



Windmill Hill City Farm Learning for Life Together Pilot

September 2016 - August 2017



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LOTTERY FUNDED

Windmill Hill City Farm - Learning for Life Together Pilot

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. 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 Windmill Hill City Farm, 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 Windmill Hill City Farm pilot project aimed to reduce social isolation and loneliness through recruiting socially active, non-isolated older people as volunteers to co-design and co-deliver a programme of intergenerational activities for older isolated people and children. These intergenerational activities focused on sharing skills and were designed by the older people themselves according to their own interests and skills.

The pilot tested whether, as research suggests, isolated older people would feel more empowered to engage in activities delivered by their peers. It was designed to build the relationships, confidence and skills of the isolated older participants through interaction with other older people and with children. It also aimed to prevent the future social isolation of the older volunteers by encouraging them to continue volunteering as they age.

Although originally intended to be a six-month programme of activities, difficulties in accessing isolated older people meant this was instead delivered as a range of intergenerational drop-in activity sessions over a period of six weeks. In addition to promoting the project using a variety of channels, Windmill Hill City Farm worked with a local primary school and a nursery to involve children in these activity sessions.

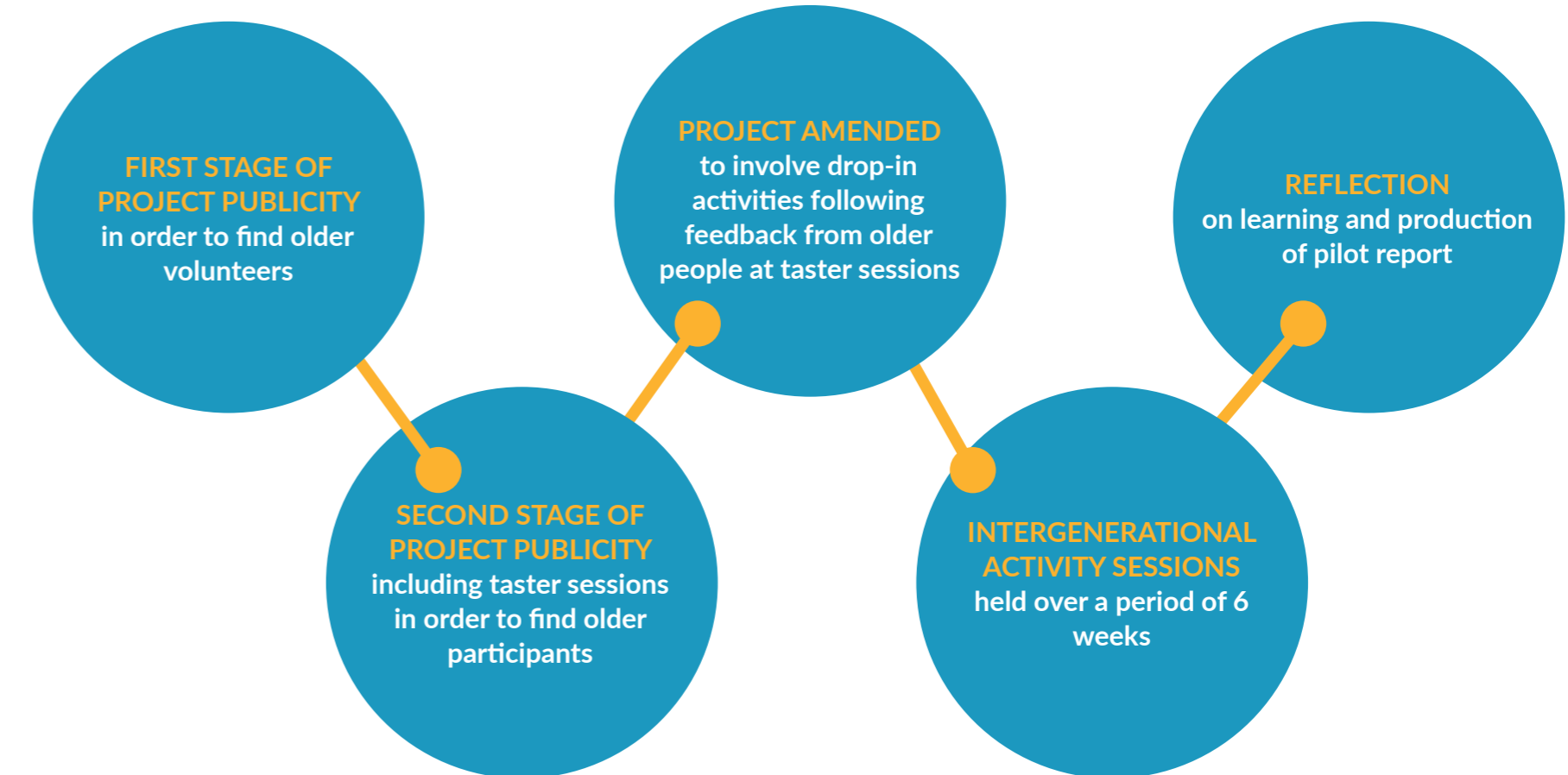
Participants

11 older volunteers and 36 older participants were involved in this pilot project. Of these, 14 provided their demographic information.

