

Learning from COVID-19

Working in the sector: adaptation, flexibility and engagement



About TED

Talk, Eat, Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged 50 and over to combat social isolation and loneliness. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund to test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.

Ageing Better learning nation-wide has captured the fast moving and unprecedented nature of the COVID 19 pandemic. TED have been adapting and reviewing the programme's service offer to fulfil its original aims and objectives, building both relationships and communities. This report builds on previous reporting and learning activity from TED on the themes of 'Enhancing Resilience in East Lindsey's Communities' and 'Digital inclusion during COVID 19 – identifying gaps and bridging the digital divide(s)'.

In the former we focussed on how resilience in the district was the interplay of relational and individual characteristics, our evidence on 'what works' focussing on ways practice can facilitate and enhance relationships. The themes from this report being:

1. Reaching out not 'hard to reach': Flexible, person-centred work in building relationships
2. Exploring the role of activity in creating collaborative community resource



TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by Community Lincs, part of YMCA Lincolnshire

3. Local awareness, credibility and social networks
4. Resilience through 'digital inclusion'

In the more recent report focussing on 'digital inclusion', our learning explored in greater detail the role of how 'digital inclusion' can be fostered by respecting and appreciating the preferences, needs and skills of people aged 50 and over. In-particular the paper explored how people can become 'digitally included' as a result of services taking a number of measures. These included: 'virtually' replicating place-based provision and belonging; engaging and upskilling people through primarily focussing on enjoyment; and utilising 'champions' as promoters/advocates of the benefits of both gaining digital skills and wider 'digital inclusion'. The latter having a specific focus on peers as 'converts'.

In this learning report the focus shifts slightly to providers, but incorporates findings from prior learning reports, as well as case studies, monitoring data and delivery partner and programme management meetings. Here consideration is given to encapsulating the challenges of COVID 19 for providing services and portraying 'adaptation' in the sector as a learning legacy for future sustainability.

Adaption in 'the sector'. Defining Scope?

There are clear overlaps between 'adaptation' and conceptualisations of 'resilience' that prior TED learning has reported on. For instance in 1917 H. B. Woolston, writing a book review in the Journal of Theology, identified a definition of social adaptation.

*By adaptation is meant such a state of adjustment between an organism or a social group and its environment as is favourable to existence and growth, or the process by which such unity comes into, and continues in, this favourable relation. The environment is both physical, or material, and social, or spiritual. Adaptation may be passive or active. Passive...comprises biological and somatic changes. Passive spiritual adaptation includes psychic development under the pressure of social institutions such as language, law and education. **By active material adaptation is meant the purposeful modification of the organism or group to suit its environment to make it favourable for life...***



Building on this definition this report has 5 core objectives in relation to people aged 50 and over. It will:

1. Seek to understand 'adaptation' as grounded in TED's experiences
2. Identify and explore themes which are present in fieldwork and data collection to date
3. Capture the issues, challenges and pressures for providers as well their strengths, during different stages of COVID 19 and associated measures

4. Consider key learning that can be utilised going forward. To understand the barriers and enablers to adaptation during the pandemic's fast changing landscapes of service delivery
5. Highlight practical examples of adaptation from TED to inform future work with people aged 50 and over in the district and with implications for wider geographical contexts and organisational settings

In locating the above objectives, this report seeks to underpin that 'adaptation' can be manifest, 'played-out' and/or impact differentially at a variety of levels (within and between: providers, aspects of provision, different individuals and groups of stakeholders). 'Adaptation' in providers is integrated with, and embedded in, the experiences of people aged 50 and over in the district. Our learning shows the parameters between 'providers' and 'beneficiaries' also frequently blur, with people aged 50 and over interchangeably and, sometimes, simultaneously, being both 'providers' and 'users' of services. An example can be found in a recent mapping exercise of 'resilience' and 'recovery' in Lincolnshire, conducted by YMCA Lincolnshire's Communities Directorate during the first stage of 'lockdown'.

Survey activity with people aged 50 and over (with 69 % of respondents residing in East Lindsey) identified that 71 out of 94 respondents said they had provided support to friends or neighbours during lockdown. A large amount of this support centred on shopping and getting 'essentials'. 81 respondents went on to say that they also had access to support from family and friends to adjust to life once 'lockdown'/shielding is over. Qualitative feedback also identified the '50 plus' age group was wide ranging, with people not necessarily self-identifying with the label (or stereotypes) of 'older' people or groups. This can also be seen in the contributions of 'ageing populations' to services through participation and co-design.

Whereas 'resilience' has been portrayed as an ability to 'bounce back' from adversity (or at least demonstrate protective and preventative factors) this report draws on wider service responses before the pandemic and during periods of intensified national measures. In addition, it identifies implications for future approaches to delivery and the 'organisational wellbeing' of service providers. Hence, the remit of this report extends beyond responses to 'austerity' and forward planning after COVID 19, to wider innovation even in the absence of pandemic situations and/or increased organisational pressures. In essence, it concerns not just principles for 'survival' or damage limitation, but different complexions of 'active adaptation' that are 'favourable for life'.



