



Volunteering Matters Learning for Life Together Pilot

September 2016 - August 2017



**BRISTOL
AGEING
BETTER**



LOTTERY FUNDED

Volunteering Matters - Learning for Life Together Pilot

2

September 2016 -
August 2017

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. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund. In September 2016, BAB commissioned three projects as part of the Learning for Life Together pilot.

Learning for Life Together aims to empower older people who are isolated and who have lost confidence by encouraging and supporting them to share their stories, skills or experiences with younger people within a learning environment. There are a number of intergenerational initiatives which already exist in Bristol aiming to bring together younger and older people in order to improve respect and understanding between generations. Learning for Life Together builds on this great work by offering specific support to those older people who may initially not feel ready to engage in this kind of activity, but with some support and encouragement can build their confidence by sharing their skills, experiences or stories.

3

The three Learning for Life Together pilot projects all trialled different methods of activity to empower older people and reduce their isolation and loneliness.

This report provides an overview of the pilot project delivered by Volunteering Matters, 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

The Volunteering Matters pilot project recruited isolated older people from the Hartcliffe, Bishopsworth and Withywood areas of Bristol to volunteer in a primary school once per week for six weeks.

The volunteers co-delivered history sessions which tied in with the existing school curriculum - local history from 1917 to the present day, for example engaging them in games the volunteers used to play as children, and sharing stories about the food they used to eat and their experiences of growing up during WW2.

The older people co-produced the project, with support and encouragement from the class teacher and the Volunteering Matters staff.

