

Street outreach

Engaging people less likely to access formal groups, services, activities and support

Practical tips to approach and engage people out on the street, to promote your service, group or activity

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This toolkit was developed by Age UK Camden and The Good Practice Mentor Team and shares learning from the Ageing Better programme (2015-2022), a National Lottery Community funded project that developed innovative ways to connect people aged 50+ to their communities to reduce loneliness and isolation.

Age UK Camden specialised in supporting community groups and organisations across the UK, to use tried and tested, practical outreach approaches to find, engage and capture insight from harder to reach people, particularly those less likely to access or be known to formal groups, activities, services and support.



Using outreach as a tool to find and engage the people ‘no-one knows’

A proactive outreach approach involves going out into the community to find and engage people in the places and spaces people live their lives, including out on the street and on the doorstep.

Ageing Better in Camden successfully found and engaged with almost 3000 people via street outreach, door-knocking and hosting informal pop-up events. 23% of those engaged through outreach activity went on to attend an outreach stepping-stone event and over 10% to embed in ongoing activities.



Age UK Camden Outreach activity ran from March 2018 to January 2022. 7346 people were engaged in total through outreach activity.

2176 people were encouraged to take action as a result of outreach engagement. This included attending an event, joining a group or accessing a service or support. 41% were men and 59% were women.

A snapshot of outreach activity in one year

January to March 2019

- 736 people engaged.
- 123 people took positive action. Of those, 53 went on access ongoing support.
- AUC delivered/supported 11 pop-up events.

April to June 2019

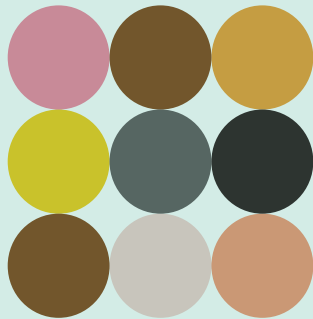
- 890 people engaged.
- 210 people took positive action. Of those, 81 went on to access ongoing support.
- Delivered/supported 13 pop-up events.

July to September 2019

- 626 people engaged.
- 145 people took positive action. Of those, 77 went on to access ongoing support.
- Delivered/supported 10 pop-up activities.

October to December 2019

- 564 people engaged.
- 162 took positive action. Of those, 84 went on to access ongoing support.
- AUC delivered/supported 11 pop-up events.



**2816 people
engaged in 2019**



**23% (640) people took
positive action**

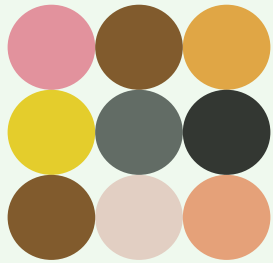
**10.5% (295) people
accessed ongoing support**

This outreach approach also helped to find and connect individuals to their local communities and help people to establish their own informal social networks.

You can read more about the outreach approach developed by ABC in the **Working with Older People Journal**.

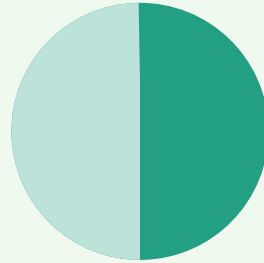


**Impact of street outreach activity to practically find the people
less likely to access formal groups and activities to share an
invitation to three informal pop-up events**



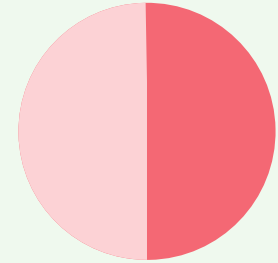
People engaged

289



Women

145 (50%)



Men

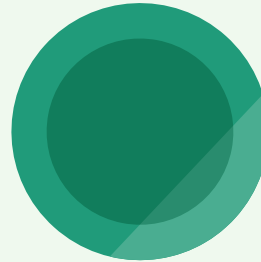
144 (50%)