During various stages of COVID 19, from pandemic outbreak, to shielding and distancing, and then a gradual re-introduction of place-based (but socially distanced) activities and services, to the more recent reintroduction of a (revised) 'lockdown', there has been strong focus on the experiences of Ageing Better partners and national reporting to capture and disseminate timely, valid, knowledge from these pandemic trajectories. In the East Lindsey District and the wider county of Lincolnshire there too have been numerous attempts to document the impact(s) on communities and providers. The Communities Directorate at YMCA Lincolnshire (which manages the TED Programme) have been involved in a number of these, including a mapping exercise of 'resilience' and 'recovery' in the first period of lockdown. This included service activity in relation to the following arms:

1. Good Neighbour Schemes and Rapidly Emerging Community Support Groups
2. Village Halls and Community Buildings
3. Businesses in Lincolnshire – with a specific focus on TED Age-friendly Businesses by economic regeneration specialists, Rose Regeneration
4. Youth Organisations
5. Young people aged 11-18 years
6. People aged 50 and over

TED continues to undertake specific contract monitoring exercises, case studies, 'good news stories', surveys and interviews – a number of the latter being conducted by research partners in the University of Lincoln's Business School. With Rose Regeneration these partners also report on findings from quantitative (Common Measurement Framework) and economic data in the form of identifying Social Return On Investment (see <https://socialvalueengine.com/>). The former includes analyses of CMF data in a bespoke spreadsheet that can be patched from Excel into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), giving insight into 'distance travelled' from CMF entry and follow-up.

Whilst the programme is managed in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) by YMCA Lincolnshire, and delivery partners undertaking commissioned services are also from the same sector, 'adaptation' in 'the sector' covers a broader sphere. **For these purposes in this learning report 'the sector' includes organisations, communities and wider stakeholders who work and/or engage with people aged 50 and over, providing a range of services. This includes, but is not limited to, the VCS, statutory sector, and private sector providers. It applies to services provided by both employed staff and volunteers but also draws on findings from holders of the TED Age-friendly Business Award.**



Background, context and landscapes of delivery

Documenting organisational characteristics, pressures and challenges (as well as profiling service-user needs) can be deeply problematic particularly when taking account of knowledge management issues in attempting to encapsulate and portray 'up-to-date', 'authentic' and 'valid' snap-shots of 'real-time' provision. Telling the story of community needs, contextual and organisational change is therefore fraught with complexities which include potential (partial) duplication, conflicting sources of information and varying systems and procedures within and between organisations. In the context of criminal justice and the VCS these have been documented by Senior (2004) and Bird (2007). More recently a major ongoing study (led by the Nottingham Business School at Nottingham Trent University in collaboration with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and Sheffield Hallam University) has sought to provide 'real time' information on the impact of COVID 19 on the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector utilising monthly barometer surveys as part of a mixed methods approach. At the time of writing the study had reported for October 2020, concurring that:

“as the pandemic unfolds it is increasingly clear that the impact COVID-19 is having on the organisations within the sector is uneven, shaping the experiences of organisations and individuals in quite different ways. Some organisations are struggling to survive, hit by losses of income from fundraising or shops, whereas others have found new income streams and been able to expand services; some organisations have found it hard to adapt to the new socially distancing rules, whereas others have been able to use digital approaches to create new and exciting services.”

The TED story is similarly complex, but at the time of writing (November 2020) it is possible to document key headlines in service delivery across the lengthening pandemic timeline. Some of these relate to wider national 'moves' and policy initiatives which influence and have been referenced by other Ageing Better partners. Of note specifically is the transition of service offers in providing 'remote' services as part of 'blended delivery'. Overall this Learning Report on adaptation focuses on 3 key thematic findings that relate to 'the sector' defined above:

- Drivers of Adaptation: Appreciating needs, preferences, and their fluidity
- Rapidly responding, forward planning
- 'Community sensitivity', collaborative work, and integrating delivery

Foregrounding a more detailed exploration of the themes is consideration of key headlines from TED (with some overlap between these points):

- What preceded the pandemic in terms of delivery
- The ongoing changing nature of service offers
- The subsequent identification of trends, issues and themes



The TED in East Lindsey Programme Journey of Change

At project outset the original overarching aims/objectives of TED echoed those of the Ageing Better programme nationally and they remain constant, if not more compelling, during COVID 19. These are:

- More over 50's will be better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities leading to an enhanced quality of life
- More over 50's in East Lindsey will report that they feel less lonely or isolated
- More over 50's in East Lindsey will feel positive about the opportunities that getting older presents
- Over 50's in East Lindsey will have more opportunities to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of services and businesses available to them

Prior to the emergence of the pandemic the project could be summarised by reference to three distinct, core arms of activity:

