
REPORT

CAN A NEIGHBOURHOOD APPROACH TO LONELINESS CONTRIBUTE TO PEOPLE'S WELL- BEING?

Angela B. Collins and Julie Wrigley

This report evaluates the overall impact of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme.

The main principles of the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme are that community activities can contribute to the well-being of people at risk of, or experiencing, loneliness; that such people can play a central role in these activities; and that this involvement can also enhance community well-being. This report is based on consultation with community researchers, professional stakeholders, programme staff and community members.

The report:

- highlights that good practice requires skilled staff who are able to communicate effectively and provide pastoral support to volunteers;
- reveals changes in community researchers resulting from their involvement in the programme;
- demonstrates where there has been community impact; and
- shares wider lessons which can be learnt from taking a neighbourhood approach.

CONTENTS

Executive summary	03
1 Introduction	09
2 The Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme	12
3 Good practice and lessons learnt	21
4 Impact of NAL	35
5 The future	46
6 Conclusions	49
Notes	52
References	54
Appendix 1: The top ten tips	55
Appendix 2: Summary of literature review	57
Appendix 3: Evaluation methodology	60
Acknowledgements	62
About the authors	63
List of figures	
1 Model showing impacts on community researchers and wider society	38
List of tables	
1 Criteria for selecting the four neighbourhoods	14
2 JRF/JRHT staff input throughout the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme	19
3 2011 Baseline survey completions	61
4 2013 Follow-up survey completions	61

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) responded to a growing interest in the topic of loneliness, and its alleviation, by setting up an action research programme to mobilise residents in four neighbourhoods to explore loneliness and develop measures that could address it.

The evaluation aimed to assess programme effectiveness, capture lessons that could be learnt from the programme delivery and identify positive impacts on individuals or the wider community.

The findings demonstrate that community activism, as fostered through the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme, can contribute to the well-being of people at risk of, or experiencing, loneliness. It shows that they can play a central role in this activity; and that this involvement can also enhance community well-being.

Background

Loneliness can affect any person in any community. Given its subjective nature, it can be a challenge to measure. There is plentiful evidence to suggest that loneliness has a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

As part of its housing offer JRHT run retirement villages and older people's housing schemes. Together with JRF, it observed the role of supporting environments in helping to address social isolation and their potential to prevent loneliness. It wants to explore this idea within the wider community, at a neighbourhood level.

About the programme

The Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness (NAL) programme ran for three years from December 2010. The programme team chose four neighbourhoods with different characteristics to understand whether those differences would influence the success of the programme. The neighbourhoods were:

- Bradford Moor, an inner city area in Bradford, with diverse tenure and ethnicity;
- Carr, a suburban area in York, with little community focus, with majority home ownership;
- Denholme, a rural area in Bradford, with a mix of tenure; and
- New Earswick, a suburban area in York with majority social renting.

The programme took an action research and participatory approach. It followed eight stages in all neighbourhoods, though the programme team adopted a flexible approach so that, according to need or readiness, some neighbourhoods gave more focus to certain stages than others. The stages were:

- 1 building awareness of and within the neighbourhoods;
- 2 recruiting community researchers;
- 3 training community researchers;
- 4 active fieldwork, collecting comments and thoughts about loneliness;
- 5 analysis of data by community researchers;
- 6 presenting the issues and collecting solutions;
- 7 prioritising; and
- 8 solutions implementation.

Good practice and lessons learnt

The evaluation asked community researchers and stakeholders from partner organisations to reflect on different stages and activities of the NAL programme to identify its strengths and weaknesses, together with any suggestions for improvement.

Enablers

Stakeholders agreed that it was crucial for a key catalyst – one person or organisation – to take responsibility for drawing people together, and communicating messages, thus enabling partners to contribute to the best of their ability. In this case, it was the programme manager. The catalyst's flexibility, along with an in-depth knowledge of the neighbourhoods, allowed her to tailor the programme's approach, as shown in the box below.

Adaptation of the programme in Bradford Moor

There were difficulties in engaging in the area for many reasons, including fear by residents about standing out by being too visible within their community. The area of Bradford Moor is culturally diverse, which can cause trust and communication difficulties. Many women in the area were relatively isolated within their homes, with multiple family responsibilities.

As a result, the delivery approach of the programme was adapted, with JRF/JRHT staff and stakeholder organisations taking an increased lead and working more intensively. A local health trainer, trusted within the South Asian community, was invited to take on a key role.

The health trainer won the trust of residents by adopting a highly personal approach to ensure that they would feel comfortable leaving their homes and engaging with the programme. Her shared cultural bond, including speaking some of the same languages, helped her to reach a wider range of people. Venues for meetings were chosen (such as a school) to provide reassurance and a sense of safety.

With this increased input, residents were able to plan, organise and undertake activities, which met the needs of the local community, such as cultural markets. At the time of evaluation, community researchers in Bradford Moor were taking steps to become as autonomous as those in other neighbourhoods already were.

Another key enabler was the reassurance provided by the JRF/JRHT brand, which encouraged stakeholder involvement in the programme. There were also a number of practical features, which supported involvement of participants: free childcare, accessible venues, good quality catering and a family-friendly approach.

Partnership working

Stakeholders identified that partnership working during this programme had been effective because the different partners identified with the goals of the NAL programme. The programme team's prioritisation of face-to-face contact with partners (over email communication) helped this buy-in. Partners attended meetings to offer practical support to the community-researcher-led action plans. The meetings also kept them informed about the programme's aims and ongoing activities.

The programme team was largely successful in involving a wide range of partners across all neighbourhoods. However, some stakeholders suggested that the engagement of more agencies from health, education, faith and employer sectors could have improved outcomes in some neighbourhoods.

The community research approach

Both stakeholders and community researchers praised the community research approach for its ability to empower local people. The programme team worked with current community groups or networks where they existed to identify potential community researchers, alongside a more creative, outreach method to reach a wider range of potential volunteers. Some community researchers questioned their continued involvement in the programme, as they received conflicting advice at the Jobcentre regarding benefit entitlements whilst volunteering.

The programme's pace

The programme was designed to unfold organically; there was no rigid programme timetable at the outset. This led to some community researchers feeling unsure about their commitment. In addition, some stakeholders felt that it was easier for them to see the real impact of the programme during the final year and 'solution implementation' stage.

Impact of the NAL programme

Community researchers before taking part in the programme

There were two key reasons why people chose to become involved in the programme, namely a general interest in local volunteering and previous personal experiences of loneliness. The topic of loneliness was part of the appeal. The programme exceeded their expectations of undertaking activism about loneliness and of meeting new people.

Range of impacts on community researchers

Community researchers experienced many and varied impacts through taking part in the programme. There were hard outcomes, such as volunteers moving into education or employment. Softer outcomes were experienced on an individual level – such as increased confidence – and at a social level – such as increased sense of social responsibility.

Individual achievements or behaviours

Community researchers felt well supported at different phases of the programme. Many community researchers underwent considerable personal development with a resulting rise in self-confidence, as they received training, took on unfamiliar tasks (initially with support from programme staff) and gradually took on more responsibility. Some took up free training opportunities signposted by the programme or its partners; others moved into higher education.

Inter-personal relationships

Community researchers consistently observed that positive changes in them also benefited wider family life. They felt that, with their newfound perspective and resilience, they were better parents. Social benefits were felt as community researchers widened their social networks and worked with people from different backgrounds and of different ages.

Social and emotional capabilities

Community researchers now had greater insight into the issue of loneliness, as experienced by others or themselves. Their participation in the programme resulted in increased self-belief as the programme mobilised them to develop their skills, whether for work or for life. Several community researchers reported improved well-being as a direct result of their role in the programme.

Benefits to society

In all four neighbourhoods, community researchers succeeded in setting up activities aiming to bring people together and improve their social networks. Although, at an earlier stage in the programme, their proposed solutions had included both preventions and interventions for loneliness, the ideas implemented to date have all focused on preventative approaches. Once these solutions are more embedded in their neighbourhoods, it may prove useful to examine well-being levels in the wider community.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders in the programme were influenced professionally and personally; they were now more aware of loneliness. They made good use of the report and infographic about local causes of loneliness. These provided a resource for the implementation of change, informing local plans and supporting the setting of local priorities by the respective local authority.

For some stakeholders, an unexpected benefit was learning new approaches to conducting meetings (the programme's approach had been creative and participatory, introducing an element of fun).

The future

Towards the end of three years, the programme team started to prepare community researchers for the transition to life after the programme by gradually handing over responsibility. In some neighbourhoods, this worked well and community researchers were already independently organising meetings and continuing their work with minimal input from the programme team. For others, this transitional stage prompted an uneasy time as they contemplated the future without the JRF/JRHT support and safety net.

Stakeholders also felt uneasy, as the responsibility for continuing the work moved onto volunteers and themselves. They saw the need for a lead agency to mobilise, support and renew the volunteer base. There was some concern about potential funding restrictions, which could thwart the activities and networks already established.

Community researchers, supported by the programme, have already implemented a range of activities in the neighbourhoods. Users from the communities and volunteer organisers are enthusiastic about their continuation. Many activities are relatively small scale. They will require little, if any, agency input and it could be achievable for community activists to run them.

In neighbourhoods with fewer original community assets, continuation of the work may depend on outside support from stakeholders or skilled and motivated individuals. Stakeholders noted that they could play a part in maintaining the momentum of the work, for example by keeping loneliness on the agenda, providing a free space for community researchers to meet or signposting people to existing activities.

The programme manager's contract was extended for one year to influence others to invest in community development approaches to alleviating loneliness. A resource pack has been produced which can help agencies replicate the NAL programme in their own area.

Conclusion

Those most closely involved with the programme benefited to the greatest degree. Many underwent personal changes. They gained in confidence, self-worth and emotional intelligence – all factors that boosted their resilience and could protect against future loneliness. Some made tangible gains such as returning to college or employment; many acquired skills.

The neighbourhoods with community assets already in place showed the greatest impacts. However, the distance travelled in neighbourhoods with fewer original community assets was greater.

Pivotal strengths of the programme were the community development approach (action research delivered through Participatory Learning and Action techniques) and the pastoral support offered through JRF/JRHT staff. The skills and attributes of the programme manager or catalyst were instrumental in achieving impact.

Implications for commissioners

The topic of loneliness is personal. Those hoping to work in communities aiming to understand loneliness should embrace a degree of personal involvement and feel comfortable to do so.

The highlight of the programme was the participatory approach, which placed local people at the heart of everything. It allowed them to fail or succeed, to learn as they go; and eventually to create a small team of dedicated residents aiming to create change for themselves and their neighbours.

Implications for policy-makers

Volunteering can be enjoyed in its own right or can be seen as a stepping-stone to something more. For many of those involved in the programme it has been a 'leg-up' to further opportunities. Some of those involved in this programme were not in education, employment or training when they started. Some of them now are. Crucially, their involvement in community activism has resulted in increased confidence, bolstered by peer support from those outside their normal social circle. In turn, they now feel able to work.

This calls into question a policy which penalises (or is perceived to penalise) those who are not actively seeking work while they are volunteering. We found that volunteering increases the likelihood of entering education or employment but that perceived consequences could deter potential volunteers.

1 INTRODUCTION

Qa Research was commissioned in September 2011 to carry out an evaluation of the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme which was run by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust, with the support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme set out to explore how a neighbourhood approach could engage and contribute to the well-being of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness. It ran for three years, from December 2010.

The overall aim of the evaluation was to: *'foster positive progress, capture wider lessons and assess overall programme effectiveness.'* This included the following objectives:

- to determine if and how community activism can contribute to the well-being of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness;
- to establish if people at risk of or experiencing loneliness can play a central role in community activism; and
- to investigate if involvement in community activism can enhance community well-being.

In order to respond to the dynamic and fluid nature of the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme, the proposed evaluation method remained flexible and was adapted throughout the life of the programme. The evaluators also acted as a critical friend to the programme, by informally discussing issues and supporting the programme manager where appropriate.

Phase one of the evaluation

The first phase of the evaluation started with a literature review supported by York Health Economics Consortium (YHEC) to set the evaluation in context, identify any models of good practice and inform the design of the research tools. It was decided that the evaluation would use the UCLA Loneliness Scale¹ in the community survey.

