

AGE BETTER
IN SHEFFIELD



Creativity in Co-production

Neighbourhood Toolkits

www.agebettersheff.co.uk



When Age Better in Sheffield first began its planning stages in 2014/15 the team recognised that lots of older people experiencing isolation and loneliness rarely (or in some cases, never) leave their homes, and therefore are significantly less likely to access community support, experience moments of natural connection and interaction, or hear about upcoming Age Better in Sheffield projects.

Age Better wanted their offer to include a creative way of reaching those older people, and to provide something which would instantly enable people to take some action towards finding connection. The idea of creating co-designed 'Neighbourhood Toolkits' with local people was born, with the aim to be informative, encouraging and inspiring, and to make sure people felt less alone from the moment the Toolkit landed on their doorstep.



How

The locations for the Neighbourhood Toolkits (4 in total – 1 still to be created at the time of writing this) were determined by target wards selected as part of the development of the Age Better in Sheffield programme.

These included: Burngreave, Beauchief and Greenhill, Firth Park, and Woodhouse – all vastly different areas of Sheffield that were identified as being likely to have a high percentage of older people experiencing loneliness. Once the Toolkits were created, they were hand-delivered through thousands of letterboxes in each area (10,000 per area).

Each co-design process had a slightly different approach depending on the area, and each Toolkit created was completely unique. This reflected the people living in that area, what mattered most to them, and what worked best for them to develop a sense of connection locally and with the city. All of the Toolkits involved many months of meeting and working with the people living in each area, and with local professionals and organisations in the community who built the Toolkits together.

The ideas and inspiration behind each Toolkit were brought to life by a well-known Sheffield based artist and graphic designer who incorporated lots of unique illustrative designs of each area to give them a strong sense of place and belonging.

Burngreave

In Burngreave, the main element of co-design happened through an event hosted in the community centre with 200 people from the ward attending. Ten of the most engaged participants also gave individual interviews to build on the event feedback. The team learnt more about the different languages and communities within the ward and developed a multi-language newspaper to celebrate diversity, champion local individuals and encourage people to get embrace the opportunities on their doorstep.



Beauchief and Greenhill

In Beauchief and Greenhill, the team attended baking and cooking sessions in the community, went to craft events and also became good friends of the 'Terminus Cafe' - a local community hub. Through these sessions, and lots of informal chats with local people, they learnt about negative perceptions people had of their area, which influenced the whole feel of the Toolkit. This Toolkit was a pizza-style box of goodies empowering people to celebrate their home-town as if they were tourists in order to discover new things to explore (this included postcards to send people, and also a souvenir tea towel featuring a detailed map of their local area).



Firth Park

In Firth Park the team were able to connect with a huge host of brilliant local organisations and people through weekly coffee break sessions, lunch clubs, book clubs, sessions in libraries, and more. The themes that came out of this research focused heavily on 'taking the first step' and supporting people to take action to join the vast amount of things happening in that area.

This toolkit also included the most intergenerational content, with many messages of neighbourliness and messages about the role everyone can play in helping to end loneliness. The Toolkit design was a giant envelope filled with lots of information about the groups available and stories of encouragement about how to get started with attending groups and meeting new people. The toolkit also included things like an interactive planner, whiteboard marker, magnet, map and free cafe voucher to encourage people to plan joyful ways of connecting with others.



Jess Goodall
@JessGoodall4

Following

@AgeBetterSheff Visiting my Great Aunt and look what's arrived!! Great opportunity to talk to her about what she can get involved in, and encourage her to make the most of that coupon! She's already got the magnets on the fridge 🥰🎉



Covid-19 - Hello Neighbour Boxes

When the UK went into lockdown at the start of 2020 the team had to pause their work with the fourth and final Neighbourhood Toolkit in Woodhouse, however they were able to use their experiences creating Neighbourhood Toolkits to create 'Hello Neighbour' boxes. Over 2,000 of these were distributed across the entire of Sheffield to spread joy and connection, help people stay well, and share information about the support available across the city during lockdown, particularly for those who were not online.

The Hello boxes included postcards with famous Sheffield artist Pete McKee's distinctive 'Perfect Day' image on, envelopes and stamps to send the postcards, Move More's booklet on keeping active at home, a page from Josephine Dellow's Sheffield Colouring Book, a booklet full of activities (including puzzles, jokes, and Warda Yassin's 'Sheffield' poem), information on Age Better's befriending service, a summary of the support available through Voluntary Action Sheffield's Support Map, tips on mindfulness, a Yorkshire Tea bag, and information about Ignite Imaginations' creative packs.