- 1. The creation and facilitation of Friendship Groups** which grew from our initial 'Teas with TED' group meetings. Friendship Groups are established and supported with a paid officer with a view to becoming self-sustaining past the lifetime of the current funding for TED. These groups recruit and draw on a significant number of volunteers to run their groups
- 2. The promotion of Age Friendliness in Businesses via the Age Friendly Business Award.** Over 100 businesses in the District now hold the award, which recognises the efforts of businesses to acknowledge the role of age and ageing in how they design, deliver and sustain their services, premises and products
- 3. 7 diverse projects delivered by 'specialist' Delivery Partners.** These projects range from a focus on Digital Inclusion, to events for Male Carers, Citizen's Advice, and Food, Health and Wellbeing projects

Projects therefore had significant emphasis on place-based and group activity ('getting out and getting together'). Similar to a range of services nationally, including those who work with a range of age groups, COVID 19 led to a refocussing of delivery which recognised the role of distancing and shielding measures. The ConnectED offer has involved, but is not limited to:

- A ConnectED telephone befriending service initially for East Lindsey residents (which was subsequently funded to cover the whole of Lincolnshire for a period of time during the first 'lockdown')
- A ConnectED pack which was emailed to organisations and beneficiaries on a fortnightly basis which features news, quizzes, short stories, and recipes. More information can be found here: <https://tedineastlindsey.co.uk/>

- Campaigns that include the KnitTED Together campaign where people can share pictures of creative knitting and experiences via social media
- A dedicated YouTube channel with features on recipes, wellbeing and other activities
- Signposting to other agencies
- A 'TED is Us' blog about staff hobbies and activities during the pandemic and 'lockdown'
- Operation Pen Pal – which included intergenerational reciprocity young people and children sending notes, prose and art to people over 50 (a number of who replied)
- Socially distanced 'wellbeing' visits to TED members from the Friendship Officer, including gift packs and accompanied with therapy ponies
- Work undertaken by delivery partners to continue to engage with older people, including bespoke support on digital inclusion, healthy living, finance, benefit and debt advice, befriending and adaptations of dynamic service activities – including the facilitation of peer to peer support via What's App, telephone and online methods of communication

The iterative 'test and learn' ethos continues, shaping ongoing service design. In practice this iterative cycle is not necessarily ordered or always a completed 'loop' – a journey in which all stakeholders are engaged throughout (similar to the observing, acting and reflecting components of action research). The test and learn aspects can, however, encompass design and feedback between funders, providers and service users. In the early stages of the pandemic, immediately before lockdown, the TED programme team commenced a mapping exercise of Age-friendly Business Award holders. This scoped how they anticipated any change in the services they provided, potential closure or part-closure and ways in which they were adjusting to consider people aged 50 and over.

The team documented this work on existing systems used by the organisation (spreadsheets, and databases such as VCS tracker), but as the situation emerged rapidly, particular systems and processes were quickly established, and 'everyday' software packages such as Excel were utilised for new and varied programme activities. This was and remains mirrored in the work of commissioned programme delivery partners. The development of systems and processes accompanied increasingly 'blended delivery' featuring 'remote strands'. These systems, processes and approaches are integral to appreciating peoples' needs and their fluid nature, as well as serving as an audit trail of activity, 'best practice' and 'impact'. All of which are ongoing.



Drivers of Adaptation: Appreciating needs, preferences and their fluidity

“Over time you build up that knowledge, it just feels like there’s an opportunity now not to lose some of that work that’s happened as the funding changes but the demand is still there” (PMG member, October 2020)

Early in the pandemic, immediately prior to the first national ‘lock down’, TED were able to respond by adapting service offers across the programme, including reduced in-person ‘place-based’ group activities. At a programme management level this ability to respond, adapt and forward plan was in-keeping with the ‘test and learn’ ethos of Ageing Better nationally. The National Lottery Community Fund invested trust and flexibility in local Ageing Better programmes which was instrumental in facilitating this journey of change in delivery. This has not been unique to the Ageing Better programme. Similar successes in identifying need and keeping attuned to the issues and preferences of communities have been reflected upon by the Good Things Foundation (2020) and their networks undertaking work in digital inclusion.

This approach has led to local services (including volunteers) meeting the needs of communities and individuals holistically during COVID 19, referenced in concepts of ‘person-centred’ and ‘wrap-around’ services. Whilst the population make-up of the East Lindsey district is not characterised by great ethnic diversity in comparison to other urban parts of the country, forms of diversity remain. Services that understand, adapt, and ‘reach out’ to diverse populations aged 50 and over were a core feature of programme activity pre-COVID 19.



Opportunities have been present and exist for working with specific samples of ageing populations throughout the pandemic. Our learning has shown the idea of a homogenous ‘ageing population’ can be potentially divisive. Those (perhaps stereotypically) not thought of as ‘mainstream’ communities can also include people who do not self-identify with these perceived identities. For instance, TED has recognised the role of minority groups, specifically those who identify with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex ‘plus’ (LGBTQI+) identities by ensuring delivery partners and programme staff undertake ‘Think 2 Speak’ training on awareness of these communities.

