



FEEL CONNECTED: FINDING WAYS OUT OF SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS

TUESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2018

EVENT REPORT

Background

The theme for this year’s International Day of Disabled People (which took place on Monday 3 December) was ***empowering disabled people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality***. In keeping with the theme, Forum Central held an event to bring together third sector member organisations, disabled people with physical and sensory impairments and statutory partners, with the aim of providing a space to hear about work going on across the city to tackle social isolation and loneliness, and discuss some of the key issues which have an impact on disabled people being able to become – and stay – connected with their communities.

The first part of the event included time for networking, as well as a mini-marketplace showcasing the work of third sector disability organisations working to address social isolation. The services who took part in the marketplace were as follows:-

Service	Contact Information
Carers Leeds – Befriending Service	Tel: 07508 885 898 / 0113 246 8338 Email: nikki.pattinson@carersleeds.org.uk Website: https://www.carersleeds.org.uk/our-support-service/carers-befriending/
Deafblind UK	Tel: 01733 358100 Email: Andrew.WilliamBarnes@deafblind.org.uk

	Website: https://deafblind.org.uk/
DIAL Leeds	Tel: 0113 467 6981 Website: http://www.dial-leeds.org.uk/
Leeds Hearing and Sight Loss Service	Tel: 0113 288 5750 / 07702 940888 Textphone: 0113 288 5758 Email: leedsinfo@bid.org.uk Website: https://www.bid.org.uk/hearing-impairment-menu/leeds-hearing-and-sight-loss-service
People Matters	Tel: 0113 2346896 Email: info@peoplesmattersleeds.co.uk Website: https://peoplesmattersleeds.co.uk/
Scope – Kickstart Leeds	Tel: 0113 357 0330 Email: kickstart@scope.org.uk Website: https://www.scope.org.uk/
Social Prescribing Services	
Connect for Health (South and East Leeds)	Tel: 0113 387 6380 Email: info@connectforhealthleeds.org.uk Website: https://www.connectforhealthleeds.org.uk/
Connect Well (North Leeds)	Tel: 0113 336 7612 Email: connectwell@commlinks.co.uk Website: https://www.commlinks.co.uk/services/leeds/connect-well/
PEP (West Leeds)	Tel: 0113 279 5870 Email: pep@barca-leeds.org Website: http://leedspep.org/
William Merritt Disabled Living Centre	Tel: 0113 350 8989 Textphone: 0785 822 4510 Email: info@wmdlc.org Website: https://www.wmdlc.org/

Following this, two guest speakers presented about work going on across the city to tackle social isolation and loneliness, including funding opportunities and learning from existing projects:

Pip Goff, Partnerships Director, Leeds Community Foundation

[See presentation slides for further information]

- Leeds Community Foundation supports thousands of charities and community groups across the city by raising funds, distributing grants and sharing advice.
- Their vision is to create a city of opportunity for all, by working together with partners to create positive change for the communities that need it most – this fits in with key health and strategies for the city including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and Leeds Plan, both of which emphasise working ‘with’ people, building on strengths, increasing the role of prevention and empowering people to self-care rather than get to the point where they need secondary care where possible.
- LCF administer many open grant programmes and recently through the Leeds Fund have awarded grants for organisations working with people to reduce loneliness and increase opportunities for inclusion.
- More information on LCF can be found on their website: <https://www.leedscf.org.uk/> or on Twitter @LeedsCommFund

Hillary Wadsworth, Time to Shine Programme Manager, Leeds Older People’s Forum

[See presentation slides for further information]

- The Time to Shine programme is a 6 year Big Lottery Funded programme, started in 2015, which aims to reach at least 15,000 older people (aged 50+) to help them move out of the shadows cast by loneliness.
- Working with a wide range of partner organisations including Leeds City Council, and the third sector, Time to Shine works to promote Leeds as an age friendly city, develop inter-generational links, improve connections with older people from street level upwards, provide support and friendships at home and increase numbers of volunteers in local communities.
- Time to Shine’s vision is that older people in Leeds (specifically those aged 50+) need not experience loneliness and isolation as an inevitable consequence of ageing, but that Time to Shine will offer opportunities for fulfilment by breaking down barriers and building strong communities – and most importantly of all, older people have been, and will continue to be at the heart of managing and designing all of the work.
- To date, TTS has funded 38 Delivery partners and 49 small projects funds. So far they have reached 8,000 individuals – 60% of whom describe themselves as having a long standing illness or disability.

- TTS gather lots of intelligence and data from the projects they have funded to find out 'what works' when it comes to tackling social isolation and loneliness as experienced by older people.
- More information about Time to Shine can be found on their website: <https://timetoshineleeds.org/>

Table Discussions

Following the networking and guest speakers, the remainder of the session was taken up with table discussions on the following topics:-

Topic	Facilitator
Accessibility of Public Spaces	Maqsood Sheik, RNIB
Employment	Joel McCormack, Scope
Younger Disabled People	Andrew Barnes, Deafblind UK
Older Disabled People	Hillary Wadsworth, LOPF
Mental Health and Physical Health	Rosemary Frances
Transport	Brandon Jones, First Bus

For each discussion topic, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and knowledge to answer the following questions:-

1. What is working in Leeds?
2. What are the challenges/barriers?
3. What actions can be taken?

Accessibility of Public Spaces

What is working in Leeds?