A baseline community survey establishing social connectedness at a neighbourhood level (including social trust, giving and volunteering) took place in November/December 2011 in each of the four neighbourhoods where the programme was to run. In Bradford Moor, an ethnically diverse neighbourhood, the decision was taken to over-sample the non-white British population. The commissioning of the evaluation in September 2011 rather than at the start of the programme in December 2010 may have resulted in some missed data collection opportunities, such as the chance to carry out baseline surveys with community researchers.

At this time, one focus group was carried out in each neighbourhood to help evaluators understand the neighbourhood areas and examine perceptions of loneliness and the programme. Evaluators were then able to devise four distinct profiles for the neighbourhoods.

Phase two of the evaluation

The second phase of the evaluation took place towards the end of the programme's allotted three years and mainly involved consulting with those who had been directly involved with the programme. A repeat of the original community survey also took place in November 2013. Appendix 3 includes survey methodology and demographic profiles of respondents.

Researchers carried out face to face interviews with 14 community researchers to assess impact at an individual level. Overall, 22 telephone interviews were completed with professional stakeholders involved in some way with the programme, in order to assess the impact of community activism on the wider community and determine the programme's contribution to the well-being of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness.

Face to face interviews were carried out with staff of JRF/JRHT in order to understand the organisational mechanisms and drivers for the programme; together with any wider impact within the organisation.

Analysis

Quantitative data from the community surveys were analysed using Askia Analyse. Qualitative data was analysed in a thematic manner by populating a predefined matrix. Triangulation of all data took place.

How to read this report

The next chapter of this report sets out the background to the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme and describes the programme's approach.

The findings then look at:

- the strengths and weaknesses of the programme's delivery;
- the programme's impact on people living in the neighbourhoods, the community researchers and stakeholders; and
- the prospects for continuation of activity in the four neighbourhoods, once JRF/JRHT has withdrawn.

The findings are set, wherever relevant, in a neighbourhood context as programme delivery, and engagement from stakeholders and community members, has varied across the neighbourhoods.

This report illustrates the opinions of participants, using direct quotes. Anonymity has been preserved by attributing the quotes with the use of pseudonyms and/or place or role names.

Please note that the report rounds up percentages to the nearest whole number, with any 0.5 per cent figures rounded up.

2 THE NEIGHBOURHOOD APPROACHES TO LONELINESS PROGRAMME

Loneliness is a human emotion which can affect any person living in any community. It is a subjective experience and an emotion felt differently by each individual who experiences it. Loneliness is increasingly regarded as the discrepancy between desired and achieved levels in the quality and quantity of social relations (Cattan, 2001). Given its subjective nature, it can be a challenge to measure loneliness.

Loneliness and its impact on well-being

There is a plethora of evidence to suggest that loneliness has a detrimental impact on the health and social well-being of individuals and communities (Fisher, 2011; Hole, 2011). It can have a significant impact on mental health. Studies have shown that people who are lonely experience more stress, have lower self-esteem and are more likely to have sleep problems than people who have strong social support.² In addition, in a brief literature search for this evaluation, the York Health Economics Consortium identified over 30 studies which reported an association between loneliness and various health outcomes including cardiovascular health, mortality in old age, breast cancer and adolescent depression.

In recent years there has been increasing interest in the understanding and alleviation of loneliness. A number of studies have tried to quantify the number of individuals experiencing loneliness. In 'Loneliness: the state we're

in³ it is suggested that 5–16 per cent of the older population is lonely. In 2010 a survey completed by The Mental Health Foundation (Griffin, 2010) suggested that 11 per cent of the whole population feel lonely often. However, the number of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness is likely to be much higher.

The response from Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT) runs retirement villages and older people's housing schemes, offering varying amounts of support which are intended to help ease the transition of older residents into more supported care as they become less mobile or frailer. Over time, it became clear to the trust that relatively few residents requested the extra levels of care on offer.

JRHT and its sister organisation, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), felt that this posed interesting questions. Did people fare better as they got older simply because they were in a familiar supportive environment? Does where people live help to address social isolation and maybe pre-empt, or offset, loneliness in ways which could be explored and possibly replicated by looking at place?

At this time (2010), academic work relating to the impact of loneliness was emerging. Given that there was some medical and social evidence to support the statement 'loneliness kills' JRF/JRHT wanted to learn more about loneliness through an action research programme at a neighbourhood level.

JRF/JRHT devised its Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness (NAL) programme to explore how a neighbourhood approach could engage and contribute to the well-being of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness. As a by-product, the programme set out to explore whether this involvement could enhance wider community well-being too. The programme ran for three years, starting in December 2010.

At the outset, the programme did not set out to alleviate loneliness in the neighbourhoods in which it operated. Indeed the name of the programme changed shortly after it started, from Neighbourhood Approaches to Tackling Loneliness to Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness. It sought to explore loneliness in neighbourhoods using the residents who lived there; then go on to support and mobilise local people to act on their findings. It sought to get people talking about loneliness whilst building community resilience and action that in turn, it was hoped, would deter, prevent and reduce loneliness.

The programme ... sought to explore loneliness in neighbourhoods using the residents who lived there; then go on to support and mobilise local people to act on their findings.

An overview of the neighbourhoods

The programme specifically sought to compare local experiences across four areas in Yorkshire, each selected to reflect a different set of circumstances. The selection criteria for the four neighbourhoods are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Criteria for selecting the four neighbourhoods

York	Bradford
Suburban neighbourhood with majority social renting and historical links with JRF/JRHT:	Inner city neighbourhood in Bradford with diverse tenure and ethnicity:
New Earswick	Bradford Moor
Suburban neighbourhood with little sense of community focus, social amenities or natural meeting places and majority home ownership:	Rural neighbourhood in Bradford District with mix of tenure and diversity:
Carr	Denholme

The following pen portrait of each of the neighbourhoods is based on externally sourced information collated from desk research and findings from the baseline survey (completed November and December 2011) completed as part of the evaluation.

New Earswick

New Earswick has the historical association of being a Joseph Rowntree Model Village. Located close to York with good transport links, there is a population of 2,737.⁴ According to the most recent ONS data, there are 1,274 households.⁵ The heart of the village comes in the form of the local community centre; there are many local amenities and recreational facilities including a swimming pool.⁶

There is an ageing population residing in New Earswick; it has York's second highest proportion of over 60 year olds and the second lowest proportion of 18–20 year olds.⁷ New Earswick has a community association and various resident led groups.⁸

In terms of recreation and natural green spaces, New Earswick boasts a nature reserve built in the 1950s, which is now managed by conservation volunteers and can be accessed by local residents.⁹

Survey respondents in New Earswick were more interested in politics and national affairs than in other areas. Over one in five (21%) said they were very interested, almost twice as many as elsewhere. Four fifths of respondents reported that they had attended a public meeting in the last twelve months, the second highest rate of all the neighbourhoods. A large number of respondents (83%) in New Earswick said they could often find companionship when they wanted it, a similar number to Carr, the area with the highest rate. New Earswick was the area where the highest numbers, over a quarter (27%), had the poorest self-reported overall state of health, described as fair or poor.

Carr

Carr is situated in the Acomb ward and is close to York, around $2\frac{1}{4}$ miles from the city centre. It is made up of 600 households; the ONS data for the overall Acomb ward states there is a population of 8,604.¹⁰

Unemployment rates are higher than the rest of York, suggesting deprivation in this area.¹¹ In addition, there are also high levels of domestic violence.

There is a high proportion of young families living on the estate. ONS statistics show that 515 of the 3,520 households in Acomb (14%)¹² are socially rented properties; many of these located in the Carr area of Acomb.

With regard to meeting places and amenities, the heart of the community is considered to be the shopping centre in Acomb; there is also a health centre and Christian Community Centre.¹³ A community survey administered by a local church in 2013 identified that high percentages of residents have expressed they feel their lives are affected by anti-social behaviour (72%) and drug and alcohol misuse (59%).¹⁴

In Carr, almost two thirds of survey respondents (62%) agreed that people could be trusted in their area: this was the highest level of trust shown in all the neighbourhoods. Carr also had the highest number of respondents reporting that they had attended a public meeting in the last twelve months – almost nine in ten. Responses to several questions on the UCLA Loneliness Scale indicated that Carr respondents felt more connected to people around them than in other areas. Every Carr respondent (100%) agreed that there are often people that they can talk to and turn to. In addition, more than in other neighbourhoods, they said they often felt in tune with people around them (72%), they found companionship when wanted (86%) and that there were people who really understood them (84%). Not surprisingly, Carr respondents also had the highest happiness rating: 98% reported that they were either happy or very happy. In Carr, more than elsewhere, residents described their overall state of health these days as excellent or very good, with almost two thirds (62%) claiming that was the case.

Bradford Moor

Bradford Moor has a population of 21,210 (ONS, 2011).¹⁵ Located in the north-east of Bradford, it is a very urban area, close to the city centre. Housing is primarily made up of terraces, with a total of 5,756 households (ONS, 2011) in the area;¹⁶ it is understood there is a problem with overcrowded housing. Overall, Bradford's level of deprivation is significantly worse than the national average¹⁷ and Bradford Moor is the second most deprived ward in Bradford; levels of child poverty are also considerably worse than the national average.¹⁸

According to the Office for National Statistics, Bradford Moor's population is relatively young in age, with half under age 24.¹⁹ With this in mind, there is a perceived lack of aspiration in young people; other than becoming involved with drug dealing.²⁰ In relation to education, 39% of people in the ward have no qualifications.²¹

The local area is ethnically diverse and people tend to live in clusters dependent on their ethnicity. The majority of residents categorise themselves as Pakistani, 63.9%, with white British residents at 14%; other ethnicities include Indian, Bangladeshi and Chinese.²²

Due to its location close to the city centre, Bradford Moor has good transport links and plentiful local shops and retailers; the Bradford Moor Ward Assessment also notes that there are a variety of assets of community value. These include women's centres, community centres, recreational grounds and libraries.²³

Respondents in Bradford Moor indicated a mixed picture relating to the levels of trust in the neighbourhood. Only a third (32%), the lowest rate of all the neighbourhoods, agreed that people in their area could be trusted. However, Bradford Moor respondents were the only ones reporting that

they trusted ‘a lot’ of people from other ethnic backgrounds (45%) about as much as they trusted people from their own ethnic background (42%). It was significant that Bradford Moor respondents socialised more than respondents in other neighbourhood areas. Almost half had friends to their house or visited a friend’s house more often than weekly. They also socialised significantly more with friends from different ethnic backgrounds, than did respondents in other neighbourhoods.

Bradford Moor respondents were much more frequent attendees at religious services than others. Over half (53%) attended at least weekly or almost weekly. This compared with other areas where less than one in ten attended that regularly. On several of the UCLA loneliness measures, respondents in Bradford Moor responded least favourably of all respondents. Sometimes or often, they were the most likely to lack companionship (30%), report that there was no one they could turn to (25%), feel left out (24%), say no one really knows them well (17%) and feel isolated (24%). Not surprisingly, respondents in this area had the lowest net happiness rating (85%), matched by the highest net unhappiness rating (14%). Self-reported health ratings were the second lowest of all the neighbourhoods, with 26% describing their overall state of health these days as poor or fair.

Denholme

Denholme is a rural area located eight miles away from the city of Bradford in West Yorkshire²⁴ and has a population of 3,489 (ONS, 2011).²⁵ The housing is mainly terraced or semi-detached, with 70% of residents owning their own home.²⁶ Denholme has a higher than average older population,²⁷ although there have been building developments which have attracted young families.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of residents categorise themselves as being white British (94%) but there is a mix of ethnic groups living in the village.²⁸ Around 40% of residents are in full time employment, with 14% classifying themselves as retired.²⁹

Its geographical location facilitates local groups and activities such as walking, fishing and water activities at the local Doe Park Reservoir.³⁰ There is a primary school, local shops, a church, charity shop, post office and farm shop. At the centre of Denholme is a community facility called the Mechanics Institute.³¹ The village ethos of Denholme lends itself to organised galas during the summer months and there is also a very active town council. The rural location of Denholme affects its transport links, as they become less frequent during the evenings.