Approaching Creativity in the Community

Those working on the Toolkits approached it with open minds and the only caveat being, 'whatever we create together has to fit through a letterbox!' It was essential that local people felt like the Toolkit belonged to them, and that it was truly useful for them, and so the process was rooted heavily in relationship building and listening to ensure that what mattered most to individuals was what was created.

A 'hands on' approach throughout research and co-design was crucial, with most quality conversations, discussions and ideas being shared whilst digging in allotments, baking bread, talking about books or chatting at bus stops.

For some people, the concept of a 'Toolkit' was at first understandably quite abstract and so creative ways of engaging, such as asking people to draw what they would like to have dropped through their letterbox to make them smile, were even more important to gauge what mattered to people.

As the Toolkits developed they evolved to include something that would stay in the home for a long time - for example a tea towel, or fridge magnet. People in the target ward were encouraged to make suggestions about what item they would like to receive, and the aim of these items was to act as a lasting reminder of seeking connection and feeling seen.

Impact

Over 30,000 Neighbourhood Toolkits have been delivered across Sheffield so far, with the final Woodhouse Toolkit still being created at the time of writing (delayed due to Covid-19). Over 2,000 Hello Neighbour Boxes were distributed at the start of lockdown in 2020.

Awareness of Age Better in Sheffield and its values was raised significantly with the high-quality content and existence of the Toolkits. The Toolkits have been repeatedly shared with stakeholders and senior leaders across Sheffield, and beyond, and they helped to influence, create links and share best practise with other local organisations. This contributed to a city-wide approach to ending loneliness and strengthening of communities.

New Age Better Start-Up groups developed in Burngreave after individuals read about the opportunity to gain funding through the Toolkit.

A local professional was recruited to the Core Partnership after receiving a Toolkit and feeling inspired to get involved.

The co-design process led the team to engaging with health and VCS professionals which resulted in professionals referring their patients onto Age Better in Sheffield projects.

Many of the other national partners involved in the Ageing Better programme were inspired by Sheffield's Neighbourhood Toolkits and have incorporated elements of them into their work.

Local press including The Sheffield Star, The Yorkshire Post, BBC Radio Sheffield, and Link Radio all covered each launch of the Toolkit.

Learning

Each toolkit brought about new learning which was applied to subsequent toolkits and design process. Here are some of the key learnings:

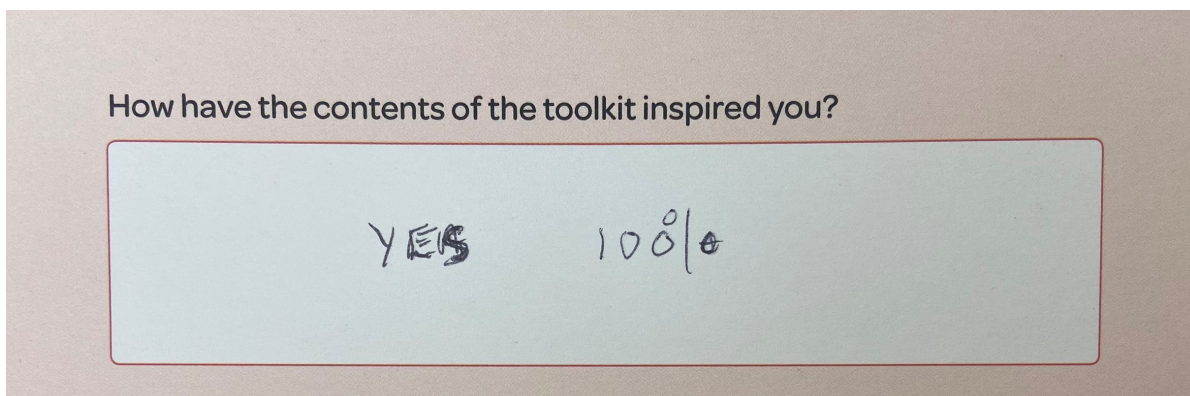
- The Neighbourhood Toolkits provided an opportunity to contribute towards developing feelings of neighbourliness amongst communities – not everyone receiving the Toolkit was older and experiencing loneliness and so the team thought more about how they could incorporate different voices and messages that encouraged people to build a sense of community whatever the recipient's age or circumstances. Some of the ways this was achieved was through working with young people in schools to encourage connection and to use their voices in the toolkit, and by including 2 tea bags so people could share a chat with a neighbour.
- Community based organisations were a significant asset to work with as they provided local knowledge, and also enabled the team to sign-post people to services that remained in those communities for the long-term. Similarly, the Toolkit helped increase the numbers of people attending local groups and organisations and therefore added value to the quality projects and work happening in the area.
- Research with the main target audience (those most likely to be experiencing social isolation) was most successful 'on the hoof' in supermarkets, post offices, libraries, at bus stops, and via online social media groups.