Common Measurement Framework data has demonstrated that original ‘Teas with TED’ friendship groups have been more readily taken up by women. As a result the programme responded by commissioning targeted services for men in the form of the Community Health Activity Project (CHAPS) and the Men Do project (for male carers). A core aspect of both projects was the role of engaging activities:

“The Men Do project, pre-Covid 19 was solely structured on group face to face meetings, activities and events that had been planned, in part by group members, and some by myself. For the remainder of the year activities and events included Comedy Nights, Lincoln v Coventry Football Match, Archery, Pint and Pub Games evening, Boston River Cruise etc. None of these activities were possible to achieve during lock-down and neither were they possible to recreate in a virtual way either. Knowing the members of the group well and knowing the support and camaraderie they benefit from which is a key aspect of the project, we were certain that we would need to continue our support in another way and to do this we needed to become even more creative!” (Carers First, Men Do project case study)

Prior to COVID 19 services were able to test and (re)design by working with a range of stakeholders including people aged 50 and over. Over time, including during 2020, providing ‘person-centred’ services have remained crucial and possible. This has had ripple effects in identifying trends in needs and preferences about ‘what works’ (for who and in what circumstances) on an ongoing basis. Services continue to explore, monitor and appreciate these in relation to their communities. This sensitivity to demand contributes to an ongoing (if informal and at times potentially problematic) evidence base which nonetheless can be drawn on to provide compelling cases for services during competitive and changing funding streams. Service providers have acted as indicators (or ‘proxies’) of localised demand: identifying ‘hidden populations’, ‘needs’ and issues that prior mapping work, such as Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, may not shed light on:

“We have had many compliments on how the calls are making such a difference to people’s days, in a time where some people are not seeing others. We received a thank you card that described one of our befriending team as an amazing ‘anchor of support’ to a lady with no family whom was shielding at the time. By simply having this chance to talk has brightened up many of our client’s days” (Age UK Lindsey, Breakfast Club project case study)

Some of these emerging needs (and populations) related specifically to the pandemic:

“During the COVID 19 pandemic there is a lot of fear among older people, especially those considered more at risk and shielding. In talking to our team, it has given people the confidence to seek medical help where needed, where previously they had been reluctant. As the situation changes for a lot of people, we believe that for many of our clients, it will still be a time when they will be reluctant to leave the safety of their homes and we will be there to support them” (Age UK Lindsey, Breakfast Club project case study)

The Connected befriending phone line, established early in the pandemic (April 2020) continues to operate. The TED programme remotely supports approximately 1,000 individuals a month, and receives 250 support requests each month.

The inclusion of ‘remote’ forms of contact has led to TED reaching people who would not engage in place-based meetings even prior to the pandemic. Services have reached people unable and/or not wanting to attend events, including those with mobility issues and anxieties about in-person group activities. Appreciating the nature of need(s) is emergent and remains ongoing.



In the early stages of the first lockdown ConnectED received calls from people on how to get essentials (shopping, prescriptions, and access to cash where online and telephone banking is not taken up). Over time providing connectedness and relationships has reflected ongoing mental health and wellbeing support. Lincs Digital commented on this in their project case study during the earlier months of the pandemic:

“We found our service needed to connect with all our learners and see how we could support them as each week was throwing new issues up. Each person we spoke to was so grateful for the call and was extremely lonely and in need of help and support. Many don’t have devices at home and use ours at different sessions we run... very few of our learners have Wi-Fi provision as they connect to our mobile Wi-Fi at sessions. We realised that this was going to be a major problem for many of our learners as they would not be able to connect to any services with the above provisions. Those learners with no provision of device or Wi-Fi, we turned our service into a help, support, and wellbeing. We connected with one of our volunteers near the coast and she identified a group of learners that she would connect with on a weekly basis” (Lincs Digital, project case study)

The importance of connecting at distance takes place against the backdrop of a combined impact of ‘lockdown’ and existing infrastructural issues associated with the rurality and sparsity of the Districts’ population, the latter reported on by Rural England (2019). As Lincs Digital reported:

“Our target audience is 50+ for this project, although many of our learners are 70 to mid-80 age range. Many of them live in small communities, do not drive, use public transport to move around or walk/bike/use mobility scooters, wherever they need to go. Public transport within our communities is limited, and with COVID-19 has become less due to the service levels being reduced or withdrawn.” (Lincs Digital, project case study)

‘Digital inclusion’ remains an issue, not only in terms of access to and ownership of devices and developing skills, but also infrastructure barriers experienced by communities. Research undertaken by Rose Regeneration (2020) further highlights disparity compared to urban areas in the country, with rural/coastal businesses in the district reporting that the accelerated move to home working has reaffirmed findings concerning poorer mobile signal and internet connectivity. This barrier to working in ‘blended’ ways for Age-friendly Businesses also echoes challenges in communication between other community members.

Building on prior programme learning, stakeholders were able to keep in contact with existing consumers and members at the same time as recognising other ageing members of communities not worked with before the pandemic. Ways of working include: Age-friendly Businesses providing home delivery services; wider TED programme activity in the form of telephone befriending and conference calls; and socially distanced services. These have been able to engage people, contributing to ongoing profiles of people aged 50 and over.