Respondents in Denholme said they had socialised with friends almost as much as those in Bradford Moor – the area with the highest rate. Two thirds said that they had visited friends or had friends to their house once a week, or more often. In Denholme, more than in other areas, respondents were more likely to socialise with friends of a different age group, too. Over a quarter (26%) reported doing this more than once a week. Denholme residents were also the most frequent supporters of a friend or neighbour who needed help: over a third did this once a week or more often. Denholme respondents were least likely to attend religious services, with 90% attending a few times a year or less. More than in any other area, respondents in Denholme (70%) reported that they often had a lot in common with people around them.

The programme approach

The programme approach was informed by the programme manager's previous experience of community research and solution implementation when working with Sure Start Children's Centres.

Stage one: Building awareness of and within the neighbourhoods

Prior to starting the recruitment of participants the programme manager spent considerable time getting to know the neighbourhoods. This involved meeting the people currently providing services in the local areas and presenting the programme to them. Forming these relationships was important to ensure the right recruitment of individuals onto the programme and assist in getting buy-in from those already operating within the local areas.

Stage two: Recruiting community researchers

Recruitment of community researchers took place across all four neighbourhoods through a variety of channels including on-street, for example at polling stations, through established groups such as children's centres and at awareness raising events about the programme. Each recruitment session involved using PLA (Participatory Learning and Action approach) activities including washing lines and timelines reflecting on personal loneliness. The recruitment generated 40 community researchers with a core of 30 involved throughout. From that point, subsequent decisions about exactly what happened in each neighbourhood rested with the community researchers, supported by the programme manager.

Stage three: Training community researchers

Community researchers were trained in peer research, facilitated by an external trainer³² with the programme manager co-facilitating each training event. A PLA approach was taken for a number of reasons including the success of this approach in recruiting community participants and the strength of this approach in developing relationships and gathering useful and relevant data which participants had ownership of. Training took place on full day sessions (or half days when this was not possible).

Stage four: Active fieldwork collecting comments and thoughts about loneliness

Following training, each group of community researchers completed on-street fieldwork collecting comments about loneliness in their neighbourhoods. They used the techniques (such as washing lines) they had learnt in training.

Stage five: Analysis of data by community researchers

Each neighbourhood and their community researchers collected and analysed data themselves with the support of the programme manager and the external training provider. This process took place over a number of days in each neighbourhood.

Stage six: Presenting the issues and collecting solutions

Following analysis, each neighbourhood undertook further fieldwork within their neighbourhood to gather ideas for possible solutions. This data was then also analysed. In addition each neighbourhood held Partnership Action Group (PAG) days where information was presented to possible stakeholders and action planning sessions took place.

Stage seven: Prioritising

Three of the neighbourhoods spent two days each prioritising the data they had collected. This stage also included programme management training for those three neighbourhoods. At this stage the neighbourhoods also worked to identify and develop their own identities and priorities. This included developing a vision and aims and objectives.

Stage eight: Solution implementation

The final stage of the programme required community researchers to work with partners in their neighbourhoods to implement ideas generated from the research.

From start to finish, the overall process generated more than 6,000 comments about loneliness – including those covering causes, effects and solutions – from almost 2,000 local people.

At the end of the programme a Resource Pack was developed as a mechanism for sharing the approach and helping others to replicate it. This is freely available to all from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation website.

Adaptation of the programme in Bradford Moor

Even though the programme was devised with the above eight-stage structure, it was necessary for programme staff to remain flexible and adapt the programme to the needs of each neighbourhood and its residents in order to create the maximum engagement and benefit. Engaging with the residents presented particular challenges in Bradford Moor, so in that case, a modified, more intensive approach was adopted. More information on the adaptations made in Bradford Moor and the reasons for this can be seen in the case study in Chapter 3.

The input from JRF/JRHT

Throughout the programme the intention was to use intensive but moderate resources, to help ensure that neighbourhoods did not become dependent

Many stakeholders made themselves available to take part in Partnership Action Group (PAG) meetings following an invitation from either the programme manager or community researchers. These were the main forum for engaging stakeholders and took place at intervals in each of the neighbourhoods through the life of the programme. Community researchers presented their findings; stakeholder organisations sought to contribute towards each neighbourhood's action plan. Stakeholders gave tangible, practical assistance to the programme in many ways. They provided venues, crèches, childcare, training and signposting to existing services; used their resources to help recruit community researchers; and even took part as community researchers themselves. At these PAG meetings, at other ad hoc meetings with the programme manager and beyond, in their everyday work roles, they shared information and put the issue of loneliness on the agenda.

Stakeholders gave tangible, practical assistance to the programme in many ways ... and even took part as community researchers themselves.

3 GOOD PRACTICE AND LESSONS LEARNT

In order to carry out a process evaluation of the programme, evaluators asked the community researchers and stakeholders interviewed to reflect on different stages and activities of the NAL programme to identify the programme's strengths, what worked well, and weaknesses, what worked less well, together with any suggestions for improvement.

In neighbourhoods where the solutions from the research took place more speedily (Denholme and New Earswick), stakeholders could identify many aspects of the programme's good practice but could not suggest any improvements. This demonstrates not only that the programme manager supported these neighbourhoods well but also that the neighbourhoods already had sufficient formal and informal infrastructures in place to support a programme such as NAL.

Community researchers noted that the programme had been particularly strong at supporting them at different phases. It had valued them and their children as individuals; it had trained and supported them to develop new skills and take on new responsibilities, both within the programme and relating to wider training or career aspirations. Testament to the success of the programme from the community researchers' perspective is that they suggested very few improvements to the programme.

The role of the catalyst

Stakeholders agreed, as did senior management at JRF/JRHT, that it was crucial to have a key catalyst – one person or organisation – to take responsibility for drawing people together, communicating messages and thus enabling partners to contribute to the best of their ability. The NAL programme manager undertook the catalyst role in this programme.

Stakeholders across all neighbourhoods commented that particular strengths of the catalyst had been:

- the overall management and structure of the programme;
- the amount of legwork and preparation carried out in the early stages of the programme to get to know the neighbourhoods and connect with potential stakeholders;
- an enthusiastic and passionate personality, with community development skills, who could communicate easily with all individuals on differing levels;
- an ethos of collaboration and co-operation which set a positive tone for the wider partnership approach;
- a desire to share information in a timely manner with those stakeholders who needed it most; and
- a willingness to use innovative approaches at meetings.

In addition, the catalyst made use of her in-depth knowledge of all the neighbourhoods to maintain a flexible approach to programme delivery in order to gain the maximum benefit for each neighbourhood and each set of residents. The case study below details the tailored approach adopted in Bradford Moor.

Adaptation of the programme in Bradford Moor

The process in Bradford Moor took a different approach from that planned at the outset of the programme.

There were difficulties in engaging in the area for many reasons, including a real fear by residents about standing out by being too visible within their community. To some extent, these difficulties had been anticipated as the original selection of the four neighbourhoods had intended to include contrasting neighbourhoods – including some with greater diversity and fewer established groups and networks to build upon than others. As a result, the delivery approach of the programme was adapted, with JRF/JRHT staff and stakeholder organisations taking an increased lead and working more intensively.

The area of Bradford Moor is culturally diverse, which can cause trust and communication difficulties. Even within the South Asian community, there are differences between people from different parts of the world, from different backgrounds and who have arrived in the UK at different times.

“... they come from all different areas of Pakistan and different backgrounds and they have different cultural values ... if you've been here from Pakistan in the 60s or 50s, and then your understanding is different from people who have only been here 10 years, 20 years ... You've got the cobblers, the hairdressers, the ironmongers from Pakistan ... there's a hierarchy system ...”

Tanvi, Bradford Moor

Many women in the area were relatively isolated within their homes. They had family responsibilities to children and to parents or in-laws, as well as to husbands. Those from the Pathan community could be particularly difficult to engage as the women are not allowed into public

places where they might encounter males, without a male chaperone. Data received from one of the stakeholders heavily involved in the programme in Bradford Moor indicated that the majority of the women in the area have vitamin D deficiency as they believe taking their young children outdoors could make them ill.

A local health trainer, trusted within the South Asian community, was invited to take on a key role. Her knowledge of the community enabled her to pinpoint a potential drawback in running a loneliness project in that area – there is no such South Asian word for loneliness. Confidence was chosen as a focus instead. Although some men were involved in Bradford Moor, the project mainly engaged with women.

“There’s no word for loneliness in the Asian community ... that was one of our biggest tasks ... we can’t really use the word loneliness in the community because obviously people would not associate with it.”

Health Trainer, Bradford Moor

The same health trainer adopted a highly personal approach to ensure that residents could feel comfortable to leave their homes and engage with the programme. She called everyone that was interested, every week, to chat about their needs and encourage them to attend and contribute. Her personal qualities were identified as playing a vital role in winning the trust of residents.

“... at least two thirds of the women were absolutely terrified ... it was a big step ... it was coaxing them face-to-face, ringing them on the Friday, ringing them on the actual day ... they didn’t quite know what they were coming to ... but now you can’t stop them talking; they want to do things in the community.”

Health Trainer, Bradford Moor

“Just her personality, she is a very positive person, she has very good social skills and makes people feel very welcome and valued and obviously makes a big difference.”

Primary School, Bradford Moor

The health trainer shared a cultural bond with many of the residents, including speaking some of the same languages, which she believed made it easier to engage with a wider range of people than would have happened otherwise. Other stakeholders from Bradford Moor agreed that appropriate language skills could help the progress of the work.

“... There’s so many different things you’ve got to think about, how to communicate with the community ... if you can speak the languages, people feel you understand them more so I think that’s really important ...”

Health Trainer, Bradford Moor

The health trainer learnt that the choice of venue could affect the number of attendees and that a well-chosen venue could provide

reassurance, and a sense of safety. Changing venues from a community centre to a school did enable the programme to reach more people. Other acceptable venues suggested by local stakeholders included a GP surgery, children's centre and church.

“... there were only certain areas that were safe and legitimate for people, particularly women, and [community centre] wasn't one of them ... we moved it to a school and we started to get more women coming ...”

Health Trainer, Bradford Moor

“... a lot of the husbands ... won't allow them to do courses in other centres, but they are allowed to come and do courses actually at the school. Maybe somewhere where there aren't going to be men ...”

Primary School, Bradford Moor

Some of those involved believed that another way to provide 'legitimacy' for the women attending the groups could have been to link attendance to the provision of qualifications or skills. The confidence group did take small steps towards that idea by awarding attendance certificates.

With this increased input, the local people were able to take the project on quicker than expected at the review stage and to plan, organise and undertake activities which met the needs of the local community such as cultural markets. Overall, at the end of the evaluation, community researchers in Bradford Moor were taking steps to become as autonomous as those in other neighbourhoods.

“If you haven't already got quite a lot of established community activities it is going to be hard to create that. But if you have already got some it is a lot easier to develop new community activities round new issues. That is why it worked in Denholme more than in Bradford Moor ... I think the big thing to be learnt is that you can achieve outcomes from community development approaches in all places; but in some places you are going to have to do a lot more supportive work over the long term as well.”

Council, Bradford

The JRF/JRHT brand

Among stakeholders, there was the perception of JRF/JRHT as a focused and effective organisation with a strong, well-respected brand. With JRF/JRHT backing the programme, individuals were more likely to want to be involved, as they could trust that JRF/JRHT would run the programme well and that their own efforts would be maximised.

“The important thing is the Joseph Rowntree – whether the trust or the other side, the foundation – they are the sort of people who can do this and do it well. I think if you went to a city council,

for instance, it wouldn't have the same impact ... Whereas the Joseph Rowntree [Housing] Trust are really good at what they are doing ...”

Community Association/Residents' Forum, New Earswick

Partnership working

Stakeholders in the programme had experience of partnership working through their job roles, which enabled them to provide useful comments about what could help its success. Partnership working was referred to by some as an 'art' and considered to be most successful when all partners were able to work together to find common objectives. Although there were some differences in views across neighbourhoods, stakeholders overall felt that this programme had offered an opportunity for those with a similar remit to work together to meet shared objectives and that partnership working had been a success. The programme's ability to prioritise face-to-face meetings over email communication had been particularly welcomed as more likely to encourage buy-in.

“The main constraint is how busy other people are and how we can work out what suits us both. One of our priorities might match one of theirs. It [partnership] is about trying to find out what the common denominators are.”