Conversion from street outreach to attendance at events



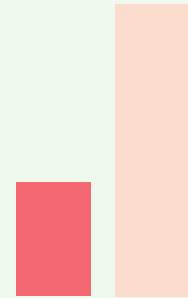
**Restaurant lunch
pop-up**

35% attended



**Cafe
pop-up***

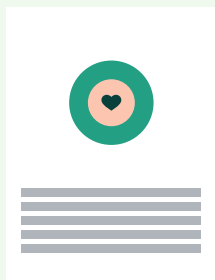
10% attended



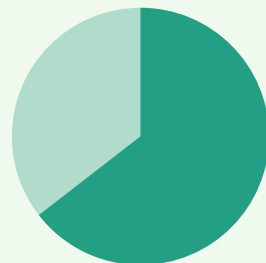
**Library social
drop-in**

28% attended

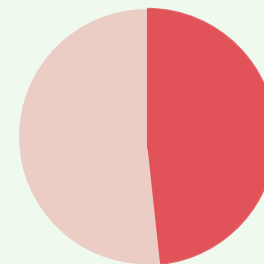
Three events



228 (78%) of people met and engaged during street outreach had information put into their hands



42 people (61%) came alone to a pop-up event



34 people who shared their contact details had no previous contact with Ageing Better or partner agencies

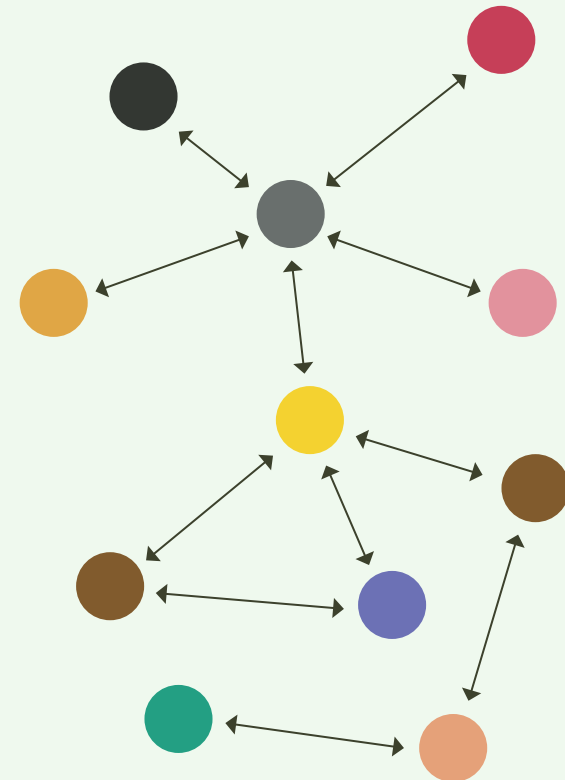
Some of the people we most want to reach and engage have ‘it’s not for me’ preconceptions about community groups, activities, service and support.

As a result, they are less likely to read notice boards or to proactively look for or ask about opportunities.

By finding, approaching and engaging people out in the community spaces people pass through – for example, on the street, at bus stops, recycling bins, parks and dog walks – you can find and engage the people you really want to meet and put information into their hands about your service, group or activity.

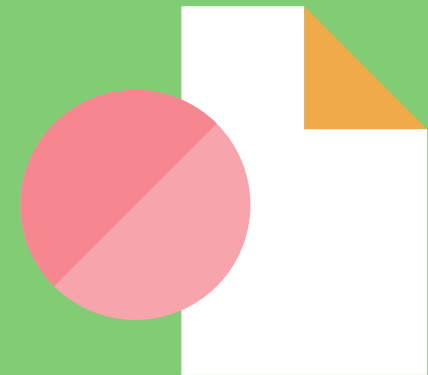
Street outreach isn't difficult and can be used to find people of all ages. Even just the odd hour spent here and there can help more people to get to know about your offer and find their way to your door, service or group.

It also means that you have more opportunity to meet and talk with some of the people who are less likely to be known to formal services, activities and support – the people who could really benefit from your offer, if only they knew about it.