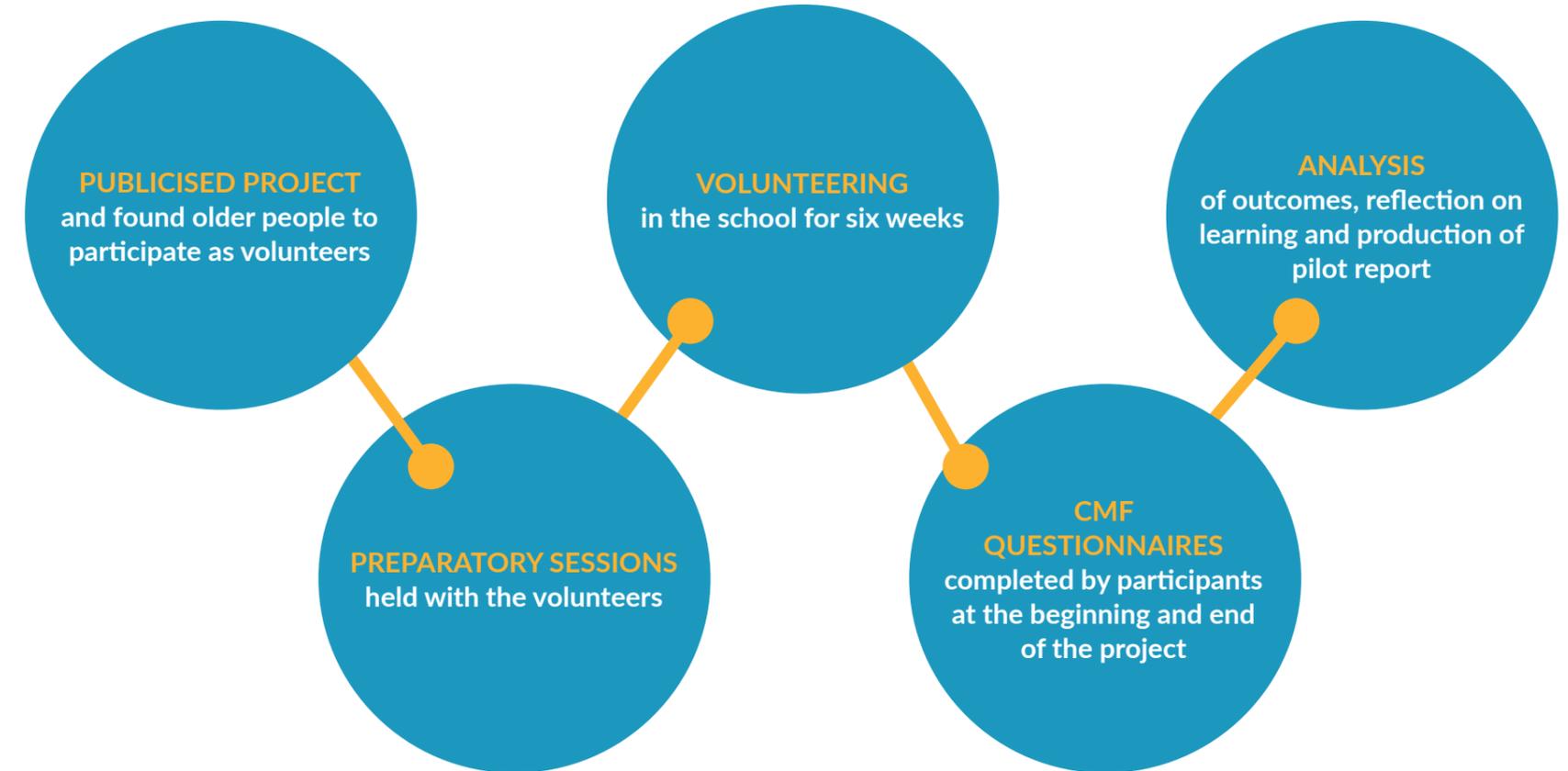
Participants

9 older people took part in this pilot project, either by attending the preparatory reminiscence sessions or by volunteering within the school.

6 of these participants provided demographic information, of whom 4 (66%) were female. Ages ranged from 67 to 91, with an average age of 80.

4 of these 6 participants (66%) lived alone. 2 participants (33%) reported having a long-standing physical/mental illness or a disability. A further 2 participants (33%) reported providing care to someone who is sick, disabled or elderly.

Project process



60%
reported
loneliness improved



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, as well as 5 months afterwards. These were standardised questions in the form of BAB's Common Measurement Framework (CMF) – a series of questions completed by participants across the BAB 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 (56% 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 their involvement with the project:

- 60% of participants reported an improvement in at least one aspect of social isolation and loneliness.
- Levels of social participation and volunteering remained the same for 80% of participants; these aspects were already relatively high before the project began and remained constant at the 5 month follow-up point.

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

More detailed outcomes information can be found in the appendices at the end of this report.

Social isolation and loneliness





The project offered a variety of options for involvement, meaning those with lower confidence could still participate.

Project successes

Coproduction:

- **Project content:** The content of the project and the nature of the school visits were designed around the participants' knowledge, skills, experiences and levels of confidence.
- **Asset-based approach:** By coproducing the project with participants it ensured the project was asset-based and empowering – it gave each individual a voice and highlighted how they had a lot to contribute.

Project delivery:

- **Flexibility of involvement:** Flexibility in how older people could be involved meant those who were more isolated or lacking in confidence could still participate (for example via audio interview). Even within the classroom the project was delivered via a balanced mix of presentations, conversations, academic activity and games – meaning participants could participate in a way which suited their needs and wishes.
- **Value for the school:** Added value for the school by tying the content of the project in with the national curriculum to support the children's learning.
- **Transport:** Provided transport for volunteers with lower mobility in order to ensure they could still participate in the project.

Case study: R, aged 90

"I found out about the Learning for Life Together project through my friend. They were looking for people to go into a primary school and talk to the children about growing up in the local area. I thought it was a nice subject to talk about, but I was nervous about going into the school because I haven't been amongst children like that for years. The Project Officer from Volunteering Matters came and recorded an interview with me. It was strange and interesting doing the interview because I haven't spoken about the war for years and years.

My friend was telling me how much fun she was having at the school visits so I said I'd go along for the last one. When I walked into the classroom the children said "It's the world famous Rose!" It was brilliant! I'll never forget that, honestly.

I was a bit nervous when the teacher started asking me questions in front of the class, but then the children read me what they'd written after listening to my interview and it was easier because they already knew a bit about me.