Council, Bradford Moor

Other preconditions identified for successful partnership working were the ability for those involved to be open minded and embrace a new style of working to meet a greater good. This had not been easy in all neighbourhoods but had worked best where there were established networks (of both professionals and mobilised community assets) already working with communities on quality of life issues. Denholme is such an example; it is an established community with many longstanding community assets. Partners were more easily able to recognise who to contact regarding a particular action from a NAL meeting than in the other neighbourhoods, whether a professional, such as the local authority, or a community organisation such as a residents' association.

Even though stakeholders could identify many positive aspects of partnership working that had taken place during the programme, this had not always been equally easy in all neighbourhoods. When probed, they diagnosed that the presence of a wider range of stakeholders from the following agencies at meetings could have improved outcomes:

- health (such as GP managers) – with their resource to offer signposting to services and their privileged contact with members of the community;
- education (primary and secondary schools) – a key finding was that children and young people were feeling lonely and more schools could have supported the implementation of targeted solutions, as happened in Bradford Moor;
- faith groups – some stakeholders recognised the lack engagement of faith organisations, an important part of the community with the ability to engage with a range of people; and

-
- employers – especially larger employers with concerns about the well-being of their staff.

“I think perhaps some of the schools, people from schools and possibly churches, or faith groups, not just churches. We should have all been in it together, particularly with the schools, they are the lonely people of the future and if we can get to youngsters early enough, at least they have an awareness about what – they probably won’t appreciate it, but at least they might remember a lesson in life ... There are a lot of youngsters that are lonely, but they don’t realise it, it can be avoided.”

Champions Show the Way, Denholme

The NAL team made many attempts to involve all of these stakeholders across the four neighbourhoods. External factors such as competing demands on their time and lack of recognition of loneliness as an important or relevant issue appear to have been barriers to involvement.

In a neighbourhood such as Bradford Moor, where there were fewer community assets and a higher degree of professional input, some key stakeholders were more reluctant to get involved in a new initiative; perhaps they did not identify with the community development approach, did not see the relevance of loneliness to their work or had to prioritise work across the city, not just the Bradford Moor area. Although the programme manager secured partnerships with some crucial organisations, other attempts to work in partnership with key community organisations (such as local mosques) in Bradford Moor were not forthcoming. Stakeholders from Bradford Moor offered suggestions for the improvement of partnership working. These included:

- more bilingual staff working on the project, which could have facilitated increased involvement from additional local stakeholders;
- communication to be presented in a variety of languages and to suit cultural communication preferences;
- an increase in numbers of partners to be recruited, particularly from local religious groups and employers, perhaps starting earlier and allowing longer than in other neighbourhoods; and
- clearer communication to potential participants about the very localised approach of the programme.

Partnership Action Group (PAG) meetings

For many stakeholders, attendance at the Partnership Action Group (PAG) meetings, where community researchers shared their research findings, was the main mechanism for involvement and proved a highly influential and successful element of the programme. Through these meetings they could offer practical support to the community-researcher-led action plans, as well as become informed about and engaged with the programme’s aims and activities.

The programme made a conscious choice to use community researchers to share information, give personal stories and facilitate activities at the PAG meetings. Not only was this influential in developing community researcher confidence and resilience but it also enabled stakeholders to

come face to face with those who had collected the information, allowing them to probe and understand the findings of the research. This exposure to community researcher stories and findings enabled stakeholders to realise that loneliness can affect anyone. For some stakeholders, the programme was appealing precisely because it was not just about service development or delivery. They became even more willing to support the programme because the topic touched them in such a personal way.

PAG meetings used an informal, participatory approach to engage attendees, similar to that used to recruit and motivate community researchers, and collect data. Stakeholders took part in activities developed to open up dialogue and encourage the volunteering of ideas. Coupled with a focus on action, this ensured that stakeholders felt enthusiastic about contributing and were confident that meetings would be productive. Stakeholders enjoyed the atmosphere of the meetings and said they felt inspired to take messages about loneliness into their own organisations or otherwise contribute to the development of the programme. Many attendees were used to more formal approaches but had never attended meetings that seemed so successful.

“... the way that they organised the partnership meetings was interesting and even though I called it chaotic I think they got a lot out of that ... I haven't come across that style of meeting anywhere else ... it seemed to work quite well; it got people talking at the time.”

Parish Councillor, New Earswick

“It was excellent, the way it was run and everything. I was really impressed. We got a lot of work done, and some real good outcomes and ways forward at the end of it. It was really well run. I liked what they did, to the point where I thought, 'I want to use them myself to do some work for us.'”

GP Practice, Denholme

The PAGs were successful, and enjoyed, mainly because they were local and therefore relevant to all attending. Each PAG met at a local venue within the neighbourhood; local community researchers attended to share their findings and progress; only issues relating to that particular neighbourhood were discussed; and a wide range of agencies working within the neighbourhood were enabled to attend through early communication of logistic information and early planning.

The community research approach

Across all neighbourhoods, stakeholders regarded the method of community research as a real strength of the programme. This approach was praised for its ability to empower local people and to be a truly neighbourhood approach to understanding loneliness.

Stakeholders commented that the local community researchers were the best people to engage their own community to share experiences and contribute to the research. Stakeholders trusted the resulting information produced in the research report, together with accompanying infographics.

The programme had deliberately set out to involve community researchers at all stages of the research, so that they would have ownership of its outcomes. Community researchers were positive about taking part in almost all of these stages: training for fieldwork, fieldwork when they went out interviewing people in the community, action planning and the development of solutions. However, some had found analysis sessions to be laborious, made tolerable by the encouragement of the programme manager and trainer. The decision to enable each neighbourhood to undertake analysis of all data collected ensured that the approach continued to be led by the community and subsequently fully owned by them – although this was a challenging process.

“I horrifically remember gathering all the Post-it notes together and trying to put them all in order. And that was two or three days of absolute hell ... but [trainer and programme manager] kept us powering through and they kept us fed and watered and kept us all laughing ... They mucked in more than probably anyone did ... they are quite good motivators, they kept us happy all the time.”

Kelly, New Earswick

Engaging community researchers

The programme manager was keen to recruit volunteers who would not typically be involved in community action. She took a pragmatic, mixed approach – both working with current community groups or networks where they existed to identify potential community researchers, alongside a more creative, outreach method to reach a wider range of potential volunteers.

She tapped into the local knowledge and networks of current groups, by attending sessions of such groups, including The Elders group in Denholme, to explain the programme to potential participants. To reach parents in a different neighbourhood, she set up a time slot after a family learning session to talk to parents at children’s centres about the NAL programme. The programme manager paid the children’s centre for additional crèche time to allow the parents to concentrate on the talk while their children were cared for.

In order to engage with neighbourhood residents not already using groups or services, the programme manager took a different tack. The NAL team went out and about in the community to where people tended to be passing or waiting and started up conversations with them. Stakeholders identified this as a particular strength of the programme. Methods included setting up ‘washing lines’ at polling stations, approaching people waiting in bus queues and being a visible presence in the neighbourhoods in all weather. Once engaged in conversation, the programme manager invited people to contribute their thoughts about loneliness onto a Post-it note, which they then displayed on the washing line, arousing the interest of other passers-by. Some passing members of the public, who later became community researchers, found this method accessible, intriguing and one that encouraged them to reflect on the place of loneliness in their own lives.

“It wasn’t intimidating at all, in fact it was very inviting ... It was a really big draw; actually seeing the washing line really perked my curiosity ... You pegged your sock on the line for this neighbourhood and where you thought the loneliness was and I put older people as there was a lot of older people here.”

Tina, Carr

“They asked you to get a pen ... and just look back and think and circle areas where you would have been lonely, or you think you’ve been lonely, and then you sit back and go that was a pretty lonely life I’ve led.”

Melissa, Carr

The programme manager supplemented these two approaches with adaptability and willingness to turn any conversation into an opportunity to talk about the programme. For example, she engaged informally with a potential volunteer at a coffee shop, initially swapping email addresses of useful contacts. This individual is still heavily involved in the programme.

The programme succeeded in engaging not only those familiar with engaging in community activism but also those with no prior experience. Community researchers enjoyed the involvement of people from a range of backgrounds and stakeholders valued the opinions of those who do not traditionally contribute in such settings.

“From meeting people who are coming to these meetings who I had never seen before, you think ‘Wow – these are people who probably aren’t very able to go out, and if they did go out to a meeting they probably wouldn’t [usually] say anything – but these people are joining in’. And that is fantastic.”

Community Association/Residents’ Forum, New Earswick

Retaining, supporting and developing community researchers

Community researchers noted that they had felt well supported at different phases of the programme. They had received training and encouragement from the programme manager that gradually encouraged them to develop their confidence and skills to take on new responsibilities and challenges, whether mixing with people outside their usual social circle, interviewing the public, presenting at large events or setting up constituted groups and activities to carry out the work of the NAL programme in future. Key to the quality of support offered to the community researchers was the personal, nurturing approach of the programme manager and NAL team, together with a family-friendly approach. Small symbolic touches, such as the awarding of certificates to those involved and even the provision of good food and drink at training sessions and events, reinforced the sense amongst community researchers that they were valued. Moreover, community researchers perceived that a lot of the training and research was active and fun! The comments below are typical:

Small symbolic touches, such as the awarding of certificates to those involved and even the provision of good food and drink at training sessions and events, reinforced the sense amongst community researchers that they were valued.

“It wasn’t like we were just there to do their bit. They [programme staff] genuinely care about the people who are working with them which I thought was nice.”

Kelly, New Earswick

“I think it’s the way we run the programme. It’s not strict, it’s not ‘... we have this amount of work to do and it has to be done by this date ...’ We don’t have yards of writing to do. It’s more doing talking in a calm environment and we take our kids to our meetings ... It’s family orientated as well, I think that plays a big part.”

Claire, Carr

“... All nice people [involved], all younger than me which was nice. And I enjoyed the ambience of the meetings and that was what kept me in it. That was the glue for me, it was fun being with a bunch of people who were coming from totally different angles from me, with different priorities in life ... and it was good fun.”

Mike, New Earswick

Some community researchers believed that there was room for improvement in refreshing the ongoing supply of volunteers: both by attempting to persuade leaving volunteers to rethink their decision; and by recruiting new volunteers throughout the course of the programme.

“If I had been managing it, I’d have said, ‘Who are the people who haven’t been for one or two sessions?’ I would have said, ‘Why not? Let’s give them a ring and see how they are doing. Are they upset? ... Or is it something else, are they poorly? Let’s give them a ring and see if we can get them back in.’”

Mike, New Earswick

The programme manager did make attempts to follow-up with those who left the programme. Many of those who left were doing so due to personal circumstances such as a growing family or finding continuing education, employment or training. Others were not emotionally ready to be involved in a programme which dealt with loneliness and its consequences.

Some community researchers expressed confusion regarding their benefit entitlements whilst volunteering. They had received conflicting advice when attending Jobcentre appointments about sanctions that may be placed upon them when volunteering whilst actively looking for work, although it is unclear whether anyone did experience such sanctions. This had been worrying for them and made them question whether they should continue their involvement in the programme.

The programme’s pace

This programme, with its action research process, took place over three years. As part of a decision to adopt an organic approach, the programme

manager had consciously decided not to inform the community researchers at the outset that the programme may last that long. The manager had wanted to leave the future direction and detail of the programme open to being shaped by the community researchers in each area. There was no expectation that volunteers committed to a specified number of hours or time period. Volunteers were recruited to the programme on the basis that they could remain involved for as long as they were able or interested. Many community researchers believed that this strategy was understandable and a good one.

“It’s just about right. You can’t make a quick decision about these things. You collect all this information from the public. Then you sort it out in a room into, for example, three categories – bits of paper that all mean the same thing. It needs proper thinking about and everybody else’s input.”

Carol, Bradford Moor

For some community researchers, the lack of awareness of the shape and duration of the whole programme did leave them feeling a little unsure about the likely commitment required and for how long. In Carr some community researchers noted that it appeared to them that there were periods of time when nothing much happened, which left them feeling unclear about whether they should be doing something and if so what. Some community researchers became disillusioned and felt unsupported without information about the programme’s future stages and expectations.

