

Community engagement beyond the “quick wins”

*A case study with Tameside Ageing in Place Pathfinder
(Jigsaw Homes)*



Running in the Ridge Hill area of Stalybridge, Greater Manchester, the Tameside Ageing in Place Pathfinder project aims to make sure that older people’s voices are heard and valued in the places they live. It is a three-year community engagement project led by housing support organisation Jigsaw.

Like many organisations, the team knew how to meet people who were already at least partly engaged in their communities. They spent the first 18 months reaching people through:

- existing social groups
- community organisations
- sheltered housing schemes
- asking them to fill in a questionnaire about their interests.

However this approach did not enable them to meet those experiencing the greatest barriers to community involvement, including poor health and long-term, complex loneliness and social isolation. As described by Community Engagement Worker Phil Brooke, the project was “**very conscious of isolation**”, with many older residents, major transport barriers and concerns about physical and mental health. As Phil describes, “**people become increasingly isolated, and then the more isolated they become, the harder it is to break out**”.

The project’s initial approach gave them some valuable “*quick wins*”, yet at the back of Phil’s mind was the knowledge that they “**were not reaching the people behind closed doors**” - those who were not already engaged with these existing organisations or social groups. It was for this reason that they sought the support of the Good Practice Mentors (GPM) programme, and they haven’t looked back since.

Bespoke practical support

The Tameside Pathfinder team explored bespoke support options with GPM to make sure it would be right for them, with Phil saying that “**we saw quite early on that it was a no-brainer to work with GPM, it was a massive benefit and opportunity**”.

GPM helped the team to use a more creative approach to finding and engaging residents who they hadn't previously met, including those whose voices are seldom heard. This new approach took the form of door-knocking in conjunction with a leaflet-drop and pop-up cafe.

What is door-knocking?

- *a safe, light-touch, non-intrusive conversation*
- *builds trust and rapport*
- *addresses barriers and provides residents with a 'nudge' to attend the pop-up cafe*
- *models safe behaviour for both residents and door-knockers*
- *developed with input from the police, trading standards, housing providers and older residents*

GPM provided the team with a practical in-person training session, support with their communications, and a tailored risk assessment. Most importantly for Phil, GPM took part in the door-knocking alongside the Tameside Pathfinder team on the first day. This *"invaluable on-the-day support"* involved modeling the technique, observing how the team used the new approach, providing practical feedback and ensuring they had the skills and confidence to continue using the approach safely and effectively with other residents. Phil describes how having a member of GPM there alongside the Pathfinder team ***"was really beneficial - it gave us the confidence to do it, it's surprising how nervous you can get just knocking on someone's door!"***.

Reaching the people behind closed doors

The team undertook two sessions of door-knocking alongside a pop-up cafe serving teas and coffees. Through this activity, the team engaged with 45 residents who they had never previously had any contact with and who weren't involved in any existing activities. Phil describes how the feedback from the residents was *"out of this world"*, with *"delight on people's faces just to be involved with something like this"*, which they told him had never been done in their neighbourhood before.

The residents engaged through this approach were different to those who the project had met previously; they were less used to engaging with activities and were *"a little bit wary of coming into something new"*. In other words, they were precisely who Phil had been hoping the GPM support would help him to reach.

**45 new
residents
reached**

Through this approach the Tameside Pathfinder team met one resident who was struggling to leave their house due to mobility difficulties but, because of this engagement, is now receiving support from Jigsaw's wellbeing team and is keen to know what is happening in the local area. For Phil, "***even just this one person makes everything worthwhile***".

Other residents met through this activity have been connected to:

- a digital awareness course
- job seeking support
- other existing social groups in the area such as 'Knit and Natter'.

For Phil, the learning and support from GPM meant that the team were undertaking the door-knocking "***in a structured way, almost a more scientific way based on what works, you knew you weren't just going out and winging it!***". He describes how the conversations with these residents were different from those the project was previously having; "***this is a different type of communication and there's real skill in how you go about that***".

The longer-term ripple effect

Beyond the door-knocking, Phil describes how the GPM support has impacted his wider approach to community engagement. Phil describes this new approach as focused on building relationships, inviting people to come along without a predefined agenda and "***not trying to sell things or get residents to do things***". For the Tameside Pathfinder team, the GPM support has "***really enhanced that kind of approach - in what we're doing now and what we will do going forward in other work***".

The support from GPM has also changed the way the Tameside Pathfinder team communicates their activities. Feedback from a resident met through door-knocking prompted them to change the wording of their leaflets to be more approachable for people not already engaged in social activities and who may have less confidence. In addition, working with GPM challenged the project's assumptions about residents' local knowledge. The team began to see this as a potential barrier to engagement and now make sure that their leaflets include a map, something Phil says they "***wouldn't have previously thought to do***". What is more, other Jigsaw activities, such as a cycling project, are starting to adopt these changes as well.

Going forwards, Tameside Pathfinder will apply the learning from GPM to continue reaching residents who are not already engaged in existing social activities. As described by Phil, the GPM support "***has given us a pathway to engage with people, and we know it works***". They will also embed this approach with other stakeholders working in the local area, including the Local Authority and carers who work on the estate.

Tameside Pathfinder's top tips for community engagement

- **Double-pronged approach:** An initial leaflet-drop followed by the door-knocking and pop-up cafe on a later date increases the likelihood of positive doorstep engagement. It lets residents know about the pop-up cafe and door-knock in advance, with instructions for how to opt-out. This approach gives them autonomy, control and the ability to make an informed choice about attending.
- **Inclusive communications:** The project had previously put phrases such as 'limited spaces' on their leaflets, however they learnt that this could deter residents from contacting them through a fear of being rejected if there were no spaces remaining.
- **Assumptions about local knowledge:** Do not assume that residents will have knowledge of local venues. The project previously put venue names on its leaflets, without a map. They learnt that having a map makes residents feel more welcome and able to attend something new - even residents who have lived in an area for a long time may not know where certain venues are.
- **Outside, visible pop-up cafe:** The team set up the pop-up cafe on some grass near to the door-knocking area, which was very effective. It meant residents could see it from their doorsteps, it attracted people passing by, and being outside removed the barrier of asking residents to take the additional step of entering a (potentially unfamiliar) building. It worked well for some of the team to stay at the pop-up cafe, ready to make residents feel welcome and included.
- **Not too much information:** The team was careful not to overpower people on the first meeting. It can be easy for a project to accidentally overwhelm residents with too much information at once, however this could put them off engaging further.
- **Extra support:** Newly-engaged residents are likely to need extra support to build up their confidence to attend activities, and may have additional barriers to address first. When new people join existing social groups, it is important to ensure they receive a warm welcome from the group and feel able to return again next time.



To receive bespoke support tailored to your needs, aspirations and aims, get in touch with the Good Practice Mentor team! We provide support by sharing the Ageing Better learning and best practice around how to reach, involve and connect with older people in local communities.

- **Email:** GPM@syha.co.uk
- **Eventbrite:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/the-good-practice-mentor-team-66357714073>
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