Keep Ageing Better: The role of volunteers in group dynamics and legacy 2022

T.E.D.
Ageing Better in East Lindsey

About TED

Talk, Eat, Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF), the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged 50 and over to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

TED in East Lindsey: background to understanding the programme and volunteering

Volunteers have been and remain crucial to Ageing Better (AB) nationally and locally, serving to promote programme reach, connect people and promote social participation. They are central in ensuring Ageing Better's impact continues after March 2022. In this learning report the TED in East Lindsey team reflect on 'volunteering' in group settings, be these place-based or 'virtual'. The importance of language and modes of engagement are explored along with aspects of the programme which can be drawn on to act as signposts to sustainable services and impact. It draws on case study approaches, volunteer, staff and wider stakeholder interviews, as well as reviews of existing learning and monitoring data collected over the 7 years of the programme.

COMMUNITY FUND

YMCA LINCOLNSHIRE

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From its initial design and project outset an objective of AB was to move from the funding investment that provided significant dedicated resource to grow (and keep on growing) social participation, networks and activities. Originally programme concepts envisioned the concerted recruitment of 'formal' 'volunteers' across the programme. These were foreseen as a solution for the longer-term sustainability of services, including as a resource that could attract future funding from other sources. For instance, TED in East Lindsey's flagship Age-friendly Business (AfB) Award, which we have recently reviewed in a separate report, would see people aged 50 and over having a core (but unpaid) role in creating the accreditation. This included undertaking assessments and presenting the Award to businesses. Mystery shoppers would be recruited, with volunteers aged 50 and over giving feedback on their experiences of engaging with nominated businesses (where a focus was on a provider-customer interface, such as with retail shops and hospitality).

This intended activity was envisioned as part of wider mobilisation, with volunteers being at the forefront of setting up and sustaining Friendship Groups. Service users would 'take-over' commissioned projects as the result of a partnership with paid staff. Local communities would keep shaping activities and services in the future. Programme design and delivery would (ideally) see staff, volunteers and 'beneficiaries' engaged throughout AB's 'test and learn' approach. Strategic oversight of the programme, including decisions about services to fund, initially involved a formally created 'scrutiny panel' comprising of residents in the district who were aged 50 and over. In addition, these early plans had another long-term vision of establishing a 'volunteer-ran' consultancy service.

Moving from dedicated resource provided by the National Lottery Community Fund's investment to self-sustaining services overarches AB nationally and locally. This included recognising community assets and realising the potential to develop skills and abilities of unpaid stakeholders. This extends to generating capacity by bidding for additional funding (where required) and the nurturing of relationships, partnerships and networks alongside managing 'practical' issues. Examples of the latter being securing premises for group meetings, Disclosure and Barring Scheme clearance and developing lasting committee structures within Friendship Groups. Rejuvenating roles when key figures no longer wish and/or are able to fulfil roles is essential when seeking continuity in provision and forward planning.

The design and delivery of TED in East Lindsey with 'volunteers' has been a complex, challenging, and rewarding journey (or set of journeys), informed by various stakeholder insights. A compelling benefit of utilising a 'test and learn' approach has been the programme's additional 'reach' through understanding how to coproduce with those aged 50 and over in East Lindsey. The reflections that feature in this report can therefore be thought of as indicators of, as well motivational factors for, promoting engagement. It is important to note that during the early stages of TED in East Lindsey, growing awareness about barriers to engaging communities contributed (in-part, at least) to a collective 'refresh' of programme strands. Hitherto, an early period of instability existed accompanied by staff movement, including at a programme management level.