“For me, the steps weren’t clear enough and the outcome wasn’t clear enough at the beginning. I know you can’t predict an outcome when you are researching, but you do have a kind of plan of action. I guess for me I wasn’t clear about what the outcome was going to be and it only became clear to me last week what the outcome was going to be.”

Tina, Carr

Stakeholders in Carr and Bradford Moor identified that the programme’s progress had appeared slow at times. They described lack of momentum and ‘quiet’ periods that stakeholders in Carr believed had affected the motivation and energy of the community researchers and possibly the motivation of stakeholders. The community development approach, with its intensive engagement and one-to-one support and training for community researchers, particularly early on, left stakeholders who were not privy to such work feeling that not much progress was taking place. Therefore, it was not easy for stakeholders to identify any impacts of the programme until the last third of activity – when ‘solution implementation’ could be seen taking place. Some stakeholders suggested that had they, and the community, seen more community based implementation earlier on they may have contributed more fully to the development of the programme.

The sheer diversity of people living in neighbourhoods such as Bradford Moor, where it can take considerable time to build trusting relationships, could also have hampered progress. Stakeholders felt that such a neighbourhood needed more than three years to embed a programme such as NAL and for it to become any kind of trusted service. As noted in the

case study above, a community health trainer joined the programme and successfully engaged with local residents. Stakeholders suggested that this had represented good practice and recommended increased use of such community members, who both worked and lived in an area, in future to fully harness a similar programme.

Communication

Both community researchers and stakeholders praised the communication styles used by the programme team, especially the amount of face-to-face meetings and ad hoc conversations prompted by the programme manager. In addition, many stakeholders noted ample time given for them to clear their calendars to attend meetings.

Several community researchers suggested that improved communication could have, in a number of ways, counteracted the inherent challenges (identified above) arising from being involved in an organic programme over a number of years. They felt that clearer communication about NAL's aims to the neighbourhoods may have resulted in better understanding and increased involvement from the local communities.

“I think they should explain it more. Like we [fieldworkers] should have had a board behind us saying what the plan was ... to make it more official, because at first when we were just walking around with a flipchart some people were just looking at us as if we were crazy ... thinking, ‘Have they just taken this on their own back to go round?’ ... It’s all right giving people a leaflet but they don’t have to read it. At least if there was a big something behind you explaining what they were doing ... then they would maybe understand that it could benefit them.”

Sarah, New Earswick

Community researchers in one neighbourhood noted that they became confused and resentful when communication from the programme manager was patchy during quiet periods.

“I didn’t get any communication from anyone over a long period of time ... I felt like I’d been dropped and there was no feedback and there was a lack of communication.”

Tina, Carr

“... Just send an email once in a while ... Even if they think it is boring for us to read, for some of us it might not be boring.”

Claire, Carr

Some community researchers wished to know that the work they were doing was having some impact. They would have welcomed reassurance and communication about early impacts from the programme manager, so that they felt valued in a process that was supporting change for those experiencing loneliness. Stakeholders in Bradford Moor supported this view and suggested that communicating the findings from the research phase

could have been a particularly valuable tool to keep residents engaged and interested over the three year period.

The feelings of community researchers demonstrate the complexity of managing a programme such as NAL. The programme manager needed to perform a delicate balancing act of empowering community researchers and enabling them to take control of and responsibility for the programme whilst also offering them support, guidance and, at times, direction. The community researchers were a diverse group of individuals and whilst this added to the success of the programme it also made managing them and their expectations more difficult for the programme manager. This was compounded by the workload presented by the programme operating across four neighbourhoods and the number and diversity of stakeholders involved. The programme manager, to some degree, made herself so valued that everyone wanted some of her time and participants were not always fully satisfied by contact from another NAL team member when the programme manager was not available.

Practical enablers

Overall there were some key practical features which enabled the involvement of participants in the programme.

Free childcare

“The chance to get involved in some research was good. The fact that there was childcare was even better!”

Deborah, New Earswick

Accessible venues

These can help meet cultural considerations. A local school was deemed suitable, as it was non-denominational.

Good quality catering

Children of community researchers, in common with other participants, were encouraged to attend, partly due to the high quality of catering provided by the programme:

“... The buffets! It’s what she [child] used to talk about all the time. She would say ‘what we having for buffet mummy?’ and that’s what she liked the most! Then she liked seeing [other children attending] who she used to play with.”

Sarah, New Earswick

Family-friendly approach

Community researchers who were also parents appreciated the programme manager’s family-friendly approach, demonstrated not only by the provision of free childcare but also by the personal welcome she extended to the children. One community researcher cited that their child received a ‘Junior Community Researcher’ badge that they wore with pride. Some of the children started to feel more a part of

their community as they accompanied their parents in carrying out the research on their local streets.

“He [son] loved it. He just loved getting out into the big wide world and talking to everybody.”

Tina, Carr

4 IMPACT OF NAL

This chapter concentrates mainly on impacts experienced by community researchers, by comparing how they described themselves before and after their involvement, by assessing how their expectations were met and by looking at other unforeseen impacts. It also examines the difference made to wider society, including residents in the neighbourhoods and stakeholders working there.

Community researchers before taking part in the programme

The programme had set out to involve community researchers who were not usual or likely candidates for volunteering. That objective was met as the community researchers who were engaged to take part in the programme varied in terms of age, gender and personal circumstance.

When asked by evaluators to talk about themselves before they became involved in NAL, community researchers used the following words:

- inward looking;
- stuck in a rut;
- feeling cut off;
- interested in community activity;
- lacking confidence;
- with time on their hands;
- with previous experience of loneliness; and
- with some experience of mental health conditions.

Community researcher motivation

There were two key reasons why people had chosen to become involved in the programme, namely a general interest in volunteering within their local community and previous personal experiences of loneliness. As set out at the

beginning of this report, an intended aim of the programme was to involve people at risk of or experiencing loneliness in community activism.

Evaluators asked community researchers whether the word 'loneliness' had influenced them to become involved – whether they were attracted by the term or not. Overwhelmingly community researchers stated that the explicit use of the word did make them want to get involved. It resonated with them as they had experienced the feeling themselves and it made them think that they would be able to support and make change happen for others who may currently be experiencing loneliness.

Community researchers stated that the explicit use of the word [loneliness] did make them want to get involved. It resonated with them as they had experienced the feeling themselves.

“It [the word loneliness] made me want to get involved ... I hate being on my own. I've been through loneliness myself and I know how depressed you can get with being lonely and now I'm trying to stop other people get into the situation I have been in.”

Claire, Carr

As well as being a draw, the topic of loneliness had also been considered a potential risk. The JRF/JRHT staff team had undertaken a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) exercise prior to the programme's active involvement within the communities. This had identified the potential threat that those who had experienced, or were currently experiencing, loneliness may experience a negative impact through their involvement with the programme. According to the programme manager, the reality of talking about such a personal topic did prove difficult for some community researchers who subsequently left the programme. Some who were experiencing a range of personal difficulties did not have the resilience to stay involved, without intensive support.

“It was just a case of everything just got a bit on top of me. As well as [son with autism and postnatal depression] I've got [son's] pony and my horse and trying to keep on top of the house ... I think I had been poorly so I missed a lot. Then the session I went back to ... I felt completely out of my depth and I didn't feel like I could get in and get involved ... I got a bit chewed up and a bit flustered with myself ... I don't like feeling out of my comfort zone. It stresses me out.”

Kelly, Community Researcher, Drop-out

Community researcher expectations

Community researchers identified two main expectations following their initial contact with the programme: to undertake research and constructive work within their local communities about loneliness; and to meet new people and potentially form new friendships. For them, the programme had exceeded their expectations.

“My expectations were to get out of the house, get some free childcare, make some friends and do something constructive. So, it’s ticked them. Done what I wanted.”

Deborah, New Earswick

“It’s exceeded to be honest ... I had certain predictions but I didn’t think that it would be as in depth and developed the way it has. It’s fantastic the sorts of things that are coming out ... One of the things I’ve thought ‘yeah this is good’ is getting loads of partners involved in the area because they are the ones that are going to take things on.”

Padma, Bradford Moor

Beyond this community researchers were unsure of further detail, but stated that they remained open minded. This is to be expected as the programme manager adopted an approach which gave the community researchers the role of directing the project, ensuring that the approach was neighbourhood-led.

“I didn’t attach anything to what it was about. I kept myself open minded because I didn’t know ... when they said ‘research’ and ‘loneliness’ I thought to myself I know what research is and I know what loneliness is so it kinda [gave] a good picture in my head about what it was going to be about.”

Tina, Carr

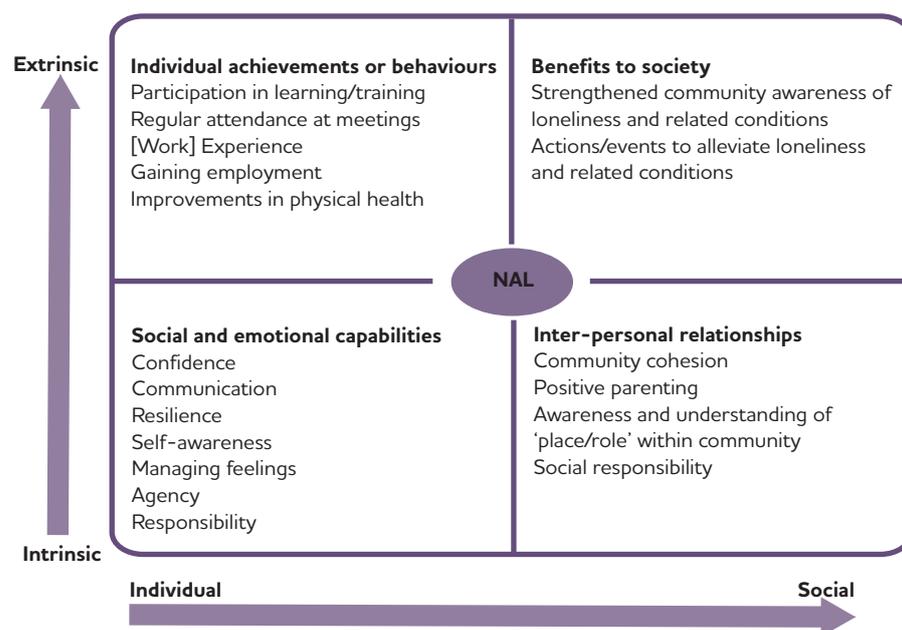
“I was happy not knowing. Things evolve as they evolve.”

Carol, Bradford Moor

The difference made to community researchers

Community researchers have experienced impacts at many levels as a result of taking part in the programme. JRF/JRHT had anticipated some of the softer, intrinsic outcomes (Figure 1) of the programme, both at an individual level – such as increased confidence – and at a social level – such as a greater sense of social responsibility. However, some of the harder, extrinsic outcomes, such as volunteers moving into education or employment, had not been expected. The impacts varied for different individuals, with most experiencing a blend of inter-related impacts across more than one of the quadrants in the model below.

Figure 1: Model showing impacts on community researchers and wider society



Individual achievements or behaviours

Many community researchers have undergone considerable personal development, as they received training, took on unfamiliar tasks such as interviewing or attending meetings (initially with support from programme staff) and gradually took on more responsibility for such tasks themselves. As well as learning new skills and having new experiences, community researchers commented on feeling mentally stimulated and challenged. This had forced them to examine their own abilities and acknowledge what they were capable of. In turn this resulted in increased confidence.

For example, one community researcher in Carr had been proud to take on responsibility for recruiting stakeholders to an action planning day.

“I was quite happy that my letter writing was effective enough to draw them to the meeting. It was good that they came. The way I see it was that it wasn't really about me, it was about the project so I felt that it was a responsibility or role that I had to do in order to get these people to come so they could then do what they needed to do.”

Julie, Carr

Some community researchers, as they used the programme's free childcare during training, developed trust in the idea of using childcare in future for other purposes, such as attending further courses. The programme and its partners had signposted some community researchers to take up new, free, training opportunities.

“I had IT skills ... but I had no qualifications, I went and did the course the ECDL ... it was the high level one and I did it in four weeks ... I went on to do a databasing one in a week ... they had never seen anybody do it that quick!”

Melissa, Carr

Others were moving into higher education, including one who was exploring an Open University course and another whose renewed confidence prompted her to apply for, and gain, a place studying social policy at York University. Without the development of personal skills and the accompanying growth in confidence these community researchers may not have embraced these opportunities.