I think they'll realise what we went through during the war; that sunk in quite well. They learned about the different foods we used to eat, food that isn't around now.

I learned a bit from going to the school. The children were really interested in it, they took everything in. I thought they were great, they were lovely and really interesting to listen to. I would have gone before if I'd have known what it was going to be like.

Volunteering Matters were great too, very helpful. They did a wonderful job and those children loved it. I think it's nice for people to volunteer. If you don't do these things, you just sit in the house and shrivel up. I met people too, I'd say hello if I saw them out and about now."

Case study: B, aged 82

"I heard about the Learning for Life Together project on BBC Radio Bristol, and decided to take part because it was something to do, a way of meeting other people, and I love kids.

Then I became seriously ill and was admitted to hospital with pneumonia. I was on a real downer when I came out, but the project gave me the incentive to go out, it was nice to meet up with the other volunteers and to go out looking for artefacts to show the kids, I got everyone looking for me!

My favourite moment was in the first visit. I was surprised how they got stuck into all the games we used to play, like jack sticks and shove ha'penny. The kids thought it was great that they were doing activities and learning through play. They learned that you can have fun with toys which don't cost anything, like cat's cradle and five stones. I saw it through their eyes and it brought back memories for me.

The most challenging part was when we were talking about the bombing in the war. I could see some of the girls were worried so I tried to make it a bit funny to lighten the mood, telling them about my granny singing silly songs in the shelter.

The support from Volunteering Matters was brilliant, and the teacher was great too, I wish we'd had a teacher like him when we were at school.

I thoroughly enjoyed myself; the kids have given me a completely different outlook. It was good to feel useful, teaching the kids something I took for granted my whole life because I lived it. Older people know things other people don't, we can help. I've learned a lot off them too and I've loved it."

Case study: D, aged 66

"I trained as a primary school teacher in 1968 and taught in schools as a music teacher and then a geography specialist. I ended up with glandular fever which turned into Myalgic Encephalopathy, or M.E. and had to retire from teaching in 1989. It took decades to recover.

Being involved with the Learning for Life Together project has given me the opportunity to use my research and teaching skills again. My role was to delve into local history, and remember what the neighbourhood was like in my childhood and how it's changed. I shared what I learned with the other participants in preparation meetings, and then translated it down to child level for the school visits.

I volunteered because I like bringing my own skills and knowledge to a worthwhile project. I like the sense of helping people, of getting out and about. I have no close family in the area and volunteering is a way of connecting with other people.

I really enjoyed being back in the classroom again. The children found it utterly incredible to discover that the neighbourhood in which they lived wasn't always there; 100 years ago it was fields and farmland and there was no electricity or running water. We told the children about events that affected the area over the past 100 years and shared what life in the area was like before the housing estate was built, before everyone had a car, or any mod cons!

However, the best thing about the project was the camaraderie between the volunteers; I met new people and everyone was willing to share their stories. I was constantly learning from them. The teacher was very helpful too, and the children were so receptive."



Despite speaking to over 100 people about the project, it was difficult to find people to participate

Key challenges and what would be done differently in the future

Finding participants:

- Volunteering Matters found it difficult to find older volunteers to participate in this project. They tried many different recruitment methods including: word of mouth, posters, Church groups, social prescribing schemes, gardening groups, carers groups, care homes, community centres, BBC Radio Bristol, Babbers radio show, social services, supported housing providers, local shops, schools, GP surgeries, local community magazine, Volunteering Matters Facebook page, BAB website, coffee mornings, University of the Third Age groups, local history group etc.
- They also held an open information meeting for local residents to attend, which was promoted through leaflets at local libraries, surgeries, shops, supported living accommodation, community centres, and children's centres.
- In total, over 100 older people were spoken to about participating the project.
- Although they eventually found 9 volunteers, these are unlikely to have been very isolated individuals, which is reflected in the low levels of loneliness and isolation reported by participants in this project.



A volunteer who did not initially have the confidence to come into the classroom recorded an audio interview first before participating face-to-face.