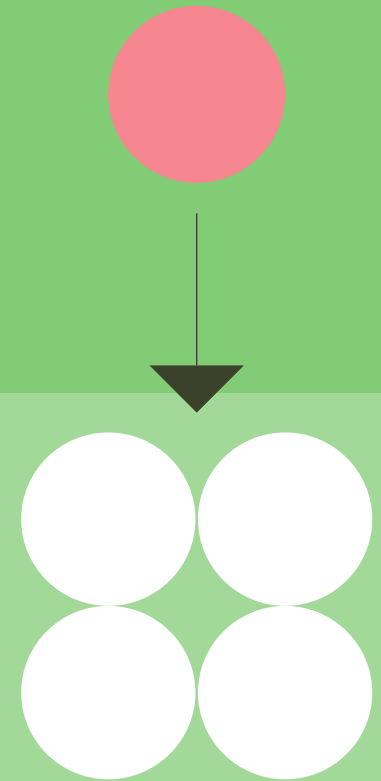
Producing comms as a tool for street outreach

Often the people we most want to reach, say 'no' to our offer of groups, activities, services and support due to preconceptions about groups, activities, services and support for people.



Commonly held preconceptions and barriers to engagement may include:

- **Perceptions around age and 'older people'.** Very few people in their 50s, 60, 70s and often 80s, regard themselves as an 'older person'. When asked, they assume that groups and services are for people who are much older e.g. 80s and 90s, and are for the people they identify as being older.
- **Life and cultural experience.** If someone's life or cultural experience hasn't involved joining or participating in groups, clubs or activities in the past, they may have preconceptions about who your offer is for - 'it's not a space/place for me'.
- **Negative cycle.** Once someone becomes isolated, people often develop an 'I'm not a joiner/ I don't go to things' mindset which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and significant barrier to future participation and engagement.

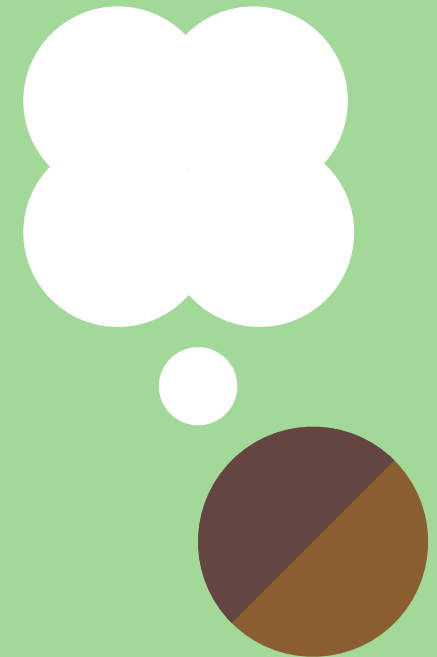


- **Precontemplation.** Not thinking about taking action. Not actively looking for, or proactively seeking out information or opportunities to expand social networks.
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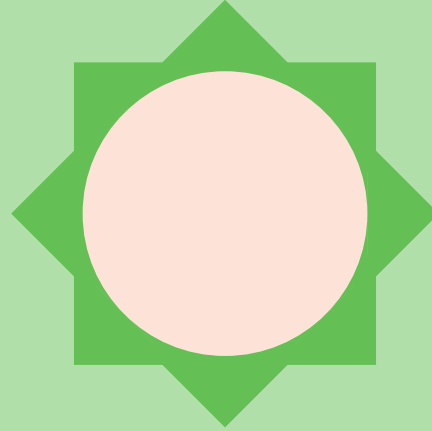
- **Social risk.** If people are socially isolated, the thought of taking a social risk - having to go somewhere new for the first time, meet new people, make small talk, make friends and/or experience social rejection, can be overwhelming. As a result, it become easier not to take this step.

- **Be mindful of your comms.** If they reinforce preconceptions and barriers to engagement, your street outreach interaction is less likely to be successful.

Rather than change the comms you already have that work well for referral partners and the people you already know, it can be useful to produce a piece of comms specifically to use for street outreach. This is likely to look quite different to materials produced for wider marketing purposes.







Top tips for producing outreach-friendly comms

- ✔ **Use clear transactional language** (say what it is on the tin) to describe the activity/opportunity e.g. describe a 'coffee morning' as 'drop by for a free coffee and meet your neighbours'.
- ✔ **Focus on the positive, not the vulnerability.** For example rather than 'falls prevention', talk about the benefits of your activity e.g. 'improve balance and flexibility'.
- ✔ **Keep tone of invite casual and informal** e.g. 'drop by', 'drop-in'. Avoid references to formal-sounding clubs or groups and social risk/commitment: e.g 'make friends, have fun, socialise'. A good alternative is to describe the atmosphere, 'it's relaxed, easy-going and informal'.
- ✔ **Don't assume that everyone will know** what the activity is and if it will be accessible to all, e.g. yoga – how would you describe this?
- ✔ **Avoid references to 'elderly', 'older people', 'later life', 'loneliness', 'isolation' and 'vulnerability'.** '50+'/'55+' etc is clearer and removes assumptions about who and what 'older people' means.