“... When we were doing presentations at college ... for the first one I was petrified. But then I thought I’ve been talking to random people [carrying out fieldwork as a community researcher], so it’s not as bad, so it helped with that as well ... the research and stuff will help me at university because I didn’t have a clue about research before [this was done at the training].”

Sarah, New Earswick

In Carr, the programme had mentored some community researchers to move closer to and even to find employment. One had plans to undertake a career in youth work. Another had moved into work at a local shop and had even been promoted. They directly attributed their success to the programme, the experiences it had given them such as public speaking and the support they had received from other community researchers.

“... I wouldn’t be where I am now if it weren’t for JRF, I don’t think ... I’ve got a job by getting the confidence through Joseph Rowntree, being offered a promotion at work through that ... [another community researcher] met me halfway to my interview and said ‘all you need to do is take a deep breath before you go in’ ... and as a result they offered me the job there and then ... I wouldn’t have gone for the interviews if it hadn’t have been for her because I would have been so [nervous]”.

Claire, Carr

Another community researcher in Carr had achieved a care work job, following coaching from the programme manager, and was now poised to move into a career in community development. Community researchers already in work felt that the involvement in the programme’s activities had enhanced their work-based skills.

“[I have learnt] ... to be a lot more confident, to be able to speak to people. It’s helped me in my job really, I do invigilation ... it enables me to approach people and you know, changes your whole aspect ... I love living in Denholme.”

Robert, Denholme

Inter-personal relationships

Families of community researchers have also felt benefits in a couple of different ways. Children of community researchers, who have attended crèches provided by the programme, have benefited directly as they socialised with new people and learnt skills whilst doing activities with specialist play workers.

“Because it was summer [child] wasn’t at nursery so me and [child] would have just been in the house, not all days ... but I think it is mentally good to be out, not just for [child], but for me as well ... just to be with different people.”

Sarah, New Earswick

Community researchers consistently observed that positive changes in them had also benefited wider family life. They felt that, with their newfound perspective and resilience, they were better parents. They were better at observing potential symptoms of loneliness in family members and reacting accordingly. One parent explained that she now supported the development of her children by inspiring them to do more for themselves, which she believed would help them as they grew into independent adults. Another community researcher noted that as she had grown in confidence, she became more able to speak to friends and schoolteachers about her child’s homework and thus provide better support for her child’s education.

“I’m just getting the children to be more independent. They do their own tasks for themselves and I don’t do as much for them.”

Tanvi, Bradford Moor

Community researchers have felt social benefits as they and their families have felt personally supported and valued by the programme manager and staff. They have widened their social networks as they have met and worked with people of different backgrounds and ages, whilst also having the opportunity to work with those with shared beliefs in similar life stages. From these new networks, they made friends, offered and received support and felt part of their wider community.

“... Meeting all the new people ... People that I wouldn’t normally meet ... that I thought I would never get along with I really did get along with ... they were really posh, middle class ... Like there was one lady who had loads of piercings and stuff but she was lovely.”

Sarah, New Earswick

Families of some community researchers who had only recently moved into their neighbourhoods now felt more at ease in their local communities and more accepted.

“I thought it was good for my children to be more familiar with their surroundings and the estate and be more comfortable to walk through and not feel like they stick out like a sore thumb or

that they don't belong ... it has helped myself and the kids as well to warm to the community and possibly vice versa."

Tina, Carr

Community researchers have particularly relished feeling empowered to make a difference within their communities – to have a mission. This has made them proud and inspired and, for those not currently able to work, has been particularly welcomed.

"For me ... I've always been concerned not to just become stuck in this place but to have something for the village ... and there are gaps ... and for me it's been a way to get talking to people from the village and I've got to know people from the village and got round the village much more, got to know what's going on, which is rewarding for me."

Mike, New Earswick

Community researchers have particularly relished feeling empowered to make a difference within their communities – to have a mission. This has made them proud and inspired.

Social and emotional capabilities

As would be expected, community researchers now had greater knowledge of, and personal insight into, the issue of loneliness. At the beginning of the programme, they had generally believed that loneliness mainly affected older people. Now, they understood that everyone could experience loneliness. They now felt better able to identify people who may be lonely; they understood their own experiences of loneliness; they understood the importance of social contact, for example for the retired; and they understood the relationship between loneliness and ill health.

All of the above benefits have contributed to the increased confidence and capacity in community researchers, with regard to their self-belief. This is evident to onlookers. This is backed up by extensive and consistent evidence from community researchers from all four neighbourhoods that as they have developed their skills – whether for work or for life – they have grown in confidence.

"I feel really lucky to be involved in this project ... Meeting the parents ... I've really got to know them and I've seen how they have developed through working with us and doing the project. I've seen changes in those women which are phenomenal; two years ago those women were not the same women they are now."

Children's centre, Carr

Several community researchers described improvements in their mental well-being and reported that this was a direct result of the personal skills and attributes they had developed through their involvement with the programme. These attributes can be identified as protective factors, providing resilience which could help prevent loneliness in the future, and help to demonstrate how community activism can contribute to the well-being of people at risk of or experiencing loneliness (one of the programme's original aims):

- strengthened resolve to cope in difficult circumstances;
- more self-worth and pride;
- feeling more 'grown up';
- better management of emotions;
- sense of perspective to combat depression;
- willingness to take risks and be brave;
- realistic expectations of other people;
- lack of fear when talking to people;
- pleasure in making other people happy;
- a new mind-set towards neighbours, seeing the commonalities not differences; and
- understanding of diverse opinions.

Benefits to society

Residents

Some community researchers, following their involvement in the programme, noted that they now had improved relationships with their neighbours. In the past, they had been slightly suspicious of 'nosey neighbours'. Now they were more conscious that this distant attitude could contribute to loneliness, so took more time to talk to neighbours and help them out.

Furthermore, something new is happening in each of the four neighbourhoods. Community researchers have been successful in setting up activities in their communities which help promote connectedness and social networks. Stakeholders across all neighbourhoods were enthusiastic about the wider impact of the solutions implemented by the community researchers. They noted that the resulting events and activities benefited those members of the wider community who attended them.

In Denholme, community researchers had started a regular walking group and film club. They held a New Year's Eve party for the community.

In New Earswick, volunteers had set up a parent-led stay and play session, Earwigs, held at the Tree House at New Earswick Children's Centre and used by around 30 families. They diagnosed that the support from the NAL programme had been crucial in their achievement.

"Because we knew we had the project backing and we had a source of funds and people who could help us write the constitution and so we had easy access to [the] sort of resources we'd need, I think we were more prepared to do it ... I think we would have done it anyway, but we would have thought a lot harder about it. That group has been very important because it serves about 20 to 30 local families. It keeps people in touch with everybody and gives people the opportunity to get out and socialise with their kids."

Alison, New Earswick

In Carr, a wide range of local people had enjoyed a pop-up café held through the summer. With refreshments for all, newspapers and knitting for adults and craft activities for youngsters, it had appealed to all ages:

“The first week apparently it was very successful, more than they anticipated ... I went and found it buzzing. I think they are running it for six weeks. What I liked was there was a whole range of ages. A lady came in on a disabled scooter with her dog and had a cup of coffee. There was a table with newspapers out, to get a cup of coffee, piece of cake and read the paper. There were kids everywhere. There were four quite structured activities set up at tables – icing biscuits, cut and paste, colouring and pom-poms. Thirteen-year-olds were calling in ... their mums with little ones were there. Their mums gave them a few pence to buy cakes, even join in with the iced biscuit activity, even though they are older. Last week there was Family Information Service there. I knew people from our courses and chatted.”

Community Development Outreach Worker, Carr

Furthermore, a local church³³ in Carr has since commissioned its own research into the needs of the local population and now, alongside that work, intends to continue the work of the NAL programme using community researchers and members of its own congregation.

In Bradford Moor a parents’ group (increasing confidence in members of the local community) was proving to be successful, with regular attendees – even though regular attendance at such groups has been traditionally difficult to achieve in the neighbourhood. In addition the group in Bradford Moor has established a community cultural market and community café. Within a diverse community the decision to use food as an opportunity to share and learn from each other has been well-received and continues to be successful.

Any dissatisfaction felt by community researchers relating to the impact of the programme in their neighbourhoods was because they wanted to implement more solutions to loneliness, but felt that was beyond their capacity. They felt that they could not assess the final impact of the programme until that had happened. They hoped that the partnerships forged among local stakeholders would carry on implementing the solutions they had worked hard to identify.

“Hopefully, the actions will continue. We identified at least 20 different ideas, but we can’t manage. It is beyond our capacity. But this is where the stakeholders take it or use it to fill grant applications. There is no way we can do everything on that list. We want to do things properly, not half-heartedly.”

Deborah, New Earswick

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, whilst the range of practical ideas and solutions generated from the neighbourhoods ranged from preventative approaches to interventions for people already experiencing loneliness, when it came to putting them into the practice the community researcher focused solely on prevention. This provides insight into the potential boundaries of what can be expected from community development approaches. Also, of the barriers (real or perceived) that can get in the way of local people ‘intervening’ in their communities such as time, confidence and red tape.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders also play their part in the neighbourhoods and in some cases live there too. Some stakeholders noted that their involvement in the programme had changed the way in which they operated on a daily basis. Now with a greater understanding and ability to identify whether someone accessing their service may be at risk of or experiencing loneliness, they are more able to tailor their approach to better meet the needs of their service users and in turn have the potential to have a greater impact on their personal outcomes.

In Bradford Moor, findings that children and young people were experiencing loneliness had surprised some stakeholders. This striking finding motivated them to stay involved and to try to act to reduce loneliness amongst children.

“I think the biggest thing was when I found out about the children. That, I will carry with me now, because to have children experience loneliness ... that’s horrendous. It’s not something that a child should have to suffer.”

Thornbury Centre, Bradford Moor

Stakeholders welcomed, and made good use of, the report and infographic about causes of loneliness within their neighbourhoods, arising from the community research. For many it has provided a central resource for the implementation of change, informing local plans and supporting the setting of local priorities by the respective local authority – especially in the York neighbourhoods.

Some stakeholders have also used the report (or are planning to do so) to demonstrate need when applying for external funding to support programmes in their neighbourhoods.

“The one positive thing that came out of the research that a lot of older children were being left home alone ... So I have been able to use that as a lever to actually say, ‘Look, this is what is happening in the community. We need more play provision ... for the older children.’ And we have got more provision for the older children (age 5–11) on a Saturday morning.”

Thornbury Centre, Bradford Moor

“... [with partners] we’re looking at putting some new applications in and we will use that knowledge and information to back up what we’re applying for, because we want to do more street level work, to do more improvements, to actually engage communities that aren’t engaged.”

Thornbury Centre, Bradford Moor

For some stakeholders, an unexpected benefit of having been involved in the programme was that they had learnt new approaches to conducting meetings. They had been so impressed with the participatory, fun, action-

based approach taken at PAG meetings that they intend to use similar approaches themselves in future.

Some of the stakeholders consulted were able to give examples of how the programme had influenced not only their professional lives, but also their personal lives. Many commented that their own personal awareness of the causes and impact of loneliness had resulted in personal change and increased empathy. They made comments about now spending more time talking to their own neighbours and communicating differently within their families because of their raised awareness of the issues surrounding loneliness.

“It has affected me on a personal level and it’s made me a different person in my home life and in my neighbourhood ... it sort of dawned on me about six months ago that actually I do things differently now that I’ve been involved with Joseph Rowntree. I spend more time talking to my neighbours ... When the weather’s been bad, I grit everybody’s path and move the snow ... my neighbours come and thank me. In the summer time I sit and talk to my neighbours on the wall and have a catch up ... This is nice because it’s building up a lovely community feeling.”

Children’s centre, Carr

There is evidence that community activism has enhanced the well-being of those directly involved in the NAL programme (in this case the community researchers). There is emerging evidence of enhanced well-being across the wider community: activities have been set up across the four neighbourhoods with the aim of bringing people together and improving their social networks and connectedness. There is also evidence that key stakeholders have taken up the baton of ‘loneliness’. However, it is early days and once the solutions and practical ideas have been more embedded in the neighbourhoods it may prove useful to examine well-being levels in the wider community, particularly of those who have engaged with the groups and activities that have been set up.