This not only considers needs and preferences but also extends capacity through peer-to-peer models of entertainment and support:

“With the telephone quiz groups I try to keep numbers at about three or four as I think it improves participation and makes it easier for the running of the session. In one of the groups I hadn’t realised that all the individuals had a memory problem... One of them does have a form of dementia so he takes part on speaker phone with his wife with him, the next chap told me his memory wasn’t very good due to a medication he’d taken years ago and the third chap was a bit nervous saying his memory wasn’t very good and maybe the group wasn’t for him. So, as I explained to him about everyone else in the group had a memory issue it really encouraged him that he was in a safe environment and he was then happy to take part” (Magna Vitae, project good news story)

These are relevant to strategic insight and informing ongoing business cases:

“The weekly calls would probably not be sustainable if face to face delivery recommenced and would not necessarily be needed. The friendships and support which the groups are providing for each other will most likely continue beyond the TED project and COVID-19...The weekly calls do give opportunity to engage on a one to one basis with the participants. It would be good to develop a set of simple questions which could provide us with some specific evidence.” (Magna Vitae, CHAPS project case study)

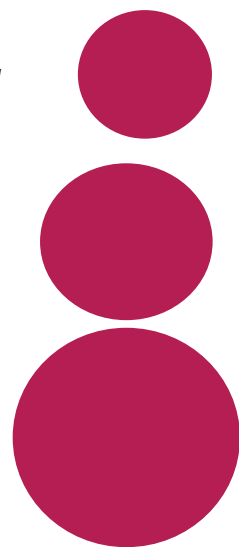
“...reflecting on other funding opportunities that are coming our way, ...they are coming our way because of the extensive inequality and deprivation in East Lindsey in-particular.. the work that TED is and has been doing has directly fed into and supported the evidence base” (PMG member, October 2020)

This was elaborated on in recent written and oral evidence TED provided for an All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into Loneliness:

“Integrating ongoing research and learning with service design has been essential in allowing us to adapt our services to meet the needs of beneficiaries. In short, we have found that by innovating in evaluation and service delivery we have made contact with groups who would otherwise have been described as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘marginalised’.

These are crucial mechanisms in ensuring our knowledge of communities is timely and funding decisions remain informed over time. Through developing strategic and stakeholder relationships, we have been able to collate evidence that is disseminated at district, county and national levels resulting in a distinctive interface between ‘grassroots’ practice and community work on the one hand, and the development of strategy and policy on the other” (Director of Communities, YMCA Lincolnshire, July 2020)

Appreciating the potential fluidity of community needs and preferences is integral to understanding ‘demand’ – an instrumental component in representing communities, influencing funding decisions, and shaping strategy and policy at a range of levels. This integrates closely with the second theme which concerns how providers and ‘the sector’ as a whole have been able and continue to rapidly respond to emerging immediate/short term issues, whilst also planning ahead.



Rapidly responding, forward planning

The shifting landscapes of providing services, their policy contexts and the impact of COVID 19 on pre-existing service offers has been outlined in this full report on adaptation. In the first theme, 'Drivers of Adaptation: Appreciating needs, preferences and their fluidity', TED documented the rapidly changing and 'fluid' nature of community needs and preferences that were instrumental in informing service provision, and the types of delivery specifically.

"Community groups and other local groups made immediate responses to the situation that they had in front of them... the demand for that type of wellbeing, telephone call to somebody to say are you okay, is there anything we can do, are there any community groups we can link you into seems to have really gathered a little bit of pace" (PMG member, October 2020)

The flexibility of The National Lottery Community Fund in enabling resource and 'space' for TED services to transition was core to the programme as a whole, and specific providers to not only address shifting national contexts but to take practical steps in the immediate and short term to engage communities. Yet this short-term facilitation also enhances the extent to which services are able to strategize and manoeuvre for the future:

"The telephone befriending service is a format that we can continue in the short and medium term as a replacement for the face to face befriending. We also feel there is a long term benefit to this service, especially living in a rural area. Our future service could look different since COVID 19 in that it we hope to continue the telephone befriending alongside the face to face befriending. We are looking to our current volunteers for extra capacity and also hoping to recruit more volunteers that have enjoyed volunteering during the Covid 19 pandemic. Having both services running together would then allow us to reach a greater number of people and to make a difference to them. We have previously had delays due to location, distance factors of befriending clients and volunteers. By offering a telephone service this can allow people to be connected straight away even if only in the interim until a local volunteer can be introduced. It is expected that the telephone service will be more suitable, ongoing in some cases." (Age UK Lindsey, Lunch Clubs project case study)

The quick responses of funders, delivery partners, team members in YMCA Lincolnshire, along with volunteers and businesses is not only underpinned by incorporating different modes of delivery, but also developing and embedding specific processes and systems. An example of this wider programme trend is reflected in the ConnectED befriending phone line. Existing YMCA Lincolnshire TED programme staff were mobilised to act as befrienders in addition to holding 'pre-COVID' responsibilities. The team devised specific Excel workbooks for a breakdown of areas in East Lindsey with each area having a dedicated staff phone number. The devised call log was completed with callers consent (for General Data Protection Regulation purposes) and an audit trail of call summaries which also enabled follow-up conversations to have a sense of continuity or highlight specific issues regarding health and wellbeing (including memory issues).



