

Let's Connect

Supporting Individuals to Combat Loneliness and Isolation, Promoting Healthy Ageing in a Thriving, Connected Community



Impact Report - Executive Summary
February 2025

Let's Connect: Supporting Individuals to Combat Loneliness and Isolation, Promoting Healthy Ageing in a Thriving, Connected Community

Taking part in Let's Connect has given me the push to sort myself out, sort my life out. I needed a push, and Age UK Sutton gave me that push. You are easy to like and relate to which is important to me as I couldn't be with someone I don't like!

Loneliness and social isolation among older adults are critical public health challenges with profound personal, social, and economic implications. Nationally, over 1 million older adults in the UK experience chronic loneliness, and in the London Borough of Sutton, more than 3,200 older adults are affected. These issues are further exacerbated by barriers such as limited transportation options, digital exclusion, and stigma around seeking help. The consequences are severe: loneliness increases the risk of early mortality by 26% and is linked to heightened risks of depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and cognitive decline, including dementia.

In response to these pressing challenges, Age UK Sutton developed "**Let's Connect**", an innovative and holistic programme designed to reduce loneliness, foster independence, and build lasting community connections.

Let's Connect **supports the prevention of increased levels of frailty and decline in health and wellbeing associated with older age.** Unhealthy ageing can lead to premature or unnecessary death, increased levels of admission or readmission to hospital, increased number of falls due to decreased mobility or poor health, increased levels of social exclusion, and a general decline in health and wellbeing. Our multi-faceted programmes helps people to take positive steps to help reduce or prevent poor mental and physical health as **being in good health makes a big difference to how someone will feel overall, and therefore experience positive wellbeing.**

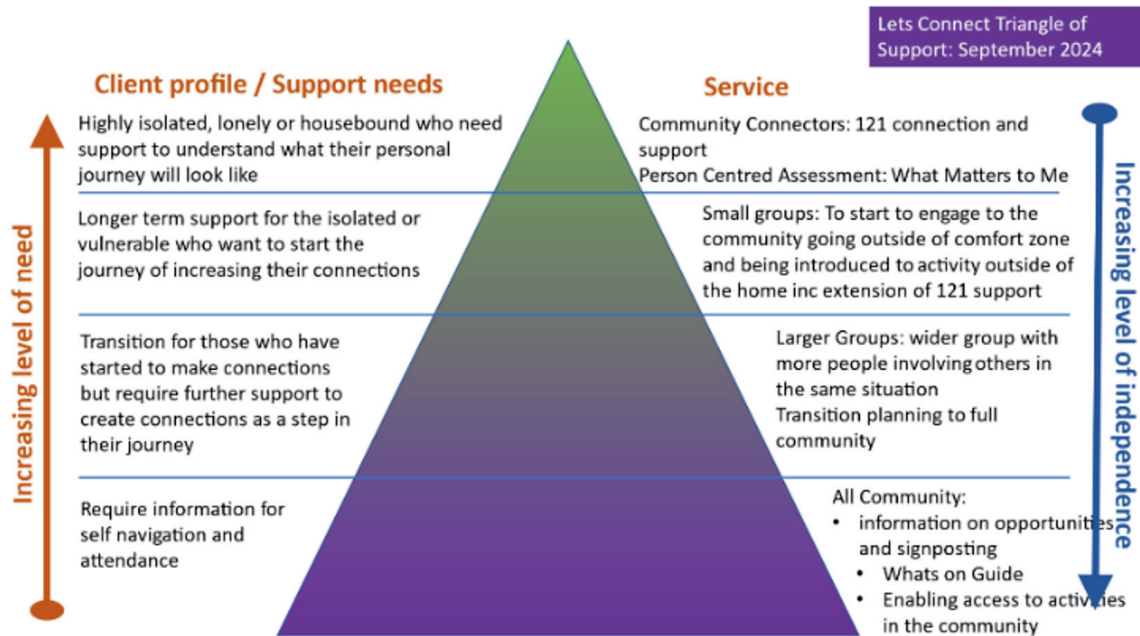
In short, the service supports Sutton being an Age Friendly Borough which is critical in ensuring access to the wider community for all older people who may be making their journey to improving their own social connections.

Guided by an evidence-based framework, Let's Connect addresses the multi-dimensional barriers older adults face, offering tailored support that **empowers individuals**, strengthening the broader community infrastructure as well as **promoting healthy ageing** offering a chance to avoid or postpone the onset of frailty or decline in health.



Key Features of Let's Connect

At the heart of the programme is the **Triangle of Support**, a multi-tiered model that provides personalised, progressive interventions to meet participants' unique needs and goals. These tiers transition participants from severe isolation to full, independent engagement with their communities:



Tier 1: Personalised 1:1 Support

For individuals experiencing the most severe isolation, often housebound or with complex physical, mental, or emotional needs, this tier provides intensive, tailored interventions. This tier addresses the needs of those at the highest risk of isolation, reducing dependence on health and care services by fostering independence and confidence.

Tier 2: Small Group Support

Facilitated settings that help participants rebuild confidence and social skills, adding Quieter Coffee mornings to the interventions offered.

