaluation materials
  - Involved in development of 'easy read' reports
- **Volunteer Listeners**
  - Gathering views from beneficiaries involved in project activities

Peer Researchers and Volunteer Listeners

Benefits to Peer Researchers and Volunteer Listeners

- Enjoying the experience

- Learning new skills

- Doing 'something useful'

- Gain confidence

- Becoming less lonely and isolated themselves

Tip 3: Use appropriate marketing and language

- Effective marketing helps to get sufficient numbers of people involved early on.

- Using the right words can make a difference;

- Its often best to avoid using terms such as loneliness, and instead focussed on social connections or the opportunity to get involved in something new, or make a contribution to the community

- Men are often attracted to services if they are helping others or volunteering, for example

Tip 4: Capture Learning

- Adopt a **test and learn approach** which encourages organisations to discuss both what works well and what isn't working as the service is developing.

- This can provide valuable insights that can be used to improve services and help develop more effective ways of engaging particular groups.

- To achieve this ongoing evaluation and feedback to commissioners and services providers is essential

Tip 5: Factor sufficient 'lead-in' time

- Some activities and groups take longer to set up than others.

- Those that involve community development, provide intensive support to the most isolated, train up volunteers, or consult with the wider community tend to take longer than expected to get off the ground.

- If projects are to be successful providers and commissioners need to allow sufficient lead in time for the type of service that is being developed and the type of end user who is being targeted.

Tip 6: Celebrate success

- There are examples of many successful projects and services operating around the country, where participants report a range of positive outcomes, including reduced loneliness and increased wellbeing through increased social contact and being linked to hobbies and interests.

- It is important to share good practice with others and to celebrate success with those using the service not just when the service first starts, but on an ongoing basis.

- This helps avoid 'reinventing the wheel'

For more information

- Centre for Loneliness Studies: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/socstudies/research/centres-and-networks/centre-loneliness-studies

- Time to Shine Programme www.timetoshineleeds.org

- Andrea Wigfield a.wigfield@sheffield.ac.uk
- Charlene Martin c.l.martin@sheffield.ac.uk