Recent interviews with Friendship Groups have demonstrated that these early experiences established lasting presence in the minds of volunteers, particularly those who had been involved in the programme since its inception. Documenting these factors are important in appraising 'distance travelled' and have application in considering future programmes start-up:

> *"When we… came on board right from the beginning it's been the three of us that's led it and we wanted a bit of a support network because of TED, but we didn't get it, but we had a passion for the group because there's been a need"* (Volunteer 1)

> *"Continuity was lacking, very lacking"* (Volunteer 2)

> *"I think staffing was the main thing because you've got a couple of good workers and then they've gone, so like [volunteer 2] said there were things that should have been put into action that weren't, which did let us down"* (Volunteer 1) (Inland Friendship Group, 2021)

This focus group took place with a Friendship Group that continues to benefit from dedicated 'formal volunteers' as well as its wider membership. These problematic experiences, aside from resonating in the minds of stakeholders over a long period of time, provide an important rationale for learning about engagement. Involving various parties in iterative cycles of 'test and learn' programme-wide continues to have importance when trying to create and ensure communication is person-centred and adaptable. This allows for learning to remain grounded and relevant (by 'closing the loop') and also enhances the confidence of stakeholders during uncertain times. This can be seen through further reflection on the early days of TED in East Lindsey:

> *"I don't know what goes on behind the scenes, but some of the staff… because of the way some of them (TED) worked with their staff team… it was absolutely terrible"* (Volunteer, Inland Friendship Group, 2021)

> *"We've had a complete turnaround of the whole staff"* (Volunteer, Inland Friendship Group, 2021)

As the programme funding draws to a close it is clear groups have various ways of approaching self-sustainability. This includes delivery partner ran groups. However, this is not necessarily problematic and can be a reflection of the opportunities, benefits and challenges of working with people and groups that have specific interests. Programme-wide experience shows that pathways to sustainability are not exclusively linear or follow a neatly defined trajectory. The Friendship Group quoted above benefits from the continuity and commitment of key figures and their strong leadership and vision. Their embeddedness in the local community over time has been essential to its success and continuing independence. Yet the experiences of this group, placed alongside others, indicate how an early tailored induction process can contribute to longer-term continuity. In other areas of the district, anticipation of the end of programme echoes how groups can vary, including the extent to which 'TED and AB branding' has become embedded. A discussion between the TED in East Lindsey's Communities Officer and lead Friendship Group volunteers based in a coastal town supports this observation:

> *"Only thing when they (the current TED in East Lindsey programme) cut out of it and they don't do it no more... so we've got no responsibility to you?... Can you appeal to extend it?... Does it still come under age concern (sic)?"* (Volunteer, Coastal Friendship Group)

Some of the issues in re-starting Friendship Groups after COVID-19 restrictions related to finding affordable and suitable 'age-friendly' venues. TED in East Lindsey's Communities Officer has been working with group leads to finalise these issues.

Although this report includes practical considerations that may apply to organisations, practitioners and/or volunteers, it is not a specific handbook or step-by-step guide on 'managing volunteers' who interact with people aged 50 and over. These insights have already been provided in a separate TED in East Lindsey Handbook and TED Friendship Group Toolkit, by Ageing Better nationally and local AB partner areas (for example Ageless Thanet, Brightlife and Ageing Better in Camden), in addition to agencies working independently from the AB programme. Examples of the latter include the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and, in the criminal justice system, CLINKS. (NCVO - Volunteering and Managing volunteers | Clinks). Strands of the programme have produced toolkits which will continue to be available online. The TED Volunteer Handbook includes safeguarding information and procedures that are set out as part of an induction which includes contact details for staff and remote working. The Friendship Group toolkit too covers these issues. Cumulatively they already

serve a 'how to' role for shaping work at programme/ organisational levels. In addition, TNLCF has also invested in Good Neighbour Schemes (GNS), with Lincolnshire having a core team employed by YMCA Lincolnshire to guide this work with volunteers. GNS have also undertaken significant work on providing practical learning and toolkits on establishing, starting-up and retaining schemes across the county that draw on the substantial insights and ownership from volunteers.

Continuing benefits of volunteering and groups can still be realised, particularly social participation, connectedness and skills development as part of partnership approaches. This has validity even in instances where programme branding may have not become fully embedded and/or which may have been embedded, but is not carried into the future.