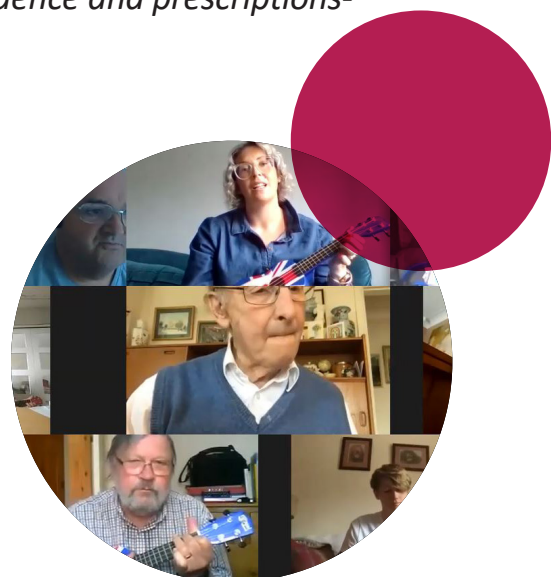
Establishing password protected systems allowed for staff members to cover each other (e.g. during leave). This provided a reference point for documenting interests and preferences, as well as providing evidence of prior engagement in the event of safeguarding issues – with TED having a Single Point Of Contact for safeguarding in the organisation’s Senior Management Team, as well as additional leadership support from YMCA Lincolnshire’s Chief Executive. Contract monitoring was also adapted to document service delivery by commissioned partners for completion on a week-by-week basis, as well as collating data on the number of beneficiaries receiving telephone support.

The call log also documents and accompanies procedures for referrals, the team receiving significant numbers of referrals from partner agencies who worked in wellbeing and social prescribing as well as signposting on to partner providers and other services. Concerted communications exercises were made to these partners by programme management to embed referral processes alongside publicity of the service (emails, social media and phone contact). Staff were also able to work with delivery partners to provide more ‘bespoke’ engagement. Examples included referring men to ‘Sporting Memories’ telephone quizzes, socially distanced visits and peer-to-peer engagement. The Carer’s First ‘Men Do’ project developed a contact directory where men could contact each other through accessing profiles of interests and experience.

Responding rapidly, in ‘blended’ and/or ‘alternative’ ways invariably incurred tensions compared to established pre-existing delivery. Additional efforts were required for adaptation. Age-friendly Businesses also reported working intensively in the short term, but this also had long-term benefits for future ‘reach’ (e.g. the role of home delivery and innovation to meet demand/markets in the community as examples of services that would be continued post-COVID 19). Our case study with Citizens Advice Lindsey, a commissioned delivery provider working in the area of guidance on rights, including finance, benefit and debt issues, reflected a pattern across the programme regarding increased demands on time and resources to enable these transitions:

“The majority of my telephone appointments have been benefit appeals and Mandatory Reconsiderations. A face to face appointment for these types of issues usually takes a 1 hour appointment and then 1 hour to write a letter of grounds and to write up the case. These type of cases are taking longer over the telephone for several reasons. Harder to keep the client focused on the questions asked and they can start talking about non relevant information, this happens also during face to face appointments but it is easier to interrupt the client and get them back on track with body language and hand gestures etc. Medical evidence and prescriptions-

I usually write this information from letters, prescriptions etc. I am now relying on the client to read out letters and spell out medication, which can make it difficult to understand especially if the client has low literacy levels. I usually ask the client to sign a completed client authority form which then is sent in with the appeal letter etc. I am now having to email the receptionist at Skegness, who then prints off this information and then sends it out to the client who then has to read, check and sign and send off... has great significance when there is a 1 month time limit for appealing decisions” (Citizens Advice Lindsey, project case study)



This additional work in the short term has longer term benefits. In our project case studies delivery partners were asked to forecast long-term influences on service design and delivery resulting from the pandemic:

“Our service and the uniqueness of our offer means we will be in demand more than ever. We have learnt that our service crosses over many services already there and we can, with our experience and expertise, cover many services while offering a one stop shop to the person. This will benefit the person and the funder, as our service level is extremely cost effective as there doesn’t need to be a variety of organisations involved with the person. Feedback from our learners is they trust and have confidence... we can resolve and support their issues. They are asking for these services to continue within a face to face drop in centre. We are currently working on a new extended offer for a full funding bid. We now have a new working plan we are developing for a new service for future delivery” (Lincs Digital, project case study)

The October 2020 report from a Voluntary and Community and Social Enterprise barometer has identified that whilst there have been additional funding streams emerging during COVID 19 funding remains even more pressing as a result of the pandemic and “some organisations are using their reserves and others are making cuts, particularly redundancies or reducing services in order to survive. Some small organisations fear they will be overlooked, and are particularly struggling with competing demands” (VCSE Barometer, 2020). This national picture has been reflected in East Lindsey with pressures on delivery partners and YMCA Lincolnshire TED programme staff. For instance, the ConnectED befriending line has included calls from members of the community who have complex mental health needs and a history of discontinuity of provision (people with engagement and ‘referral-on’ that sometimes involves multiple people and providers).