- Leeds street charter being developed and discussions happening with the council sign up to it – will include best practice around making public spaces accessible.
- No shared spaces like in some other areas (let's keep it that way).
- Open spaces consultation – open spaces strategy (strong economy/compassionate city/want everyone to impact on it).
- Access + Usability group – LIP group (did work with John Lewis + Playhouse).
- Need groups that actually make a difference (works well if you feel like something has happened / good tactile paving – when its right/it's great).

- Posters at the railway station are very helpful to get the right train/platform (need booking).
- Retreats –Debenhams/House of Fraser – really useful to be able to get some quiet time (can this info be shared so more people knew about it).

What are the challenges/barriers?

- Issues with parking on pavement/wheelie bins on pavement/ inaccessible crossings (e.g. no button under turning box)/ cycle lanes.
- A647 corridor – cycle lane/bus lane.
- More needs to be done at planning stage.
- Colour coding for bikes/pedestrians - very confusing what signs for who (hard to know when you're on a bike lane. Red/green signals for bike – same).
- Drop curbs (paving generally has got worse + worse / Different standards – European/British standards. Different at different train stations).
- Construction work – people doing this need training to understand different people's different needs – awareness training for accessibility for pavement/road construction workers.
- Need more places to sit for people.
- Disabled parking – are there enough spaces near public facilities?
- Registering blue badge online for those who don't use internet can be challenging.
- Lots fewer public conveniences.

What actions can be taken?

- Have a number of reps from different disability groups to influence planning public spaces so that everyone's needs are taken into account.
- Visioning – Tell people what would make a difference? What might work better?
- Share info wider across others working in the disability space.
- Get people into a room to discuss the issues- Councillors – who is lead councillor for disability? Need to bring right people around the table.
- Think about what we have in terms of shared issues/needs/assets and take action together as disability organisations.
- 'Our Spaces' strategy consultation to look at redefining public spaces is an opportunity – open until Feb 2019. Get involved and have your say!

Employment

What is working in Leeds?

- More tailored support for individual – one to one.
- Partnership working.

- People more open about their health.
- More awareness/more understanding.
- People listening more.
- More social inclusion.
- Flexibility (allowing work from home) and work life balance can be better.
- Share SVCs according to individual.
- Feel valued.
- Monthly socials at workplace (more confidence, at work away from work).
- Developing staff 'Me' time.
- Respecting value/recognising knowledge, skills, experience.
- Reasonable adjustments.
- Time out/breathers/access to a quiet room.
- Using disability/health as asset.
- Access to work.
- Expert by experience/lived experience.

What are the challenges/barriers?

- Older general belief/attitudes.
- Should be judged on skills and experiences instead of illness.
- People still gossip/discriminate.
- Lack of knowledge/understanding.
- Male dominated/toxic masculinity.
- Need more sympathy/empathy/compassion.
- Media portrayal of illness/disability/mental health.
- People sometimes not motivated to work – benefits etc.
- Divide between employers/employees/applicant.
- Asking about disability (should be 'do you consider' not 'are you').
- Possibly not flexible inductions/ too rigid.
- Some ticking boxes.
- Co-production – more collaborative communication needed.
- Discussing is fine but actions need to be taken as a result.
- Needs to be more buddying.
- Sharing/respecting experience.
- Process is good but formalising can make situations work better.
- Having more diversity.

What actions can be taken?

- More ambassadors/positive role models e.g. Famous people, service users, staff/employers, managers/line managers, us/everyone
- Opportunities.
- Better understanding of benefits whilst working.
- Not working sets back/negative impact.

- Disability doesn't define you.
- Awareness training.
- People services/support is aimed at need to be involved in development.
- Respect lived experience.
- Shouldn't be 'them/us' divide.

Younger Disabled People

What is working in Leeds?

- Don't know really, but have heard about some organisations doing work (more around learning disability?)

What are the challenges/barriers?

- People working in silos
- It's difficult for younger people to try activities or groups because they have to demonstrate that they **want** to do it. How can you know you want to do it if you haven't tried it out first?
- People don't know what's going on
- Organising support (PA or transport) can be really hard
- It's difficult to be spontaneous.
- There's little freedom to choose activities and try out different things, like non-disabled younger people would do.
- Younger people are missing out because everything in discussions on loneliness and isolation usually seems to be centred on older people. Otherwise, things aimed at younger people seem to be all about developing skills, aiming for work, or be targeted to people with learning disabilities.
- Younger people need support to have a 'normal' life, with relationships, friends, family and social life etc.
- There is a pressure to have a diagnosis in order to get support or access certain things – people need to fit a category. This is wrong.
- Knowledge about what's available
- One point of access for information: info hub/signposting
- Crossover from child services to adulthood: 18-25 year olds need more support at this age - ?
- Faster action when people need support
- Hard to find information from small charities or organisations locally (or big organisations with small local groups)
- Activities for children are different to young people.