The Importance of Dialogue: Enhancing Engagement, Role Labels, and 'Formality'

"(there's a) need to look after volunteers" (Inland Friendship Group, May 2020)

Observations made on engaging ageing populations in AB broadly, mirror (to an extent) abilities to collaborate with, recruit and retain people aged 50 and over in 'volunteer' roles specifically. Ecorys, the national partner for the evaluation of Ageing Better nationally, recently published findings on the impact of Ageing Better. They reported:

"We found that from October 2015 up until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Ageing Better engaged almost 150,000 people and made measurable improvements in participants' social contact and wellbeing" (Campbell-Jack, Humphreys, Whitley, William and Cox, 2021: 8)

National patterns of engagement are also important as a number of these have been observed locally. The 'gender-balance' of involvement in projects was echoed in the TED in East Lindsey Programme, with approximately a third of attendees being male and two-thirds female (although the impact report by Campbell-Jack et al (2021) referenced above highlights projects categorised as 'mental health' did attract a slight increase in take-up by men). The iterative nature of service design, feedback and ongoing development informed the TED in East Lindsey programme to commission two projects with a specific focus on men.

Case Study: Taking Over? Engaging men in dynamic activities and realising the benefits

TED in East Lindsey commissioned Carer's First to develop and establish 'Men Do' in the summer of 2019. The project was motivated by national and local statistics from Ageing Better that highlighted the under-engagement of men in existing services and activities. Focussing specifically on care-givers, 'Men Do' is recognition of the benefits that can be gained from drawing on activities to form connections and enhance peer-to-peer support and camaraderie. As

a result, the project contributed to significant progress in increasing men's involvement in the programme as a whole, and informing aspects of delivery. In a separate learning report, it was detailed that in April 2019 38% of TED in East Lindsey participants were men and by December in the same year this had risen to 43%.

'Men Do' develops a programme of striking activities with past examples including: snooker master-classes with the late Willie Thorne, air rifle shooting, brewery trips, breakfast clubs and fish, chips and chat by the sea. During the pandemic a 'chat directory' was put together so men were able to provide a profile about themselves and include their contact details so they could connect with each other. The dedicated project lead from Carer's First also had frequent contact with Men Do members during shielding measures which featured delivering gift packages, visiting men at social distance and also promoting online events. The latter involving a virtual group ukulele performance following the inclusion of the instrument with instructions in a gift pack. As measures were relaxed, 'socially distanced' events initially took place, including at locations such as Cadwell race track.

Having resource in the form of a paid project lead has been essential in promoting 'Men Do' and contributing to its success. It has developed understanding about the 'lived experiences' of carers and different ways to engage men, in addition to capitalising on their contributions to the project, be these in-keeping with 'formal' or 'informal' typologies of volunteers:

"One thing I have found is that the difference between volunteers wanting to be official or unofficial is a tricky balance... if they're unofficial then really you can't ask much of them at all, not because they don't want to help but because of the red tape. But there's such a risk to asking them to do the online training to become official because of the likelihood of them not wanting to do that and then potentially stepping back from any volunteering help at all. Particularly on a project like this where we're trying to work towards volunteers taking a lead on events." (Men Do Project Lead, Carer's First)

Our discussions with the men who participate in 'Men Do' and design activities have revealed

the emotional resonance the project has with them. However, relationships have been reciprocal with men actively supporting project leads:

> *"you're an angel, I don't know how you manage everything you do, and it's right that we step up to help you. It's a two-way street."* (Men Do participant)

As with other TED in East Lindsey programme components the relationships developed with staff and formal volunteers (as well as other TED members) have been normalised in the sense that they are thought of as friendships. This contributes to how people aged 50 and over value and 'own' programme activities so the desire to 'keep going' (and keep enjoying) is part of communities. Men Do has gone on to receive subsequent funding from the Morrisons branch at Skegness and Freemasons have provided financial support to continue men's breakfast meetings across East Lindsey. Carer's First are supporting the development of a steering group of men to increase the resilience of the project so the dynamic service offer can continue into the future.

