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# Happy City Group Work Peer Support Pilot

June 2016 - May 2017

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2

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Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership of organisations working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them to live fulfilling lives. In Autumn 2015, BAB began to commission sixteen pilot projects as part of the Group Work Peer Support Service. These pilots tested different methods of group work and peer support in tackling loneliness and isolation.

Group work and peer support use peers to help people focus on their assets, abilities and potential routes to recovery and general wellbeing. It mobilises the insights and empathy of people who share similar problems or experiences to support their peers, in this case regarding loneliness and social isolation.

This report provides an overview of the pilot project delivered by Happy City, including their outcomes for participants, their successes and challenges. In line with BAB's 'test and learn' approach, this report will highlight key points of learning and advice which may be useful for other projects within Bristol Ageing Better or the other thirteen Ageing Better areas funded by the Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme.

## Project overview

This pilot project from Happy City involved adapting their '5 ways to wellbeing' training to focus specifically on positive ageing. They delivered this adapted two-day training programme to a group of older people who were already active and trusted within their communities. Once trained, these older people would become Wellbeing Champions and then be able to pass this knowledge on to, and with, other older people within their local community.

By delivering this adapted training across the city, this pilot aimed to develop the capacity of those working with older people and support them to improve both their own wellbeing and that of the people they work with. It aimed to:

- Foster a positive view of ageing.
- Promote attitudes which respect and value older people.
- Recognise and support older people's participation and contributions.
- Value self-reliance, independence and individual responsibility.
- Acknowledge diversity among the older population.

3

## Participants

A greater number of Wellbeing Champions were trained than Happy City had initially anticipated – in total 14 older people were trained as Wellbeing Champions compared to the initial expectation of 12.

8 of these 14 participants provided demographic information. Of these, 6 were female (75%) and 2 were male (25%). Ages ranged from 57 to 75, with an average age of 64. 6 participants were White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British (75%), while 2 were Chinese (25%).

2 participants were Christian (25%), 1 was Buddhist (12.5%), 1 had another religion (12.5%), 3 had no religion (37.5%) and 1 chose not to provide this information (12.5%). 7 participants reported being heterosexual (87.5%), while 1 chose not to provide this information (12.5%).

In terms of living arrangements, 2 participants lived alone (25%), 3 lived with a spouse or partner (37.5%), 2 lived with family (25%) and 1 lived in residential accommodation (12.5%).

3 participants had a long-term physical or mental illness or disability (37.5%). 2 participants reported looking after or giving special help to someone who is sick, disabled or elderly (25%).

## Project process



## Outcomes for participants

Participants answered a set of questions at the start of their involvement with the pilot project, and then again at the end of their involvement. These were standardised questions in the form of BAB's Common Measurement Framework (CMF) – a series of questions completed by participants across the Bristol Ageing Better programme as well as within the thirteen other Ageing Better areas funded by The Big Lottery Fund through the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better Programme.

5 participants (36% of the total who participated in this pilot project) answered the CMF questions at both the beginning and end of the project. The following outcomes are therefore based on the information provided by these 5 individuals.

At the end of the pilot project:

- 60% of participants reported an improvement in at least one aspect of social isolation and loneliness.
- 80% of participants reported an improvement in at least one aspect of wellbeing.

The scales overleaf show the average scores relating to loneliness/isolation and wellbeing before and after participating in this pilot project.

More detailed outcomes information can be found in the appendices.

# 60%

reported  
loneliness improved



# 80%

reported  
wellbeing improved



## Social isolation and loneliness



**BEFORE pilot** 2.0  
**AFTER pilot** 2.0 (no change)



## Wellbeing



**BEFORE pilot** 3.63  
**AFTER pilot** 3.66



The Wellbeing Champions met up three months after they had received the training, in order to discuss the impact of the course on their own lives and their experiences of sharing this information with other people in their communities.

