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**LOTTERY FUNDED**

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)
Group Work Peer Support Pilot
January 2016 - December 2016

Action for Blind People - Group Work Peer Support Pilot

January 2016 – December 2016 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 the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), including their successes, challenges and learning. 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

RNIB partnered with Guide Dogs, Action on Hearing Loss and Sense to deliver six peer support taster sessions (45 minutes) on 'Living with Sensory Loss'. These sessions covered three different forms of sensory loss within the one combined session - sight loss, dual sensory loss and hearing loss.

These taster sessions then generated referrals for a more specific peer support session within each respective organisation. The following numbers attended these more specific peer support sessions:

- Dual sensory loss - 8 people
- Hearing loss - 3 people
- Sight loss - 50 people

Participants

Of these attendees, four people provided demographic information. All four were women aged between 59 and 65 years old. They lived in a variety of neighbourhoods within Bristol. Two were Christian, while one reported their religion as 'other' and the fourth had no religion.

In terms of their living arrangements, one lived alone, one lived with family, one lived with their partner/spouse and one chose not to provide this information.

Two reported having a long-standing physical or mental illness or disability. One reported that they did not have this type of health condition, while the fourth chose not to provide this information.

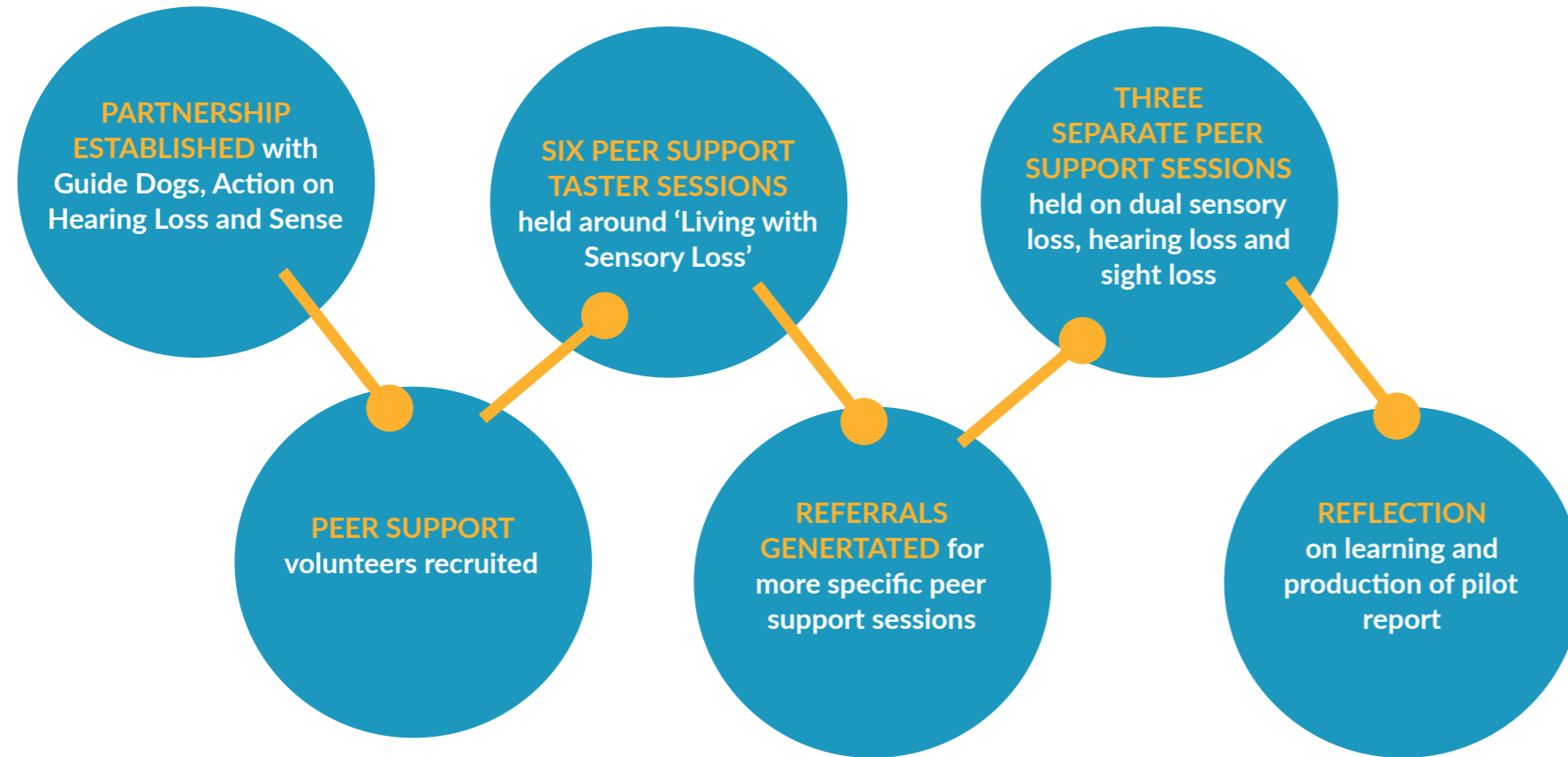
Lastly, one participant reported providing care for someone who is sick, disabled or elderly.

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Project process



Project successes

Impact on participants:

- **Anecdotal impact:** Although there were fewer participants than expected, those who did participate anecdotally reported a positive impact, for example greater confidence and reduced feelings of isolation.
- **Information:** Participants were also made aware of the other services offered by the partnership organisations, for example regarding welfare rights, employment and counselling services. This information is likely to have a beneficial impact in the future through participants being more informed.

Volunteers:

- **New volunteers:** Peer support volunteers were recruited for this pilot project and were an integral part of delivering the peer support sessions.
- **Volunteer continuation:** Many of these new volunteers then continued volunteering for Action on Hearing Loss and RNIB after this pilot project finished.

Working in partnership:

- **Strong relationships:** Strong working relationships were developed between RNIB, Sense, Guide Dogs and Action on Hearing Loss. They found it valuable to share best practice, share resources, deliver training to each other and make cross referrals between organisations within the sight loss field. These organisations plan to continue to work closely after this pilot has finished.



Participant numbers were lower than expected for all of the peer support sessions

Key challenges and what would be done differently in the future

Marketing difficulties:

- This project was advertised through a variety of methods including: Bristol Ageing Better, RNIB, Action on Hearing Loss, Guide Dogs, Sense, Hanover Housing, Sensory Support Service, Sensory Impairment Team and Bristol Healthwatch.
- However participant numbers were lower than expected for both the taster sessions and the more specific peer support sessions, suggesting that other forms of promoting the project could be tested in the future.

Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

Multisensory approach:

- This pilot trialed a multisensory approach in the general taster sessions, combining sight loss, dual sensory loss and hearing loss.
- This can be useful in some instances, but there is also the risk that it dilutes the more specific individual models and therefore a multisensory approach may perhaps be less person-centred than those focused on one specific type of disability.

Case study:

M had not previously identified himself as deafblind even though he had acquired sight and hearing loss. He had just assumed this was part of the ageing process and did not realise support such as Communicator Guides was available.

Before participating in this pilot project, he was not aware of the Care Act 2015 and found the definition of deafblindness very enlightening: "Persons are regarded as deafblind if their combined sight and hearing impairment cause difficulties with communication, access to information and mobility".

As a result of this pilot, M is now more informed about the support available to him.





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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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