5 THE FUTURE

The evaluation sought to understand whether there would be continued activity around loneliness as a result of the programme in each of the four neighbourhoods.

Community researchers and stakeholders were asked to consider whether they thought work would be likely to continue once core funding and support from JRF/JRHT ceased. Responses were mixed and very much dependent on the neighbourhood. Some continuation of the work and legacy was considered to be real and achievable in both Denholme and New Earswick. However both community researchers and stakeholders remained unsure about long term change without a catalyst, in the other neighbourhoods.

Transition to life after the NAL programme

Throughout the life of the programme, the NAL team were mindful of thinking about and planning for their exit strategy. Towards the end of three years, the team started to prepare community researchers for the transition to life after the programme by gradually handing over responsibility.

In some neighbourhoods, such as Denholme, this worked well and community researchers were already organising meetings independently and continuing their work with minimal input from the JRF/JRHT staff team. It had proved difficult to assess the best time to start this exit strategy with each group of community researchers. Some volunteers wished that they had been prepared for independence sooner. Others had resisted earlier attempts to put in place strategies for transition. For example, researchers in Carr had not originally welcomed proposals that they start to work in partnership with the local church – an organisation which was interested in alleviating loneliness and had the resources to help bring about some of the proposals designed by the Carr community researchers. This initial reluctance about partnership working with the church was gradually overcome as community researchers came to know the vicar better and worked with him to provide a pop-up café for the community during the summer holidays.

For some community researchers this transitional stage prompted an uneasy time as they contemplated the future without the JRF/JRHT support and safety net. In Carr, community researchers and stakeholders both agreed that community researchers had struggled to self-nominate for a leadership role at this time. With no leader, the diverse group of community researchers had not found it easy to reach consensus about their decisions. One stakeholder who had worked heavily with community researchers suggested that the programme could have nominated and trained a community researcher to prepare them for greater leadership after the end of the programme.

Doubts about continuation of the work

Stakeholders also felt uneasy at this time as the responsibility for continuing the work moved onto volunteers and themselves. They identified that there are intrinsic risks in depending largely on volunteers, without a lead agency to support and mobilise them or a robust strategy for retaining and renewing the volunteer base. For example, there could be a risk of burnout if there are too few volunteers who then become overloaded by taking on too many tasks without training or preparation.

Community researchers and stakeholders observed that some volunteers might be able to stay involved only for a limited period as their circumstances change. This can equally apply to those who have to cut down their volunteering due to changing family or health circumstances as to those in Carr who have developed so much through their involvement in the programme that they have now found employment.

Stakeholders are worried about the momentum of the work in future – both the debate and the solutions – without the driving focus, energy and funding pot of the catalyst or another key agency. In addition, without the credibility and kudos associated with the JRF/JRHT name, some, particularly those in York, believed that partners might be less willing to subscribe to any future work after the end of the programme.

“I do worry that if they do not have some sort of co-ordinator to drive it, it might not sustain itself. How are you going to make it sustainable when you don’t have any resources? That is actually a very difficult thing to do.”

Children’s centre, Carr

Across the neighbourhoods, except possibly in Denholme, stakeholders expressed concern about potential funding restrictions, which could thwart the groups and networks set up in the solutions phase to meet the aims of the programme.

There was a widespread wish amongst stakeholders that JRF/JRHT could continue to play a small role in continuing the work of the programme and thereby support them in their own organisations to drive loneliness up the agenda. They suggested that this role for JRF/JRHT could include presentations to funding bodies or potential partners to demonstrate the impact of the community research approach not only on the individuals involved but also on the communities as a whole.

Continuation of the work in the four neighbourhoods and beyond

A range of activities – designed as ‘solutions to alleviate loneliness’ – have already been implemented in the neighbourhoods and are receiving popular support. Users from the communities and volunteer organisers are enthusiastic about their continuation. Community researchers noted that solutions such as the walking group and film club in Denholme and the Earwigs play sessions in New Earswick look likely to continue with community researchers intending to continue their support for at least the near future. Volunteers have set up the activities, with limited support from JRF/JRHT, have established for themselves clear roles and are prepared for the transition beyond the end of the programme. The activities are relatively small scale and will require little, if any, agency input; therefore it is achievable that they could continue being run by community activists.

In the other two neighbourhoods, where there were initially fewer community assets available, continuation of the work may depend on outside support from stakeholders or skilled and motivated individuals.

In Carr, the role of Lidgett Grove Church in the continued loneliness work may be pivotal. Not only does the church have a real ambition to embrace and continue the work of NAL but it also has resources in terms of building space and church members willing to help. Therefore, the work started by the programme in Carr is likely to continue in some form, even if not exactly as originally anticipated by local community researchers.

The parents’ group in Bradford Moor has offered a safe place for parents to gain confidence, providing a transitional step towards wider family change including more positive parenting – outcomes which will have impacts within families long after JRF/JRHT leaves the programme. Meanwhile, the cultural markets focusing on food from different cultures look set to gain popular support.

Even though some stakeholders were nervous about the phasing out of JRF/JRHT’s catalytic role, they agreed that every partner organisation could have a role to play in maintaining the momentum of the work after the end of the official programme. They expressed enthusiasm for contributing and could identify a role for themselves, such as keeping loneliness on the agenda within their professional life, providing a free space for community researchers to meet or signposting people to existing activities.

Whilst JRF/JRHT’s direct involvement in the four neighbourhoods has come to an end, the programme manager’s contract has been extended for one year to try and influence others to invest in community development approaches to alleviating loneliness. A resource pack³⁴ has been produced which can help people replicate the NAL programme in their neighbourhood and this, along with the evaluation findings, are important tools for enabling sustainability beyond the four neighbourhoods.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The NAL programme specifically set out with a wide remit of working within four neighbourhoods to open up dialogue about loneliness, seek the opinions of local people regarding the causes and solutions of loneliness, and use local people where possible to implement solutions. The evaluation demonstrates that for those most closely involved in the programme, it has been life changing.

Overall impact

The NAL programme has had an impact upon the neighbourhoods in which it has operated. We can broadly say that those closest to the programme, such as community researchers, have benefited from its impact to the greatest degree and that those furthest away from the programme (general residents within the neighbourhoods) have felt less of an impact to date.

The impact on individuals close to the programme, in many cases, has been profound. In all community development there will be some individuals who benefit more greatly than others and this programme has been no exception, as individual community researchers have varied in the commitment they could give and the degree of importance they gave to the programme in their life. This demonstrates the diversity of those involved, from retired professionals with higher degrees to unemployed single parents struggling to get back on the education or work ladder. Although all have cited changes in themselves, some have not only changed their professional skills and personal attitudes but also had the opportunity to realise their potential, for example by gaining employment or returning to college. Personally, many have gained in confidence, self-worth and emotional intelligence – all factors which have boosted their resilience and could protect against future loneliness. Others have set about improving things for their neighbours, by setting up groups and activities or simply talking to their neighbours more frequently.

It could be considered that the programme has had its greatest impact in neighbourhoods where community assets were already in place (Denholme

The impact on individuals close to the programme, in many cases, has been profound.

and New Earswick). However, the distance travelled in neighbourhoods that had fewer community assets at the outset could be considered to be greater.

Regardless of neighbourhood, the evidence suggests that the greatest impact has been a result of the community development approach (action research delivered through a Participatory Learning and Action approach) and the pastoral support offered through JRF/JRHT staff. Lessons for any neighbourhood wanting to create change can be learnt from this – regardless of topic theme or area. Loneliness was a good hook to get people involved, given its personal nature and the likelihood that people will have experienced it at some point in their own lives. However, programmes organised around other topic areas could result in similar levels of impact should the same process and support be offered.

When considering the continuation of the work, the programme will leave a legacy in all the neighbourhoods in which it has operated, with new groups and activities established in each neighbourhood. For stakeholders, loneliness has now been brought higher up the agenda, although without the involvement of a catalyst there is a chance it may gradually fall back down. Those stakeholders who attended meetings and were actively involved in the programme insist that they will, wherever possible, continue to keep the issue of loneliness in sharper focus in many aspects of their professional and personal lives.

In those neighbourhoods where community assets were already present, where pace of the programme kept momentum and where solutions were implemented earlier it can be assumed that continuation of the work is more likely. This may evolve and end up taking a different form from that anticipated during the programme. In Carr and Bradford Moor continuation of the work will be reliant upon some other form of catalyst (whether this is a stakeholder organisation such as the church or an individual with the skills and motivation to continue their work on the programme).

Each neighbourhood is different and the programme was designed to test whether the neighbourhood approach could be successful anywhere. The programme manager was able to adapt her approach by learning enough about each of the four chosen neighbourhoods to identify potential assets, in terms of existing voluntary groups, services and buildings, whilst also remaining keen to access its untapped potential. Difficulties encountered in Bradford Moor, such as a fear of standing out, serve as a reminder that anyone delivering such a programme should remain aware of the need to allow for linguistic, cultural, religious and other differences which may require different communication methods, different venues to be used, a different pace of change and different levels of support.

This programme demonstrated that the skills and attributes of the programme manager or catalyst were instrumental in achieving impact. Here this was a combination of experience in community development approaches and strong inter-personal skills. This enabled a blend of support and challenge to enable community researchers to develop their own skills and confidence levels as they took increasing ownership of the programme and its activities.

Implications for commissioners

Developing a programme or approach which places the power in the hands of the people can be unpredictable. It runs contrary to current funding processes where projects must demonstrate anticipated impact and work towards specific targets. This evaluation report shows that with

the right process and staffing considerations, this approach to community development works to enable individuals who are more able to support themselves and their communities in working to alleviate the impact of loneliness.

The topic of loneliness is personal. This evaluation shows that those hoping to work in communities aiming to understand loneliness should embrace a degree of personal involvement. This approach will benefit most when all those involved feel comfortable to be themselves.

The highlight of the programme for both community researchers and professional stakeholders was the participatory community development approach which placed local people at the heart of everything. It allowed them to fail or succeed, to learn as they go, and to eventually create a small team of dedicated residents aiming to create change for themselves and their neighbours.

Although the topic of loneliness resonated with individuals, this theme could have been replaced with any other issue with which a wide range of people can empathise or identify. It is clear that the process undoubtedly prompted personal changes in individuals which may well have longer term impacts on employability, health outcomes, civic participation and family well-being.

These things do not always 'just happen' within communities. The NAL programme demonstrates the importance of support and a catalyst as well as adequate training and preparation for the transition of going it alone. This can help local residents take ownership of a project and feel 'allowed' to be visible and active in their own community. Continuation of work is more likely to occur where strong networks already existed or where an interested stakeholder or individual can be encouraged to partner with volunteers to ensure greater sustainability of the work.

Implications for policy-makers

Some of the participants involved in this programme were not in education, employment or training when they started. Some of them now are. Crucially, their involvement in community activism has resulted in increased confidence, bolstered by peer support from those outside their normal social circle. In turn, their volunteering activities have made them feel confident and able to work. This calls into question a policy which penalises those who are not actively seeking work by spending time volunteering. Whether perceived or real, the sanctions placed on benefit recipients wanting to volunteer within their community does create fear and cause doubt about volunteering. We have found that volunteering increases the likelihood of entering education or employment but people can be deterred by any potential consequences.

Volunteering can be enjoyed in its own right or can be seen as a stepping stone to something more. For many of those involved in the programme it has been a 'leg-up' to improve their confidence, health, general family well-being and chances of finding employment or further education. A benefits system that better acknowledges and communicates the value of volunteering could encourage people to take worthwhile action within their communities that could also help them re-enter the labour market, as it has helped others involved in the NAL programme.