7 of the 14 participants (50%) attended this meeting and reported:

- All 7 of these participants had used what they learnt on the training course while undertaking their existing roles within the community. They had either delivered short informal training sessions or had discussed the '5 ways to wellbeing' with colleagues, at community groups, or with family or friends.
- All 7 of these participants planned to either run training sessions in the future or continue to share their knowledge about the '5 ways to wellbeing' in some way.
- All 7 of these participants reported using the '5 ways to wellbeing' within their own lives by appreciating the small things that build wellbeing.
- This flexibility to either deliver formal training or give advice more informally was a strength of the pilot project because it enabled knowledge to be passed on but also took the capacity of the individual into account.

### Project successes

#### Coproduction:

- Happy City involved older people in the adaptation of their '5 ways to wellbeing' course and training materials. For example they spoke to older people about how they learn about looking after their wellbeing.

#### Maintaining contact between participants:

- Happy City set up a Facebook and Whatsapp group for participants to encourage them to share information, support each other and ask questions of each other.
- They organised follow-up meetings 3 months and 6 months after the training had taken place to ensure participants felt connected to the programme and could discuss experiences from each other. Through this maintained contact, Happy City realised the value of sharing and learning together as a group.

### Key challenges and what would be done differently in the future

#### Finding participants:

- It was a challenge to find people who were 'likely' to share the knowledge within their community groups or workplaces, and to attract these individuals to take part.
- Even though many of the participants shared their knowledge with other people, most wanted to do the course in order to improve their own wellbeing or to incorporate wellbeing strategies into their already existing roles within the community.

#### Diversity of participants:

- Happy City would have preferred to have greater diversity among participants in terms of cultural backgrounds and languages, as this would have increased the likelihood that the '5 ways to wellbeing' knowledge would be shared within BME communities and among those who did not have English as a first language. Happy City aimed to attract participants from underrepresented groups by sending them direct invites which ensured they were aware of the opportunity to participate.
- However unfortunately Happy City were only able to offer the training in English, which reduced this diversity.

### Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

#### Flexibility around individual support needs:

- It worked well to design a programme which had a core foundation but could then be flexibly adapted according to individual interests and support needs. This included practical needs as well as the different learning styles of people taking part.
- If the project involves knowledge being cascaded down, this willingness and ability to adapt should also be taken into consideration by those who will pass on the information in the future.

#### Completing BAB's Common Measurement Framework (CMF) forms:

- Allow additional time to complete these as, depending on the individual, it can take a long time to complete. Participants may need a great deal of additional support, and this should be taken into consideration in advance when planning how your project will complete them.

# Appendix 1

## Outcomes for Participants: Social Isolation & Loneliness

The Big Lottery Fund identifies 10 intersecting dimensions of social isolation and loneliness<sup>1</sup>. At the end of the pilot project, 60% of the 5 participants who provided both entry and exit outcomes data reported an improvement in at least one of these dimensions.

The combined answers from these 5 participants can be seen in the table below:

	Before participating in the pilot	After participating in the pilot
I experience a general sense of emptiness	0% yes	0% yes
There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems	20% yes	40% yes
There are many people I can trust completely	20% yes	20% yes
There are enough people I feel close to	80% yes	20% yes
I miss having people around	20% yes	40% yes
I often feel rejected	0% yes	0% yes
How often do you lack companionship?	0% often	20% often
How often do you feel left out?	0% often	0% often
How often do you feel isolated from others?	0% often	0% often
How often do you feel in tune with people around you?	60% often	40% often

<sup>1</sup> From the De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale

# Appendix 2

## Outcomes for Participants: Wellbeing

Similarly, the Big Lottery Fund identifies 7 intersecting dimensions of wellbeing<sup>2</sup>. At the end of the pilot project, 80% of the 5 participants who provided both entry and exit outcomes data reported an improvement in at least one of these dimensions of wellbeing.

The combined answers from these 5 participants can be seen in the table below:

	1 None of the time	2 Rarely	3 Some of the time	4 Often	5 All of the time
	Before participating in the pilot (average)			After participating in the pilot (average)	
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	2.8			3.6	
I've been feeling useful	3.8			3.6	
I've been feeling relaxed	3.2			3.2	
I've been dealing with problems well	3.4			3.4	
I've been thinking clearly	4.0			3.8	
I've been feeling close to other people	3.6			3.6	
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	4.6			4.4	

<sup>2</sup> From the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS)



Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) is a partnership working to reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people and help them live fulfilling lives.

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