'Test and learn' has framed and informed understandings and appreciations of volunteering. This has been, and continues to be, influential in shedding light on volunteers' motivations to start to participate and stay over time. TED in East Lindsey commissioned a two-year formative and summative evaluation which was undertaken by evaluation partners from the University of Lincoln International Business School and Rose Regeneration. Key headlines show the programme had:

> *"... mobilised 537 volunteers who, collectively, have contributed 13,678 hours to supporting the programme. Based on the national minimum wage, this represents an economic contribution of £112,296"* (Price, Annibal, Jackson, Sellick and Herron, 2021: 3).

Individual benefits intersect with community benefits:

> *"I volunteered because I wanted to put something into the community and different ideas of what we can do because you've got to have these ideas otherwise people are not gonna come"* (Coastal Friendship Group volunteer, 2021)

> *"... because of COVID itself, planning ahead for the future where we can go as a group, because we are inclusive with the members as well, not just the volunteers. I mean (during lockdowns) I missed everything about a Wednesday, I mean we generally go around once a week to (see volunteer 1 and volunteer 2) ...and everything. That part of our life, and I find this is personal, is not there at the moment even though we are interactive... we've got a long way to go, but the inclusivity of the community, I miss everything"* (Inland Friendship Group volunteer, 2021)

The importance of language is key to engagement. This has direct implications relating to 'volunteering' specifically, but also in 'reaching' and sustaining participation from sections of communities. This includes the 64% of TED in East Lindsey participants who reside in parts of the district which belong to the 30% of most deprived communities nationally (Price, Annibal, Jackson, Sellick and Herron, 2021). The coastal towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe experience some of the most severe forms of multiple deprivation and, as a result, have been placed in the top 5 towns experiencing highest levels of multiple deprivation with implications for problematic recovery from the pandemic (Ibid; also Centre for Towns, 2020).

References to 'volunteers' can create varied inferences about identities, which are informed and challenged by factors that include: existing stereotypes; direct 'lived' experience; varied relationships; and different stakeholder involvement in shaping services and delivering activities. Recognising this complexity, other organisations have sought to capture different embodiments of 'volunteering' through exploring terminology. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO, 2021) defines volunteering broadly as:

> *"Someone spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone who they're not closely related to. Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual".*

Both independently and cumulatively the aforementioned factors shape how volunteering is conceptualised. Some of these factors are utilised with the intention to give clarity and context to different forms of volunteer activity, yet can too blur lines between perceived 'formal'/'traditional' volunteering on the one hand and more 'informal' contributions on the other. 'Formal' volunteering is aligned with the following traits (see [Community Southwark, 2020](#)):

- Giving unpaid help through a group or organisation (be this voluntary and community, private or public sector)

- Volunteers typically having a set number of hours

- The volunteer opportunity is accompanied, potentially, with a role description and, potentially, induction into the organisation which can be guided by policies and procedures

- The organisation provides supervision of the volunteer

Community Southwark (2020) identify informal volunteering as providing help to someone who is not a relative or family member and is not coordinated by an organisation, but takes place at a 'community-level' or through 'social action'[1] . 'Micro-volunteering', for instance, can be conceived of as providing 'bite size' support that benefits communities yet does not involve time-bound commitment and is characterised as being more flexible (The Guardian, 2017)[2] . This type of volunteering has the potential to harness valuable input from those who do not have the time or desire to engage formally, or via a structured approach. As such these informal or micro experiences can be inclusive and ultimately inform a person's potential transition into more formal long(er)-term commitment (which can be promoted, for example, through 'taster' sessions). The emergence of this approach also overlaps with developments in 'virtual volunteering'.

