



University of Bath Group Work Peer Support Pilot

August 2016 - July 2017



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University of Bath – Group Work Peer Support Pilot

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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 the University of Bath, including 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 - REACT (REtirement in ACTION)

This pilot project aimed to increase the physical and social activity of older people aged 65 and over who were starting to have difficulties with the activities of daily living, for example walking up stairs, getting to the shops or getting out of a chair.

Regular sessions were run at Easton Community Centre for 12 months. These were twice weekly for the first 3 months and then weekly for the next 9 months. These sessions involved a 60 minute gentle group physical activity followed by a 30 minute social session.

Each participant first had a one-to-one 45 minute meeting with the session leader to discuss their motivations, concerns, barriers and goals. This enabled the regular sessions to be tailored to the individuals present. In the later part of the 12-month programme, the social activities involved different activity taster sessions and visits to other community centres, with the aim of building the individual's confidence and physical ability to participate in a range of community activities.

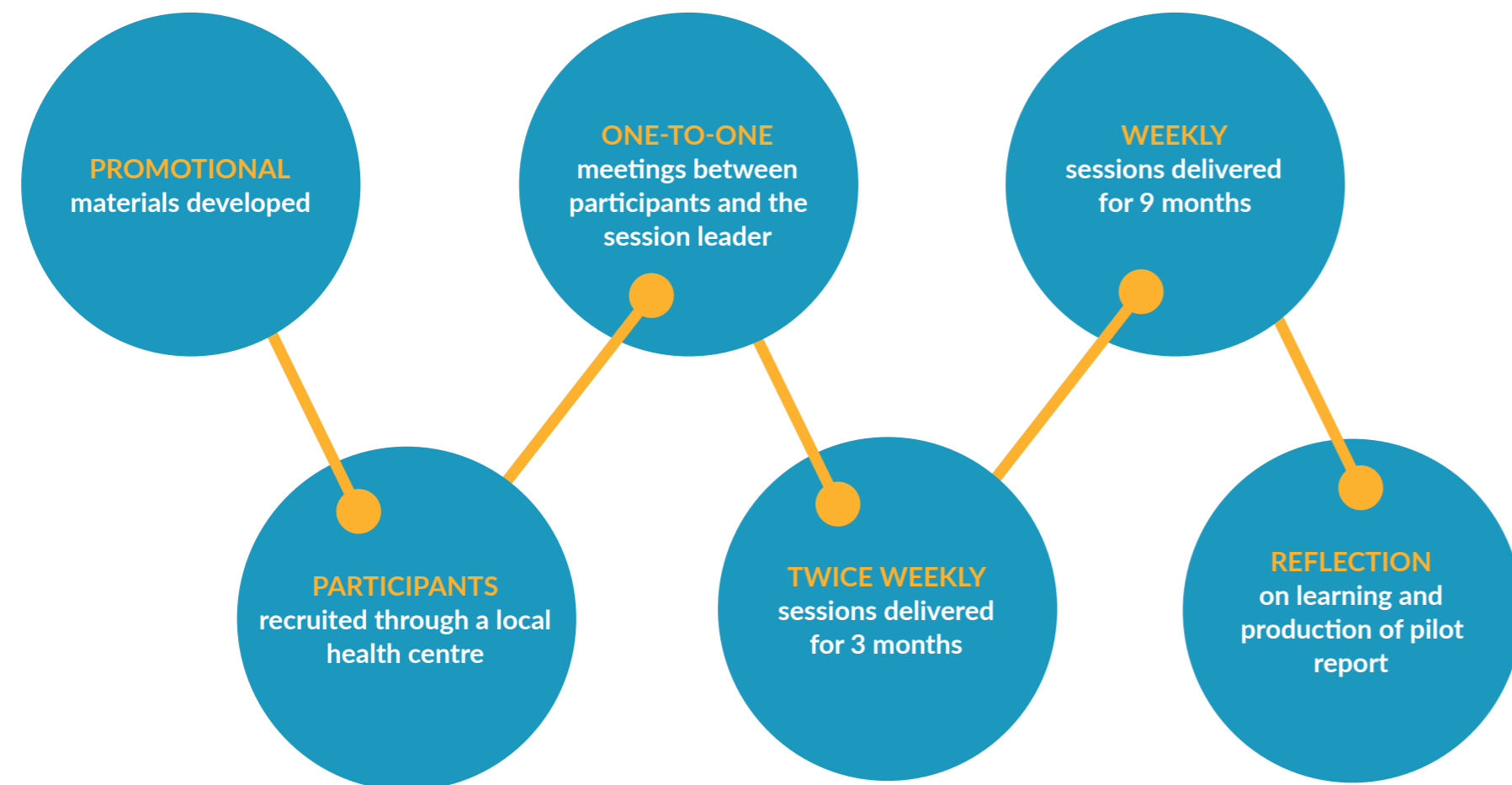
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A few months into the 12-month programme, participants were encouraged to become REACT ambassadors. These ambassadors received training to support the programme, for example helping to find other participants through word-of-mouth, researching opportunities for activities and helping individuals to attend the sessions. In this way the aim was for the ambassadors to help this REACT project to be sustained beyond the BAB funding.