Tier 3: Larger Group Support

This is our transition stage, whereby we introduce those who are able to engage in larger groups of people where they still require support, group facilitation, and introduction to the wider community, with the focus on widening and fostering longer term connections and “safe” introductions into groups in the community. Offering activities that encourage broader community engagement, and delivered through our Friendship Groups, Digital Champions and Walking Tennis.

Tier 4: Independent Community Participation

Our comprehensive service offer extends to facilitating access to a wide range of activities, delivered directly by Age UK Sutton, and through partnerships with other local organisations. By curating a database of diverse activities, we empower participants to explore new interests and connect with like-minded individuals, involving a greater degree of community engagement. Additionally we have developed partnerships with 14 local organisations who provide welcoming, age-friendly activities, enabling participants to sustain their connections independently. Having the bottom tier as a **vibrant age friendly community is critical to the success of all health and wellbeing outcomes**, but in particular delivering success for those in all tiers. Ensuring people are supported on their journey to wellbeing, whether that be out of isolation or improved health outcomes, cannot be achieved without a well-connected community.

With an approach founded with Prevention at its heart, the programmes are able to aid people to transit from loneliness and isolation, through to a meaningful community connection. Utilising an enabling approach the services provides longer-term options, moving people from dependency on a limited range of health and care services, through to a better connected, wider and more fulfilling community.

Success Story:

Initially hesitant to leave her home, Glenda wanted to lose weight and improve her mobility. Starting with Walk and Talk, she transitioned to using public transport independently and now participates in Walking Tennis and other activities, fostering both health and social engagement.



Getting out is very important to people's wellbeing and the no pressure walks and encouragement and chats with someone I clicked with did me good

Programme Objectives

Let's Connect aims to:



Prevent and reduce loneliness and isolation

Foster Independence

Prevent poor health outcomes

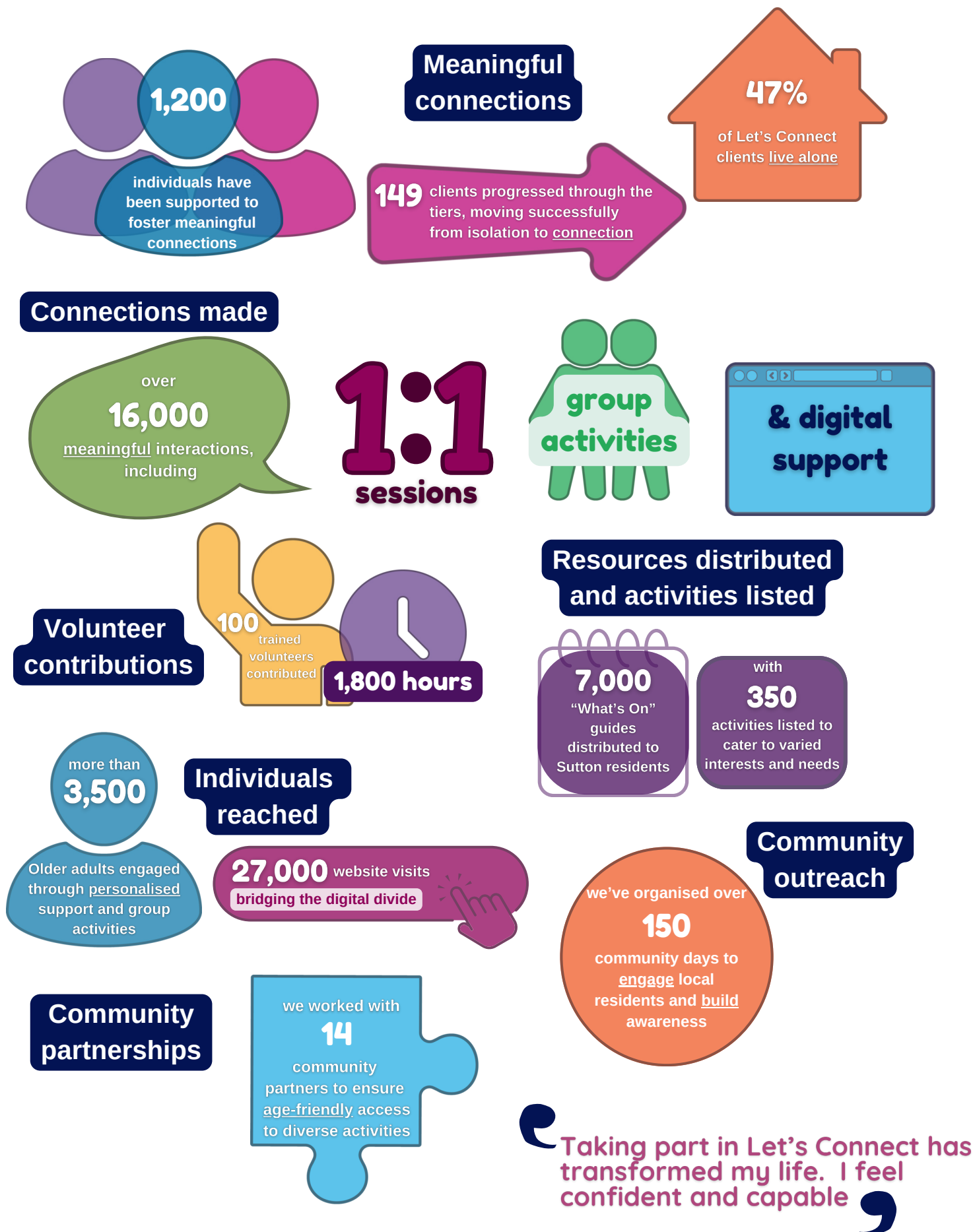
Support people to Age Well

Address barriers to connection



Achievements at a Glance

Since its inception, Let's Connect has delivered measurable, transformative impact:



Success Story:

Margaret was a lady living with Alzheimer's disease. She joined the women's only Walking Tennis Group on a Monday and has reported a major uplift in her attitude and her health - proving to herself that she is still able to do things independently and has "still got something". She is now encouraging her grandchildren to come and pick up a racquet.

Why Let's Connect Matters

The programme is rooted in the understanding that loneliness and isolation are not just personal issues - rather it is a systemic challenge with widespread economic and social implications. The cost of severe loneliness at **around £9,900 per person per year⁽¹⁾**, due to its combined impact on wellbeing, health, and work productivity. Programmes like Let's Connect are not just moral imperatives but economic necessities, offering a cost-effective, scalable solution with far-reaching benefits.

Fully understanding and capturing the benefit of relieving or preventing loneliness and isolation will have a meaningful impact to the individual with **noticeable health and wellbeing gains**. Additionally, it will also **bring savings to the wider health and social care sector**, delivering wider population based health outcomes.

Unfortunately, once a person becomes persistently lonely or isolated, it can cause a 'downward spiral', reducing a person's ability to look after themselves and act as a deterrent to accessing help, so accelerating incapacity. To bring people along on the journey from isolation to connection, we wanted to find a way to break the cycle of loneliness by being innovative in how people are supported.

Our approach is validated through Age UK's recent research, "You are not alone in being lonely", (Dec 2024)⁽²⁾ which identified that "bringing people together to increase the number of social contacts is not an end in itself. People need those connections to be meaningful to them personally, and to have choice and autonomy over the types of connections formed. Social activities are part of the solution but insufficient on their own. **Tackling loneliness therefore requires more than social activities – to combat loneliness, the quality of relationships needs to be addressed**".

Our Let's Connect service took direction from the findings of the Age UK research "All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life"⁽³⁾, which identified that the reasons people feel lonely are personal, so the support needed to help them cope with or overcome these feelings must also be personal (and at times be creative and imaginative). Our work shows that this requires people in the community to **recognise someone who is lonely, to signpost them to trained people who can then work with them to understand the causes of their feelings of loneliness and together develop actions to cope with or resolve these**. Organisations, activities and support need to be available for people, and those supporting lonely people need to be aware of and be able to access these – the Whole System approach

The success of Let's Connect is a testament to the power of community-driven solutions in tackling loneliness and isolation. To sustain and grow this transformative programme, Age UK Sutton calls on stakeholders—local authorities, funders, activity providers, and residents—to invest in a connected future for older adults. By working together, we can ensure that no one in Sutton is left behind.

Let's Connect is not just a service - it is a testament to the profound change that is possible when individuals and communities unite to create a society where every older adult feels valued, supported and connected.

¹ Campaign to End Loneliness, [Facts and Statistics | Campaign to End Loneliness](#)

² Age UK: You are not alone in feeling lonely, [you-are-not-alone-in-feeling-lonely.pdf](#) Dec 24

³ Age UK: All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life! [loneliness-report_final_2409.pdf](#), Sept 2018

Success Story:

Participants like Frank, who after eight months of being housebound due to a stroke, set a goal to shop independently. Through 12 sessions of Walk and Talk, he regained mobility and confidence and overcame his agoraphobia, demonstrating the programme's profound ability to transform lives.

Let's Connect is trying to get people out of their comfort zone, create friendships and connections, whilst attempting to make these connections sustainable

(AUKS Service Manager)



The Future

The core funding through The National Lottery Community Fund finishes on 31 March 2025. At Age UK Sutton, we know that Let's Connect, as an evidenced based service, brings huge benefits to all older people living in Sutton, but in particular to those who are lonely, isolated or vulnerable. **Our ambition for the service is to continue to maintain its role in the prevention of any decline through frailty and unhealthy ageing and to support older people to Age Well.** Additionally, we look to scale our outreach to more underserved communities, enhance our digital inclusion, enhance our volunteer capacity, support the improvement in community infrastructure, to strengthen our community partnerships and to innovate for the future.

Whilst Age UK are committed to the future of this highly valuable service, we continue to look for further funding and utilising our own resources to maintain the programme for the upcoming financial year, 2025-26

Before this, I was stuck indoors and not living my life the way I wanted to. Now I can walk to a local coffee morning and feel brilliant. My family is amazed.