- ✓ **Anticipate questions to remove the barrier and need for people to contact you.**
What, why, where, when, who? Include this information in the flyer.
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- ✓ **Provide images of the activity location** (inside and out) and a map with clear travel directions to remove barriers such as literacy issues, memory loss or for ESOL speakers.

- ✓ **Don't assume access to technology.** Not everyone will have internet access or the ability to contact you online. Provide a contact name and telephone number.

- ✓ **Be mindful of the impact of images.** Consider the impact of representations of people. Images of people who might not look like you or trigger preconceptions about 'who your offer is for' can be a barrier to engagement. See <https://ageing-better.org.uk> for a free age-friendly image library. Choose images that will appeal to a diverse range of people.



Checklist: Making posters and flyers



Include a map and directions to the venue



Use a legible font, like Arial



Include a picture of the front of the venue



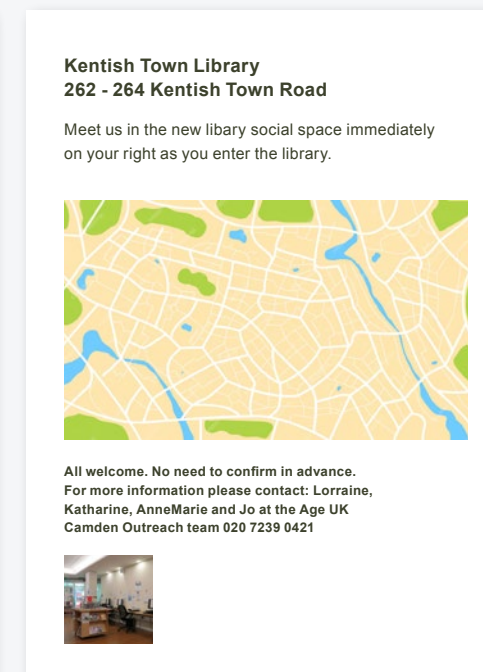
Make sure there is adequate spacing between lines and paragraphs



Use 14-point font size as a minimum



Make sure your poster or flyer is accessible for everyone



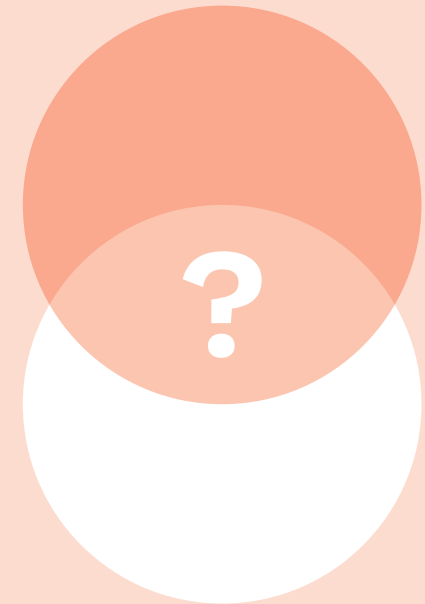
Don't use coloured text on top of coloured backgrounds

Bad contrast
Bad contrast

How to avoid being confused with a community fundraiser

People are naturally suspicious of being approached by a stranger and are likely to think ‘who are you and what do you want?’. Community fundraisers are often out and about on the street to approach and engage people in conversation.

Although actively friendly, nine times out of ten, people are likely to give community fundraisers a wide berth unless they are particularly interested in the fundraising cause or campaign.