Project delivery:

- A central part of the project involved the older volunteers sharing skills, experiences or stories with the children. However many of those who initially expressed interest in the project preferred to either a) learn something about local history, or b) reminisce about the past with their peers, instead of coming into school to facilitate and lead activities. Some volunteers may have been daunted by the idea of volunteering, whereas others simply did not wish to do this activity. This indicates that the intergenerational element of the project can sometimes itself be a barrier to participation.
- The project was adapted to take this preference into account – a block of 'preparatory' sessions were held with the volunteers in the form of supported reminiscence groups. The aim was that these sessions would reignite their local history knowledge and build their confidence about sharing their knowledge with others.
- A volunteer who did not initially have the confidence to come into the classroom recorded an audio interview about her childhood in the 1930s and 1940s which was used in the face-to-face sessions with the children. She then visited the school during the last volunteering session. This enabled her to participate in the project without attending all of the sessions in the classroom.
- This additional preparation time meant staff costs were higher than expected.

Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

Finding participants:

- **Promotion:** When promoting a project, it is important to provide clear information about what participants will be doing and what will be expected of them. Lack of clarity about what the project will involve can put some individuals off participating.
- **Technology:** It may have been useful to show older people photos and/or video footage of the volunteering sessions to demonstrate what would be involved if they participated.

Project delivery:

- **Structure:** The content of the volunteer sessions were unstructured at first and changed over time following input from the school and the volunteers. However this required more time to plan each session. Having a pre-existing framework for the sessions would have been less time consuming and more cost-effective, i.e. creating a series of lesson plans on the agreed topic (e.g. local history) in advance and then adapting them according to the skills and interests of the volunteers.
- **Back up plans:** Develop contingency plans (e.g. extra back-up learning materials) that could be delivered by project staff if necessary to fill in gaps or cover for illness.

- **Participant confidence:** Give participants the opportunity to rehearse in front of each other before school visits in order to build their confidence about presenting in front of students and facilitating sessions. Offering the opportunity to participate via audio interviews worked well to build participant confidence, however, once these interviews are recorded, projects should try to persuade these participants to visit the classroom as a follow-up as this face-to-face confidence is one of the primary purposes of the project. A visit from the classroom teacher before the project starts may also build the confidence of the older people as they would already have a familiar face inside the school and could ask specific questions.
- **Media consent:** Send out photo/video consent forms before the project begins as there can be delays in waiting for these to be returned.
- **Flexibility:** Remember that schools have their own pressures and therefore flexibility is needed for projects that involve working with schools in order to fit around the school system.

Appendix 1

Outcomes for Participants: Social Isolation & Loneliness

The Big Lottery Fund identifies 10 intersecting dimensions of social isolation and loneliness¹. 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.

	Before participating in the pilot	After participating in the pilot	5 months after participating
I experience a general sense of emptiness	0% yes	0% yes	0% yes
There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have problems	60% yes	40% yes	66% yes
There are many people I can trust completely	80% yes	60% yes	100% yes
There are enough people I feel close to	100% yes	40% yes	100% yes
I miss having people around	25% yes	25% yes	0% yes
I often feel rejected	0% yes	0% yes	0% yes
How often do you lack companionship?	25% often	20% yes	40% often
How often do you feel left out?	25% often	0% often	0% often
How often do you feel isolated from others?	0% often	0% often	0% often
How often do you feel in tune with people around you?	60% often	60% often	67% often

¹ From the De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale

Appendix 2

Outcomes for Participants: Social Participation

	Before participating in the pilot	After participating in the pilot	5 months after participating
Are you a member of any clubs, organisations or societies?	100% yes	100% yes	100% yes
Compared to other people of your age, how often would you say you take part in social activities?	20% said less than most or much less than most	20% said less than most or much less than most	20% said less than most or much less than most

Outcomes for Participants: Volunteering

	Before participating in the pilot	After participating in the pilot	5 months after participating
Have you given unpaid help or volunteered in the last 12 months?	80% yes	100% yes	80% yes
Do you intend to give unpaid help or volunteer in the future?	100% said yes or maybe	100% said yes or maybe	100% said yes or maybe





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>

Image on page 13: John McArthur © | Flickr.com