Engagement during COVID-19

"Whether in "new" forms like NHS Volunteer Responders or mutual aid groups, or more established befriending schemes and support groups, volunteers provide vital practical, emotional and social help to some of the most vulnerable and isolated people in our communities." (Campaign to End Loneliness, 2021)

Experiences of the pandemic have reaffirmed that strong relationships between different forms of volunteering can exist. As mentioned in the previous section, micro-volunteering can be seen to converge with approaches that are not 'place-based'. These often involve a significant 'virtual' or 'online' aspect. For instance, Age UK Lindsey's telephone befriending service provides an example of how volunteers have supported and connected with communities during the pandemic. Likewise, digital service offers have been supported by 'champions' who are converts to the benefits of digital which has been the case with Lincs Digital (a TED in East Lindsey commissioned delivery partner). These are symbolic of the benefits of peer-to-peer models of support with volunteers acting as 'experts by experience' (that have been documented in forms of mental health and substance-use oriented advocacy). A case study at the beginning of the pandemic captured how 'informal' and 'micro' forms of volunteering were integral to community responses during shielding and 'lock-down' measures. This has provided fundamental support to people with essential needs and, for some, emotional support throughout the pandemic which continues. These experiences have contributed positively to knowledge about what can be achieved, and the possibilities of framing individual action as belonging to a collective effort:

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[1] Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can include volunteering, giving money, community action or simple neighbourly acts. Through the commitment and skill of citizens, social action can empower communities, help people in need, and complement public services – see Social Action - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[2] Microvolunteering: what is it and why should you do it? | Voluntary Sector Network | The Guardian

"Small groups of people are seeing the benefits of helping each other to achieve an outcome, e.g. one person shopping for a few, one making food, one helping with laundry etc. With help and support these community groups that have delivered such an amazing service to each other, could themselves continue and thrive with even greater outcomes." (Lincs Digital Case Study, 2020)

Having numerous approaches to, and formations of, 'volunteering' or, 'helping' does not necessarily mean a preference for facilitating one form over another, or that accommodating multiple incarnations will lead to conflicts within and between projects and programmes. Indeed, the pandemic has demonstrated the benefits of diverse ways of involving and supporting communities. One of the Friendship Groups with a number of 'formal volunteers' and a committee structure demonstrated ways in which continued connectedness had been essential in lock-down periods:

"We couldn't do it without our team...they're always there and I mean up till COVID we were having meetings on a regular basis because without the team (of volunteers) we wouldn't be able to manage it at all... we did the 'this is me' brochure which of course you could hand over on the doorstep or leave on the doorstep... we'd pop puzzles in and maybe even if we knocked on their doors... going to houses dropping things off and keeping with the most vulnerable, finding out who's got contacts and who hasn't, because some people have got shopping and taxi people. Basically, just making sure everyone on our books that we had numbers for was okay" (Inland Friendship Group, 2021)

The Campaign to End Loneliness (2021) reports that during COVID-19 many of the fundamentals of 'volunteer management' remained unchanged, but the emerging situation required practical adaptations to be made to ensure these continued. A series of traits remained constant, they are summarised and paraphrased below:

1. Be flexible and responsive
2. Help volunteers feel enabled and supported
3. Be sociable and connected
4. Ensure volunteers are valued and appreciated
5. Support volunteering to be meaningful and purposeful
6. Makes good use of volunteers' strengths

During COVID-19 when government measures intensified, many of the existing group dynamics continued. Although TED in East Lindsey was able to provide flexible support to groups, importantly that provided by commissioned partners, it was also the case that the pre-COVID-19 foundations had facilitated a sense of independence in volunteers. As seen in our friendship groups both formal committee members and 'friends' were proactive in

contacting and providing support for their networks. This happened without the need for people to be managed (formally and informally) and serves to indicate that 'post-funding' legacy is already present. However, it is also very real that during COVID-19 volunteer 'burn out' remains a pressing issue. From a *Loneliness in the Time of COVID-19* webinar held by the Campaign to End Loneliness, 75% of participants who work with volunteers said they were worried about volunteer burnout.