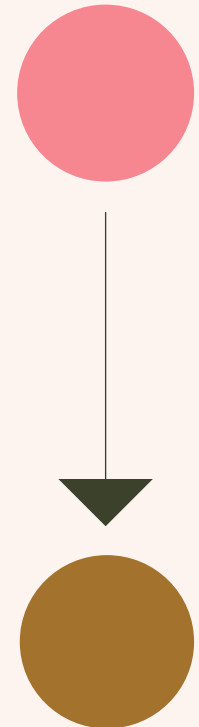
Tips to avoid people identifying you as a community fundraiser:

- ✓ **Dress casually** and appear neutral, avoiding business attire or branded t-shirts. This makes you more approachable and less likely to be perceived as a fundraiser.
- ✓ **Roam and keep moving** – don't keep static/stand in one place (e.g. outside a supermarket or station) or people will be suspicious/proactively avoid making eye contact and walk around you.
- ✓ **Don't use a clipboard**, carry folders or lots of information (carrying information in a tote bag works well and is accessible to pull out when needed).



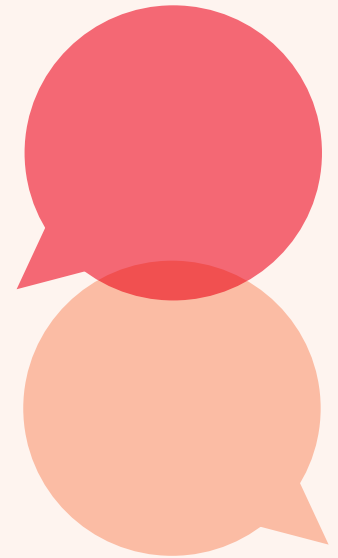
How to make your street outreach approach:

- **Appear to walk alone/avoid approaching in pairs.** This leaves enough physical space for conversation and avoids making people feel crowded.
- **Be friendly, confident and relaxed.** If you feel uncomfortable about making the approach your hesitancy will make it more difficult to establish a connection.
- **Approach the person casually** preferably from the front (never run after someone or approach from behind)
- **Approach the person with one piece of paper/comms in your hand** - the invitation or opportunity you want to promote. **Position it between you** so that the person can see at a glance what you want to share and you can look at it while you chat through it together.



How to start your street outreach conversation:

- **A good opener is ‘excuse me, sorry to bother you, I’m not fundraising or trying to sell anything’.** (Get this out of the way first and people are more likely to stop and chat.)
- **Use a simple opening line.** Start by saying something like, ‘I’m/ we are just trying to let people know about this...’. (Tip: Don’t say ‘local’ people as it gives someone an immediate out to say ‘I’m not local’ and bring the conversation to a close before you’ve had a chance to share your offer.)
- **Quickly and briefly explain what the offer is** in clear ‘say what it is on the tin’ transactional language – referring to the comms. Be aware of barriers to engagement (e.g. saying to someone ‘come along and make friends, have fun, socialise’ might be a red flag to someone anxious about meeting new people – better to describe what it’s like e.g. ‘it’s easy going, relaxed, informal – meet other local people’.)



- **Be ready to answer questions** and follow the conversational lead of the person you've engaged, rather than your own agenda. For some people, your chat might be a valuable social encounter in its own right.
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- **Make sure you have copies of a printed map and travel directions to give people,** including a picture of your venue (rather than people) which can help someone to find you. It also removes barriers to people with literacy issues, ESOL speakers, memory loss etc, without needing to ask or explain.



Who to approach and how to stay safe:

- **Don't decide for people.**
It's impossible to know from looking at people if they are likely to be interested in your group or activity. Stop and engage everyone in the same way, even if you think they don't fit your 'target' group.
- **Don't put people at risk.** Avoid approaching someone crossing a road or attempting to catch a bus. Find locations that give you space for having relaxed conversations without being in the way of others.
- **Always do street outreach in daylight and if going to a quiet location, take someone else with you.** That way you can stay in sight of each other and keep each other company when you stop for a tea break.
- **Don't push someone to engage if they say no.** If the person says it's not for them/they're not interested, nothing has been lost. You can always ask them if they know anybody they can pass your information onto.
- **Use your judgement.** If something doesn't feel right, or you don't feel safe, you can decide not to approach someone or bring the conversation to a close at any time. Just say thank you and walk away.



Further information, training and support, including;

- street outreach skills
 - producing outreach-friendly comms
 - using street outreach as a tool for social action research
 - informal conversational strategies
 - where and how to find the people you most want to reach
- are available to groups and organisations anywhere in the UK.

For more information, please contact:

The Good Practice Mentors

GPM@syha.co.uk

<https://www.syha.co.uk/wellbeing/improve-your-wellbeing/good-practice-mentors/>

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