10 of these 14 participants (71%) identified as female. While the majority identified as cis-gender, one participant reported being transgender. Ages ranged from 51 to 89, with an average age of 69. 5 participants (36%) lived alone, with the majority of others living with a spouse or partner. 36% reported having a long-standing physical/mental illness or disability. Only 1 participant reported providing care to someone who is sick, disabled or elderly.

The drop-in nature of this pilot made it difficult for information about outcomes to be gathered from older participants, as different people attended each session.

Project process





The group of older volunteers were heavily involved in the design and delivery of the project

Project successes

Coproduction:

- **Project promotion:** The group of older volunteers led on deciding where and how to advertise the project. They also assisted with this promotion, including visiting local lunch clubs and handing out information flyers (for example on the high street, at GP surgeries, in sheltered housing complexes).
- **Finding participants:** The older volunteers actively generated ideas about how to reach very isolated older people. They came up with the idea of holding taster sessions and suggested activity content which they felt would appeal to this group.
- **Delivering activities:** The older volunteers successfully designed and delivered a number of activity sessions. These were of high quality and excellent feedback was received from both the older and younger participants.

Project delivery:

- **Specific activity focus:** Although it was difficult to find older people to participate in the project, those who did attend appeared to enjoy participating in a specific activity rather than simply a cup of tea and a chat.
- **Responding to feedback:** In addition to being intergenerational activities in themselves, the taster sessions were used to gather feedback about how to involve a larger number of older people in the project. This feedback indicated there was a demand for sessions which had more of a 'drop-in style', which the pilot project then implemented.

Case study: A volunteer

"I am recently retired and wanted to find a short term project to explore the world of volunteering. I looked on a website for volunteer opportunities and was keen to do something at the city farm.

It was an interesting project and I enjoyed meeting and working with new people of all ages. I liked the idea of a start-up project as it meant we could explore different opportunities and consider alternative approaches for how to run the project.

For the organising team of volunteers, it was a chance to share ideas and skills and deliver a range of sessions. The nursery children clearly enjoyed the activities and having a mixed age group of instructors. There were opportunities for older people to sit in the group and feel part of the session but they would build up confidence to join in very easily.

We were unfortunately not able to make contact with more isolated older people to come to our sessions - this would have improved the outreach aspects of the project.

This project has given me a good insight into volunteering and will encourage me to get involved in the future."



It was a challenge to find participants who were experiencing very high levels of loneliness and isolation

Key challenges and what would be done differently in the future

- Finding participants:** Despite doing a lot of advertising for the project, it was difficult to find older people to participate in the activities. For older people who were more active and less isolated, there were many other activities in Bedminster available to them. However, older people who were isolated and lonely proved very difficult to reach. Linking in with social services or GPs may be one way to reach these individuals.
- Specific promotion:** This project was promoted through: taster sessions, an advert in the Pigeon, on the farm website/social media, visiting local lunch and activity groups, through local agencies/services and flyers on the street. In the future it may be useful for these adverts to be more specific/focused than they were for this pilot.
- Staff time:** This pilot took more staff time than was initially anticipated, possibly due to the additional work required by the weekly drop-in format. The older volunteers also required a higher level of support than anticipated before they felt confident in leading the activity sessions. This additional time would be built into future projects.
- Completing BAB's Common Measurement Framework (CMF) forms:** The project was initially designed to involve a 6-month programme of activities with many of the same older volunteers and older participants. However this was changed to a drop-in format due to difficulties with recruiting older people. As such, only demographic information could be gathered from participants; information about their feelings of loneliness and isolation could not be gathered.

Learning, recommendations and advice for similar projects

- Taster sessions** appeared to be a successful way of finding participants, and could also be used to get feedback from older people about what they would like to see from the project in the future. Holding these taster sessions as part of a pre-established event worked well, rather than putting on a separate independent event from scratch.
- Build-up time:** The sessions started to come together and run more smoothly towards the end of the pilot. Future projects should allow six months to access older participants (for example through delivering lots of taster sessions) and then a further six months to gradually allow the numbers to increase as the project progresses.
- Support for volunteers:** At first, the volunteers did not feel confident in leading the activity sessions. Future projects using volunteers should factor in additional time to support them and build their confidence, rather than expecting them to be able to lead activities straight away. This also encourages volunteers who have a range of confidence levels to participate.



Taster sessions appeared to be a successful way to find participants and to get feedback from them



Notes

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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