- Relationship building was an enormous part of the process – the most successful co-design sessions happened once trust had been built and in some cases it took months to grow this connection.
- The launch and delivery of the Toolkits grew with each one, with the latest launch being reported live on BBC Radio Sheffield as a team of volunteers hand-delivered them in Firth Park - local people came onto the streets after hearing the radio to excitedly collect their Toolkit. The addition of launch events also became a part of the delivery process which gave people the chance to attend informal sessions to talk about the Toolkit and connect with other local people who had received the Toolkit.

Evaluation and feedback

Responses to the Neighbourhood Toolkits and Hello Boxes was overwhelmingly positive with many people sharing their excitement, gratefulness, and support of the unique creative way to reach people.

Many free-post feedback cards included as part of the Toolkits were sent back to the team:



What do you think of your Neighbourhood Toolkit?

- ☐ I loved it!
- ☒ It's okay
- ☐ It's useful
- ☐ It's not my kind of thing
- ☐ It's not helpful for me
- ☐ I don't like it

Please tell us more about your answer:

Great information for those who need
it - not necessarily myself but for elderly
yes.

What do you think of your Neighbourhood Toolkit?

- ☐ I loved it!
- ☐ It's okay
- ☒ It's useful
- ☐ It's not my kind of thing
- ☐ It's not helpful for me
- ☐ I don't like it

Please tell us more about your answer:

IT WILL HELP TO RELIEVE
LONELINESS.

- ☒ I loved it!
- ☐ It's okay
- ☐ It's useful
- ☐ It's not my kind of thing
- ☐ It's not helpful for me
- ☐ I don't like it

Please tell us more about your answer:

It Lets People over 55 They
Don't Have to sit in alone.

How have the contents of the toolkit inspired you?

they have inspired me
to help within the
community

Have you done anything differently after receiving the toolkit?

planned my week &
tensed the local
area

In what ways do you feel connected with your community?

Made more aware of
community events

What support would help you become more connected in your community?

more events for the
community.

Would you like to be contacted by Age Better in Sheffield?

You can find out about projects, volunteering, and more!

☒ Yes ☐ No

Phone number:

by post please

Email address:

What do you think of your Neighbourhood Toolkit?

- ☐ I loved it!
- ☐ It's okay
- ☒ It's useful
- ☐ It's not my kind of thing
- ☐ It's not helpful for me
- ☐ I don't like it

Please tell us more about your answer:

Information is handy on whats
happening in the area. Like the board
very handy.

As to be expected, not everyone receiving the Toolkits, or those asked to contribute to the co-design, engaged with the team or the final product. And for some, it was simply not their 'cup of tea'.

There are also some challenges with evaluating elements of the Neighbourhood Toolkits, for example evidencing how the Toolkits 'plant a seed' for people which influences their behaviour at a later date, or how the Toolkits contributes towards people feeling differently about themselves and their area.

Setting measurables for the success of the Toolkit also brings some challenges as for some, a 'successful outcome' from engaging with the Toolkit could be starting up a conversation with the cashier in a shop, feeling differently about themselves, starting a new hobby, learning something they didn't know about before, changing their perception of their area, or it could be attending a local group - this is likely to be different for everyone and not necessarily straightforward to measure.

There were also occasions where positive conversations about the Toolkits would make their way back to the team via informal means which may not have otherwise have been captured. For example, members of staff at South Yorkshire Housing Association (ABiS' lead organisation) had family members who received the Toolkit and heard feedback via them.

As a test and learn programme, the team continued to grow ways of gathering feedback for each toolkit, including through the introduction of events in the community after the Toolkits.

Summary

The Neighbourhood Toolkits were completely unique to Age Better in Sheffield and played a key role in the programmes' growth, in raising the profile of loneliness in Sheffield, and in providing creative, co-designed solutions to help connection thrive in communities.

In addition to fulfilling their aim of reaching those most experiencing loneliness and social isolation in communities, the Toolkits helped build relationships with local organisations, grow the Age Better in Sheffield brand, strengthen relationships with local press, influence the wider sector in Sheffield (and beyond), and increase engagement with other Age Better projects. They also contributed significantly in helping commissioners and stakeholders to learn more about Age Better in Sheffield and the creative, co-produced approach the programme had at its very heart.

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