Opportunities to recognise and work with people aged 50 and over, along with an ability to demonstrate the demand and rationale for services also working collaboratively has, paradoxically, taken place amidst organisational, resource and stakeholder pressures. Whilst still requiring dedicated resources, the importance of volunteers remains. Mapping work undertaken by the YMCA Lincolnshire Communities Directorate has shown that volunteering activity (in formal and informal capacities) has been essential to maintaining community and individual wellbeing. For instance, village hall committees, who serve a significant number of people aged 50 and over, have maintained their structure and remain committed to the future of their buildings and their role in communities, even where most of these have had to close during periods of lockdown. This commitment has been echoed in Good Neighbour Schemes and rapidly emerging groups. The central importance of volunteers is in-keeping with the original ethos of the TED Programme:

“We know that the role of volunteers has been instrumental in service design, delivery and sustainability and to the overall success of our programme, but we also recognise that this success has required dedicated resource in the form of the TED staff team and associated commissioned VCS partners. This investment has created capacity in communities, volunteers and beneficiaries through sharing specialist knowledge and expertise, experience and training. Community members, groups and volunteers have been supported by our team to build on this investment in order to transition to self-sustaining status.” (Director of Communities YMCA Lincolnshire, July 2020)

It is, however, the case that during COVID 19 organisational learning has demonstrated the substantial role of providers working collaboratively. During the pandemic, case studies highlighted how different providers were able to communicate and work collaboratively. In providing 'wrap-around' and 'blended' service delivery in working with people aged 50 and over. In-part this has been shaped somewhat paradoxically by pressures on resources. For example time, staff/volunteer dedicated resource, financial challenges along with additional work from different ways of working. The prospect of potentially increasingly competitive, short term funding landscapes and trying to match levels of demand and need. The final theme in this report focusses on how working 'collaboratively' has brought challenges, but is outweighed by great benefits (to the sector in the form of organisations, people, businesses and the wider community).

'Community Sensitivity', 'Collaborative work' and integrating delivery

"It would be a real shame I think for groups that work with older people and charities that work with older people who have got initiatives now that have developed as a response to COVID that we're not looking at how to make best use of tying those together"
(PMG member, October 2020)

Elements of this theme are covered elsewhere in this learning report on adaptation. The pandemic has presented a wide range of stakeholders with challenges that have included 'community sensitivity'. The term encompasses recognising and appreciating peoples' needs and preferences in an ongoing nature (the 'demand aspect'), and adapting service delivery during reductions in place-based and face-to-face/group activities as well as working with the short term, uncertain, contexts. Against, and potentially because of this, the sector has shown capabilities to future plan.

"COVID has almost sort of made us a lot more joined up as there's a lot more communication there's a lot more learning about what other organisations are offering" (TED Programme Manager, October 2020)

This last theme demonstrates examples of 'collaborative work' and how delivery can be integrated, exemplified in concepts such as 'wrap around support', 'holistic' and 'person-centred' delivery. Collaborative work takes the form of formal 'partnerships' between providers (e.g. through service level agreements), but also a wider range of relationships between various stakeholders. This includes people aged 50 and over as providers, users and designers of services. In the context of partnerships the nature of these arrangements can vary considerably, as Adam Crawford has similarly noted in distinctions between 'multi-agency' and 'inter-agency' work:

"We can distinguish on the one hand between multi-agency relations which merely involve the coming together of a variety of agencies in relation to a given problem, and, on the other hand, 'inter-agency' relations, which involved some degree of fusion and melding of relations between agencies"
(Crawford, 1999: 119)



This distinction may better be understood as a spectrum along which examples of relationships and practice can be situated. In the case of commissioned delivery partners and other strands of programme activity, pre-existing programme aims (before COVID 19) remained clear and central during COVID 19. Embedded clear priorities continue to be instrumental for ongoing collaborative adaptation:

“We have worked with partners to help develop a different ‘virtual’ offer which so far has included an online quiz, access to the Sporting Memories ‘Sporting Pink’ (newsletter) and online sporting memories video clips. Initially the target beneficiaries were men already attending CHAPS sessions in Mablethorpe and Skegness. We are now aiming to engage with a wider audience and have already been able to engage with the husbands of the (Magna Vitae) Fitness Food and Friends participants as well as wider work through social media engagement and participants of the ‘Men Do’ project (ran by Carers First another programme delivery project).” (Magna Vitae, CHAPS project case study)

These can be appreciated in TED’s prior learning reports that encapsulate the relational nature of resilience. Collaborative work was taking place before the pandemic and formal arrangements were in place in the form of delivery group meetings (bringing representatives from commissioned delivery partners together) and multiple stakeholders forming a high-level Programme Management Group. This report has documented how the sector quickly established systems and processes in shifting to more remote and blended ways of working. Services were able to overcome practical concerns whilst collaborating, which included the ability to obtain and record consent (in verbal and written forms) to share personal information, in line with General Data Protection Regulation.