What actions can be taken?

- Open communication between organisations. For example, PSI members of Forum Central
- More crossover between organisations
- Sharing information to people leaving education or thinking about college or university
- Clear information available – accessible website/links/booklet with activities and information for younger people, signposting
- Universities should do more to attract disabled younger people
- Talking to younger people about what they need (including thinking about money/resources needed)
- Emphasising that having the same freedoms as all young people and young adults (social life etc.) is as important as education and care needs
- Flexible support
- Looking at transport issues: services need to be accessible to offer independence and choice.
- Changing the image - younger disabled people can be just as socially isolated or lonely as older people
- Finding out how younger people would prefer to communicate, for example social media (which ones?)

Where to start?

- Acknowledge that younger people can be isolated or lonely too
- Find where the gaps were – talk to younger people about what's needed
- Use social media
- Create a page for younger people's services – Leeds Directory and Forum Central websites were mentioned

Older Disabled People

What is working in Leeds?

- Positive examples of groups in Lychee Red.
- Good work by Forum Central/LOPF to bring organisations/projects together.
- Neighbourhood network – courage across city.
- TTS - Lots of organisations / Pilots of projects / activities.

What are the challenges/barriers?

- Lack of meaningful activities.
- Where and how to find isolated OP?
- Does everyone know about them (org + activities)

- Partnership working could be better.
- Silo working.
- More varied activities.
- Not enough joined up intergenerational work (need to take a life course approach).
- Need for long term funding (NNS not appropriate for everyone).
- Information on what groups/activities exist isn't always available.
- Need print materials, i.e. poster, bring community organisations in to the light.

What actions can be taken?

- Individuals to speak up about their needs – e.g. hearing + Take this to the light/place/decision makers.
- Raise awareness of hidden disabilities.
- More involvement of OP.
- More diverse voices + representations
- Joined up advertising of organisations/branding.
- Asking the question (why people have stopped attending – adaptations).

Mental Health and Physical Health

What is working in Leeds?

- Social prescribing as it is holistic – can look at what is available for people to support both their mental health and physical health.
- Social prescribing connected services (e.g. groups/activities) as they are more set up for people that may have physical health needs/impairments.

What are the challenges/barriers?

- Social prescribing can't fix everything! Also, there is not enough capacity to offer support to everyone that needs it through SP.
- Mental health and physical health issues are often treated and/or looked at separately. They are linked and should be treated as such.
- Information is not always being directed to people that need it.
- Too much reliance on GP (10 mins not enough time for meaningful signposting).
- If you are isolated or unable to get out, your access to information is restricted – especially if you don't, or can't, use the internet.

What actions can be taken?

- We need support closer to home – LCPS will be a good thing. Need people to work together.

- Alternatives to GPs. What are they? How can we make the most of them?
- Access to relevant information – shared responsibility to make this information accessible.
- Going to groups (targeting groups to find more about what is needed)
- Sharing information and taking a whole system approach.
- Not isolating physical + mental health care - looking holistically.
- Involving people in how services are planned and delivered.
- Focusing on what people actually want.

Transport

What is working in Leeds?

- “Connecting Leeds” consultation work. People are being asked about what is important to them when it comes to transport changes.

What are the challenges/barriers?

- Staff customer service (whether taxi driver, train guard or bus driver). Concern around communication and understanding needs of each other – both staff and customers.
- The experience of people with visual impairments intending to board buses, e.g. how to stop the right bus, particular issue at busy stops
- At bus stops font size on timetables too small and timetable information too high (West Yorkshire Metro)
- Faster and more detailed response to complaints
- Bus drivers moving away before customers are seated.

What actions can be taken?

- Ensure users are always involved in designing programmes
- Further improve staff training and look at tools to help service staff, e.g. lanyards such as in airports or route cards that customers hold up for drivers (this has been done in York)
- Promote the Access Bus more (West Yorkshire Metro)
- Bus operators to further promote use of PAWS (Pull Away When Seated) to drivers
- West Yorkshire Metro are piloting a new, more accessible timetable layout
- Opportunities to improve the bus network, e.g. bus/train connections, bus reliability, evening frequencies, more orbital routes
- “Connecting Leeds” programme investigating proposals to improve reliability with bus priority, to invest in buses with next stop announcements, to increase evening frequencies and review network options.

Useful Links

Forum Central website (for health and care third sector news and updates):

www.forumcentral.org.uk

Leeds Involving People website (find out about involvement and engagement opportunities): <http://leedsinvolvement.org.uk/>

Open Spaces Strategy website: www.leedsourspaces.co.uk

Leeds Disabled People's Organisation (new disabled-people led organisation which runs events and gets involved in campaigning): www.ldpo.co.uk