Our Communities Officer continued working with Friendship Group leads during 2021 to plan for the reintroduction of place-based gatherings and activities. Having this 'community interface' in different parts of the district meant that drawing together perspectives from all Friendship Groups in East Lindsey was achievable. Shared key lines of inquiry focussed on aims to re-start gatherings, arrange meeting venues (where needed), address practicalities like providing PPE and hygiene measures, and undertaking risk assessments, including for socially distanced events. This was additional to emotional and pastoral support provided by TED in East Lindsey stakeholders. Similarly, the Communities Officer was able to discuss what activities (and support) groups were hoping to provide to their members and wider communities:

> *"I think lunch out somewhere else now and then would be nice. Days Out with picnics ie. Cleethorpes, Horncastle etc. Happy to give lifts, car share petrol costs. Gives us a chance to get to know people outside of a specific environment. Learn about others interests."* (Lead Volunteer, Coastal Village Friendship Group, 2020)

Where possible, in line with COVID-19 measures at the time, delivery partners and the Communities Officer both maintained contact through socially distanced interaction, delivering gift packs at social distance. For Friendship Group members this included receiving visits from Rainbow Dreaming's ponies and the Communities Officer.

> *"There was one particular (activity) for us when two of the horses were brought round and I knew that was for us, only for us volunteers"* (Volunteer, Inland Friendship Group, 2020)

> *"we've had TED as a backup, without TED we wouldn't have existed... if we've needed things finding out they've been able to do that for us, and tremendous, helped us monetary-wise with providing different activities"* (Volunteer, Inland Friendship Group, 2020)

> *"It's nice to know they're (TED) at the end of the phone or an email and they will come back to you hopefully with a solution, if not they will try and find a solution"* (Volunteer, Inland Friendship Group, 2020)

As TED in East Lindsey draws to a close there is a need to remember that even though some of these moves to autonomous sustainability may feel intuitive, natural and unplanned, getting to this point has required the allocation of resources, time and commitment from stakeholders. Our programme learning shows that future volunteering would still

benefit from, and utilise, funding to appreciate volunteers' skills, values and perspectives and the roles these people can have in communities. Importantly, these are not on the periphery of 'core', 'statutory' provision nor are they 'cheap' or without cost. Activities provided and the coordination they require are not Cinderella Services, even though they can still function against a backdrop of stereotypical perceptions, including those incorrectly aligned to the Voluntary and Community Sector.

Taking-Over and/or Moving Forward

It is clear that AB nationally and locally have made significant in-roads to promoting social action, social participation and reducing social isolation. As a number of TED-commissioned services reached the end of their current funding journey, the demand for, and recognition of, programme activities and relationships continue. Anecdotally, this appears to be in emerging contexts of funding which are (perceivably) less secure and short-term. We have already seen commissioned partners attracting further funding and develop additional projects. This is not only in the case of 'Men Do', Sporting Memories quizzes previously part of the Community Health Activity Projects ran by Magna Vitae, a TED in East Lindsey delivery partner, has gained additional support. Partners working in digital inclusion, befriending and advice continue to diversify.

Programme experience has validated volunteering and its impact on challenging stereotypes about ageing populations, their services and community providers. 'Volunteers', including people who 'help informally', are core to enhancing social participation, and contributing to individual and collective identity while supporting services that are person-centred. In all guises volunteers continue to be an integral part of service offers that remain responsive to local needs, preferences and population characteristics. Therefore, moving from intensive 'top down' investment to responsive, grass-roots groups and networks is a core ethos of AB that will live on.

Across programme progression it is already possible to trace plans and practices that support this transition. Friendship Groups, including a growing online support group for people who are Ageing Without Children (AWOC), are working with the Communities Officer in planning ahead. This approach has been blended, with 'hard copy' and online toolkits for Friendship Groups, visits to discuss the ending of AB funding ending and creating and distributing information packs. As highlighted earlier, some of this planning has concerned pragmatic issues relating to a re-emergence of place-based provision as COVID-19 measures recede:

> "As part of my role I am working with each Friendship Group to produce an information folder that will support the group to succeed past March. Contents will include an example of a volunteer job description; a volunteer handbook along with sample attendance registers and registration forms. Key members of each group will be able to draw on this guidance. It features welcome matters for attendees going forward and highlights other organisations who can continue to help. For instance, Lincolnshire Community and Volunteer Service can assist with Disclosure and Barring Service clearance. In addition,
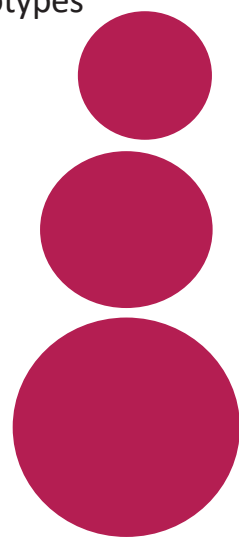
details are given regarding training events and General Data Protection Regulation. We have been mindful that key procedures for safeguarding are also covered" (Communities Officer, 2022)

Where volunteers have been leaders in providing services and activities, such as in the case of Friendship Groups, their presence will continue. Whilst funding for services delivered by commissioned partners completed at the end of 2021, it is the case that relationships with organisations, their staff and volunteers continue. This is indicative of how key organisations and businesses contribute culturally, engaging emotionally which transcends contrasting interpretations of 'provider' and 'end beneficiary'. The 'TED journey' has enabled collective learning, building on protracted 'buy-in' and 'local credibility' that has too featured in earlier reports published by the TED in East Lindsey team. This resilience, innovation and partnership work has been bolstered greatly by Ageing Better's investment and the influence of the programme in the district. The TED in East Lindsey team at YMCA Lincolnshire and delivery partners have been able to offer a range of services to people aged 50 and over through making connections to other activities within their organisation or by referral to others. This ensures networks TED in East Lindsey created and/or have capitalised on remain healthy, where 'volunteers' (in their most diverse forms) can continue to be at the hub of making the district a place where people can age better.

Key learning

Volunteers have been and remain crucial to Ageing Better (AB). They are central in ensuring Ageing Better's impact continues after March 2022.

The importance of language is key to engagement. This has direct implications relating to 'volunteering' specifically, but also in 'reaching' and sustaining participation from different sections of communities generally. As is shown in the Men Do case study this can include men, but also parts of deprived and/or 'minority' communities.

References to 'volunteers' can create varied inferences about identities, which are informed and challenged by factors that include: existing stereotypes; direct 'lived' experience; varied relationships; and different stakeholder involvement in shaping services and delivering activities.

People who contribute greatly to service offers and group dynamics do not necessarily wish to identify as a 'volunteer'. They can see their role in the group as being with others and enjoy a shared identity. Even where paid staff/facilitation exists, people in these roles are often viewed primarily as a friendship or an informal, mutual relationship.

Allowing for 'informal' experiences can promote inclusivity and be a pathway to a person's long(er)-term connection. Formal labelling and dedicated roles can be counter-inclusive if this approach is given sole precedence.

People who 'help' and those who are 'helped' can have dual, coexisting identities that can blur. Appreciating this can be a strength when working to create and maintain inclusive community approaches.

'Volunteers' and people who 'help' (who may be labelled in a variety of ways) bring diverse skills, interests and energies. A conservative estimate of benefits can be made from equating this with hourly rates of pay, using the minimum wage as a baseline. However, TED in East Lindsey has recognised that this figure needs to be appreciated alongside wider social value. Capturing this requires drawing on a mixed-methods approach.

'Volunteers' are not on the periphery of 'core', 'statutory' provision. They are not 'cheap' or without cost and the services and activities they provide along with the coordination they require are not Cinderella Services. This is despite working in contexts that foster stereotypical perceptions, including those about the Voluntary and Community Sector as a 'whole'. Going forward there is still a strong case for dedicated resource, including for those networks that are already established.

About East Lindsey

T.E.D.
Ageing Better in East Lindsey

East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 30% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED Programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness

- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities

- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have over 1800 registered TED members, and over 100 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Award.

Further information...
To find out more about TED visit our website www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk

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