However, the development of bespoke systems and processes (within and between) providers of services also leads to differing opportunities and challenges for harmonising formal routes of communication and also documenting engagement with people aged 50 and over:

“We also have established relationships with, and understand, other service providers in meeting the diverse needs of people in East Lindsey and Lincolnshire. These understandings provide scope for addressing unmet need and coordinating approaches... avoiding duplication of provision and ensuring funding is targeted and maximised. More recently our relationships have extended to include TED staff being involved in the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum. This has been particularly valuable, and has enabled us to contribute TED insight and learning whilst representing the perspectives of people aged over 50 in our communities.” (Director of Communities, YMCA Lincolnshire, July 2020)



In the same way in which Friendship Group members were keeping in contact with each other providing support and ‘checking-in’ without additional guidance or direction, commissioned delivery partners continue to work with each other, demonstrating independent innovation at a grassroots level built on historical relationships in communities prior to lock down. Showing ‘community sensitivity’, delivery partners and the programme as a whole have been cross referring (formally and informally), continuing to engage and provide support in ways that reflect the interest(s) of ageing populations:

“Whilst I was phoning one of the participants from the Fitness Food and Friends group she asked if I would give a call to an elderly man she knew from her church. He had recently lost his wife and was depressed, didn’t have any family and no one was calling him. So, I gave him a ring which he was very pleased about and gave him the bereavement number and the number for the Wellbeing team. I asked he if would like me to phone him again and he said he would really like that. I’ve therefore added him to our Fitness Food and Friends list so that we can encourage and support him” (Magna Vitae, project feedback)

The diversity of providers and initiatives in East Lindsey give practical examples of collaborative work, but this has created complexities in terms of how to share best practice with multiple stakeholders and the most suitable mechanisms for enabling this. Other complexities include how to design and align ‘formally’ defined signposting tools, communications and forums/groups with ‘informal’ (sometimes undocumented) collaborative work and link this to strategy, policy and future funding.

This also relates to the other themes of this report, but during COVID 19 TED have demonstrated the clear benefits of collaborative work, not only for ageing populations, but also for providers, their staff and volunteers. This adaptation has ongoing reach, recognising multiple voices and capitalising collectively on opportunities in relation to bids/funding, services (design and provision) and wider community engagement.

Key Learning

- **Nationally and in the district the COVID 19 pandemic has created considerable pressures for services.** These include heightened, changing demand and community needs matched with real concerns about resources available to address these.
- **The shared aims of Ageing Better and the TED Programme over the past 5 plus years have created and embedded common terms of reference and objectives for a range of providers which has created ‘common ground’** both for transitioning service offers during COVID 19 and undertaking collaborative work.
- **Representing communities and demonstrating demand.** All aspects of the TED programme have been influential in capturing the needs of people aged 50 and over in East Lindsey as well as the strengths of these communities. Timely and ongoing profiling of the district is essential alongside concerted communications which enable the programme to influence at a variety of levels, including funders.
- **Rapid service adaptation is complex and challenging.** The TED programme and stakeholders (including people 50 and over) have facilitated innovation and change in how organisations, communities and people work together. The flexibility and trust of The National Lottery Community Fund has been core to working with ageing populations in this ongoing, quickly shifting landscape. This includes streamlined approaches to funding decision-making processes mirrored in the VCSE sector broadly.



- **The mobilisation of services across COVID 19 contexts has contributed to preparedness in the event of future challenges to delivery.** Although potentially challenging, our learning recognises that short-term funding streams can contribute to utilisable tools and knowledge which can have positive implications for longer-term delivery and support.
- **Feedback and reflection. A cyclical appreciation of testing and learning through identifying assets in the form of grassroots community work and contributions to modelling future provision provides an effective approach,** but this can be fragmented and engaging all relevant stakeholders throughout ('closing the loop') can be problematic.
- **The TED programme, with partners in other sectors and beyond the district have opportunities to further explore approaches to refining a 'best practice' online repository.** This ongoing potential requires knowledge management considerations (specifically on refinement of purpose and duplication issues) and resource implications such as providing dedicated coordinating staff to update/maintain and manage online content as well as monitor uptake of use.
- **TED continues to identify and bring together stakeholder representatives as community advocates reflecting on the scope of available knowledge, its uses and relevance to the AB/ TED terms of reference, representing community interests.** The informal relationships are crucial in understanding and validating formally identified partnerships and supporting inter-agency approaches which can be extended to future joint bidding and lobbying on 'high-level' decision-making.
- **Existing accountability and planning mechanisms – such as the Delivery Group Meetings and Programme Management Group can continue to be utilised to promote this work and engage strategy, funding and local experience**



About East Lindsey



T.E.D.

Ageing Better
in East Lindsey

East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 29% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED Programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness
- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities
- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have over 1800 registered TED members, and over 100 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Award.

Further information...

To find out more about TED or to get involved visit our website www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: [@ted_EastLindsey](https://twitter.com/ted_EastLindsey)



community
Lincs

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