This BAB pilot project was part of a wider REACT research study, which was developed and delivered by the University of Bath and funded by the NIHR PHR programme.



Project process



Participant characteristics

This pilot project had 15 participants in total. Of these 8 provided information about their characteristics, loneliness and mental wellbeing, descriptions of which are below and on the following page.

Characteristics

Ages ranged from 67 to 86, with an average age of 78.

6 identified as female (75%), 1 identified as male (12.5%) and 1 chose not to provide this information. 4 were Black Caribbean (50%), 2 were Indian (25%), 1 was White British, English, Scottish, Northern Irish or Welsh (12.5%) and 1 chose not to provide this information.

4 reported being Christian (50%), 1 reported being Buddhist (12.5%), 1 reported being Hindu (12.5%), 1 reported having no religion (12.5%) and 1 reported belonging to three religions - Christian, Hindu and Buddhist (12.5%).

6 reported being heterosexual (75%) while the other 2 chose not to provide this information (25%).

In terms of living arrangements, half lived alone while half lived with a spouse or partner. 7 (87.5%) reported having a long-standing physical or mental illness or disability. Furthermore, 3 (37.5%) reported providing unpaid help or care to someone who is sick, disabled or elderly.

Participant characteristics (continued)

Loneliness

4 participants answered questions about loneliness using the De Jong Gierveld scale when they became involved with the project. This scale generates a participant score of between 0 and 6, with 0 being the least lonely and 6 being the most lonely.

The average loneliness score of these 4 participants was 1.5, indicating they were not very lonely. However this score is only based on the 4 participants who completed these loneliness questions, and does not include the other 11 participants who took part in this pilot project.

Mental wellbeing

4 participants answered questions about mental wellbeing using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) when they became involved with the project. This scale generates a participant score of between 7 and 35, with 7 representing lower wellbeing and 35 representing higher wellbeing.

The average mental wellbeing score of these 4 participants was 23, indicating reasonably good levels of mental wellbeing. However, as with the loneliness score, this is only based on 4 of the total 15 participants.

Project successes

Coproduction:

- This pilot project had an advisory group made up of older adults. This advisory group provides input and feedback on specific aspects of the project.
- The role of a REACT ambassador offered participants the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities and feel a sense of ownership.

Participant feedback:

- This pilot project had good participant attendance levels, with 11-13 people attending on a regular basis out of the 15 total participants.
- Anecdotally, participants reported improvements in their physical function and provided positive feedback about the sessions.



The role of REACT ambassador offered participants the chance to take on additional responsibilities.



Transport was challenging throughout this pilot project.

Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

Transport:

- Transport was challenging throughout this pilot project. Dial-a-Ride was used to bring participants to the activity sessions, however sometimes Dial-a-Ride were unable to accommodate the request.
- To overcome this challenge, the University of Bath recruited a 'standby' volunteer driver who provided transport for participants who could not get Dial-a-Ride.
- The REACT ambassadors also took on the responsibility of liaising with Dial-a-Ride in order to try and maximise attendance at the sessions.
- Getting to the venue was a substantial challenge. The University of Bath's other pilot sites in Bath, Exeter and Birmingham also faced similar transport issues but to a somewhat lesser extent. This may have been because none of the Easton participants were car drivers and the venue was not well-served by public transport.

Appendix 1

Participant

The Big Lottery Fund identifies 6 intersecting dimensions of social isolation and loneliness³.

Answers:

Social Isolation & Loneliness

The combined answers from the 4 participants who answered these questions can be seen in the table below:

	Before participating in the pilot
I experience a general sense of emptiness	0% yes
There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems	75% yes
There are many people I can trust completely	100% yes
There are enough people I feel close to	75% yes
I miss having people around	0% yes
I often feel rejected	0% yes

³ From the De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale

Appendix 2

Participant Answers: Wellbeing

The Big Lottery Fund identifies 7 intersecting dimensions of wellbeing⁴.

The combined answers from the 4 participants who answered these questions 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)				
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					3.00
I've been feeling useful					3.50
I've been feeling relaxed					2.00
I've been dealing with problems well					4.25
I've been thinking clearly					3.25
I've been feeling close to other people					4.00
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					3.00

⁴ 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.

Bristol Ageing Better
Canningford House
38 Victoria St.
Bristol BS1 6BY

Email: bab@ageukbristol.org.uk
Telephone: 0117 928 1539
Website: <http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk>