NOTES

- 1 UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) Loneliness Scale is a widely used scale which utilises a series of questions to measure the loneliness of the individual completing the questions. Our survey used the 1996 version.
- 2 Information taken from Mind at <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/loneliness/loneliness-and-mental-health/> [accessed 30 January 2014]
- 3 Information taken from Age UK, 'Loneliness – the state we're in' (2012) at <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/brandpartnerglobal/oxfordshirevpp/documents/Loneliness%20the%20state%20we%20are%20in%20-%20report%202013.pdf>
- 4 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> New Earswick Ward, Table: Key Figures 2011 [accessed 29 January 2014.]
- 5 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> New Earswick Ward, Table KS105EW, Household composition, 2011 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 6 Information taken from The Garden Village of New Earswick at: <http://www.jrht.org.uk/sites/files/jrht/uploads/10/10/NewEarswickleaflet.pdf> p. 3 2008 [accessed 29 January 2014.]
- 7 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> New Earswick Ward, Table KS102EW Age Structure, 2011 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 8 Information taken from The Garden Village of New Earswick at: <http://www.jrht.org.uk/sites/files/jrht/uploads/10/10/NewEarswickleaflet.pdf> p. 3 2008 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 9 Information taken from The Garden Village of New Earswick at: <http://www.jrht.org.uk/sites/files/jrht/uploads/10/10/NewEarswickleaflet.pdf> p. 4 2008 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 10 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> Acomb Ward, Table QS102EW [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 11 Information taken from Acomb Community Survey 2013 at: http://www.acombchurchsurvey.co.uk/survey/Acomb_FullReport_Web.pdf p. 14 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 12 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> Acomb Ward, Table QS405EW Household Tenure, 2011 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 13 Information taken from Acomb Community Survey 2013 at: http://www.acombchurchsurvey.co.uk/survey/Acomb_FullReport_Web.pdf p. 46 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 14 Information taken from Acomb Community Survey 2013 at: http://www.acombchurchsurvey.co.uk/survey/Acomb_FullReport_Web.pdf p. 44 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 15 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> Bradford Moor Ward, Table KS101EW, Usual resident population 2011 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 16 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/>

statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Bradford Moor Ward, Table KS105EW, Household Composition 2011 [accessed 29 January 2014]

- 17 Information taken from Department of Health, Bradford Health Profile, 2008.
- 18 Information taken from Public Health England's Health Profile of Bradford, 2013 at: <http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=50328> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 19 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Bradford Moor Ward, Table KS102EW, Age Structure 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 20 Information taken from City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council Bradford Moor Ward Assessment 2013–14 at: <http://www.bradford.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A03D83F4-E91E-48E2-8B77-DFDE5E53FAE3/0/BradfordMoorWardAssessment201314.pdf>, p. 18 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 21 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Bradford Moor Ward, Table KS501EW, Qualifications and Students 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 22 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Bradford Moor Ward, Table KS201EW, Ethnic Group 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 23 Information taken from City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council Bradford Moor Ward Assessment 2013–14 at: <http://www.bradford.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A03D83F4-E91E-48E2-8B77-DFDE5E53FAE3/0/BradfordMoorWardAssessment201314.pdf>, p. 13 [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 24 Information taken from Denholme Town Council Website at: <http://denholme.org/about-denholme/2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 25 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Denholme Parish, Table: Key Statistics 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 26 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Denholme Parish, Table QS405EW, Tenure, Households, 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 27 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Denholme Parish, Table KS102EW Age Structure, 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 28 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Denholme Parish, Table KS201EW, 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 29 Information taken from the Neighbourhood Statistics website at: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/ Denholme Parish, Table KS601EW, 2011> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 30 Information taken from Denholme Town Council Website at: <http://denholme.org/about-denholme/> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 31 Information taken from Denholme Town Council Website at: <http://denholme.org/about-denholme/> [accessed 29 January 2014]
- 32 3Ps are community participation consultants; they supported the programme manager with training community researchers. More information on them can be found at: <http://www.3ps.org.uk/>
- 33 Lidgett Grove Methodist Church.
- 34 The resource pack produced as part of the NAL programme is available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/loneliness-resource-pack> [accessed 5 February 2014]
- 35 *The Empowering Communities for Health: Business Case and Practice Framework*, Health Empowerment Business Project, November 2011, can be found at: <http://www.healthempowerment.co.uk/key-documents> [accessed 12 June 2014]
- 36 The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey short-form (SCCBS) can be found at: <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/communitysurvey/> [accessed 5 February 2014]

REFERENCES

- Attree, P., French, B., Milton, B., Poval S., Whitehead, M. and Popay, J. (2011) 'The experience of community engagement for individuals: a rapid review of evidence', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 19(3), pp. 250–260
- Cattan, M. (2001) 'Supporting older people to overcome social isolation and loneliness', Help the Aged
- Clifton, J. (2011) 'Social isolation among older Londoners', London: Institute for Public Policy Research
- Dupere, V. and Perkins, D. D. (2007) 'Community types and mental health: a multilevel study of local environmental stress and coping', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 39, pp. 107–119
- Fisher, B. (ed.) (2011) 'Community development in health – a literature review'. Available at: www.healthempowermentgroup.org.uk [accessed 10 November 2011]
- Friedli, L., Jackson, C., Abernethy, H., and Stansfield, J. (2009) *Social prescribing for mental health. A guide to commissioning and delivery*, Care Services Improvement Partnership.
- Gillespie, J. et al. (2011) *Creating stronger and more inclusive communities which value everyone's right to contribute: Some lessons for positive action in the context of austerity*. Available at: <http://www.keyring.org/site/KEYR/Templates/Generic3col.aspx?pageid=298&cc=GB> [accessed 16 September 2011]
- Griffin, J. (2010) 'The Lonely Society', *The Mental Health Foundation*. Available at: http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/the_lonely_society_report.pdf [accessed 4 February 2014]
- Hole, K. (2011) 'Loneliness compendium: examples from research and practice', *JRF/JRHT programme paper: Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness*
- Morris, D. and Gilchrist, A. (2011) *Communities connected: Inclusion, participation and common purpose*. Available at: <http://www.thersa.org/projects/connected-communities/communities-connected> [accessed 10 November 2011]
- Randall, J., Cupit Swenson, C. and Henggeler, S. W. (1999) *Neighborhood solutions for neighborhood problems: empirically based violence prevention collaboration*. Available at: <http://heb.sagepub.com/content/26/6/806.refs> [accessed 28 March 2012]
- Wicker, A. and Sommer, R. (1993) 'The resident researcher: An alternative career model centered on community', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21(4), pp. 469–481
- Williamson, T., Brogden, J., Jones, E. and Ryan, J. (2010) 'Impact of public involvement in research on quality of life and society: a case study of research career trajectories', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 34, pp. 551–557

APPENDIX 1

The top ten tips

Qa completed the following top ten tips after analysis of data collected from stakeholders as part of this evaluation. The content was included as part of the resource pack published by JRF/JRHT.³⁴

Working with your community to REDUCE loneliness

Simple ideas can make a big difference when it comes to reducing loneliness. Qa Research did an independent evaluation of JRF's Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme. This included talking to stakeholders who were involved in the programme. Stakeholders are those who have an interest in the work or those who can help make the programme a success. These ten tips aim to help you understand how to engage stakeholders and get the most out of their involvement in your work.

Work with the right people

Think carefully about who to involve. Engage respected, powerful and prominent local partners who will help progress your work and who will benefit in return. Remain open about how input from others could improve your work and do not ignore any offers of help.

The personal touch

Prioritise face-to-face contact above email. Recruit volunteers using face-to-face, fun methods. Unlike leafleting or posting a meeting date on a website, this will help you to reach those who are not the 'usual suspects' for volunteering or community engagement. Be practical – tailor measures depending on the community and its needs. This could mean using bilingual workers, translated materials, free crèche provision, signposting to related courses and so on. You could even invite stakeholders to be community researchers themselves.

Build on a powerful brand

Use the findings, resources and evidence from JRF's Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness programme to build on the work of others and make your case to funders, partners and other potential stakeholders.

Harness existing networks

Bring on board stakeholders already working in the community, whether local agencies, third sector organisations or residents. Take advantage of their local connections, resources and expertise. This could include encouraging them to provide a venue for community groups, provide crèche

facilities to engage parents or support volunteers with administrative duties such as funding applications.

Establish new connections

In communities where there are fewer established networks and community capacity, think laterally. Who is trusted within the community? Who is already working with a group that may stand to benefit? It could be schools, children's centres, GPs, health trainers, employers or faith leaders.

Consider a catalyst

Consider using one person or organisation to co-ordinate and manage communication – enthusiasm and passion will help engage and retain partners and volunteers. Identify what skills are needed to make your objectives a reality and deploy the right people for the task.

Communicate expectations

Tell those involved what you expect of them at different stages and what they can hope to gain.

Let them know your timescales and interim achievements as this will prevent disillusionment if things take longer than expected. Understand your neighbourhood – adapt the aims and communication to suit the local community and the pace of change that is possible there. In areas with fewer community assets expect a slow pace of change and allow more time.

Innovate at meetings

Keep it fun but focused. Concentrate on creative, participatory methods that will be enjoyable, will encourage all to contribute and will result in action. The personal touch can be powerful.

Real-life stories told by community volunteers can touch and inspire hardened professionals.

Be ready to react

Different volunteers will need different styles of management and support. Identify the skill set required to sustain the project, then monitor volunteers closely and set mechanisms in place to identify when they are ready to learn new skills or take on new challenges.

Embrace renewal

At every stage be aware of the need to retain volunteers and recruit new ones. Keep a focus on attracting volunteers from a range of sources, with diverse backgrounds and skill sets. Stakeholders may value the fresh influences and the project will benefit from a variety of ideas from a range of perspectives.

APPENDIX 2

Summary of literature review

A literature review was carried out at the start of this evaluation to set it in context, identify any models of good practice and contribute to the development of evaluation tools. It did not intend to regurgitate the excellent compendium of research already compiled to inform the development of the Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness (NAL) programme (Hole, 2011). That review, along with others, suggested that the effects of loneliness cut across demographics and can affect all members of society from the most vulnerable and marginalised individuals to those considered to be part of the 'mainstream'.

The purpose of this review was not to assess the validity of the evidence that links loneliness to poor health outcomes, but rather to accept this premise and assess the evidence that neighbourhood approaches to addressing loneliness are effective.

Community or neighbourhood? Development or engagement?

Involving individuals in shaping communities of interest or geography is central to many strategic approaches aimed at reducing health inequalities, a number of which are associated with loneliness, such as depression, cardiovascular health and alcohol abuse.

However, Attree *et al.* (2011) note that the term 'community engagement' includes a range of approaches which are perhaps best illustrated by Arnstein's classic Ladder of Participation.

Furthermore, Fisher (2011) notes that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) uses the terms 'community development' and 'community engagement' interchangeably but argues that the latter is a 'top down' approach whilst the former is a 'bottom up' stimulus and facilitation more akin to NAL in seeking to enable people to:

- identify their own needs and aspirations;
- take action to exert influence on decisions which affect their lives; and
- improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live and societies of which they are a part.

Building on assets

Asset based approaches are used and recommended by a number of authors (Fisher, 2011; Morris and Gilchrist, 2011). These 'assets' can be social, financial, physical, environmental or human resources.

The view that individuals themselves are 'assets' and not merely a drain on statutory resources is a central tenet of co-production. As Morris and Gilchrist argue in *Communities Connected: Inclusion, Participation and*

Common Purpose (2011), '... public services can no longer afford to ignore the resources of public service users, most notably their community connections'. This assertion is illustrated by the successful use of community researchers documented by Williamson *et al.* (2010). These authors believe that community researchers enhance the 'quality and validity' of research – a view previously asserted by Wicker and Sommer (1993).

In addition, The Health Empowerment Leverage Project (HELP) review (2011)³⁵ argues that 'good public services enable and encourage people to maintain social relationships'. This advocates a move away from communities as service delivery agents to placing an intrinsic value on building and maintaining social networks.

The argument for an asset based community development (ABCD) approach is clearly laid out in the literature review compiled and edited by Fisher (2011). He concludes that 'in essence, the review shows that [community development – CD] helps strengthen and multiply social networks ... and so build up social capital'.

Clifton (2011) recommends that services are 'designed around relationships, rather than fixed institutions and procedures'. In an RSA paper Morris and Gilchrist (2011) argue that, 'the importance of social networks and co-production is particularly evident in the fields of health and social care'.

But whilst community development is an important technique to support and increase social networks, Fisher (2011) suggests that 'this discipline is relatively unknown to many in the NHS'. Furthermore, he demonstrates that there are known cultural and organisational barriers to using this technique with statutory authorities, despite the known advantages of social prescribing for mental health outlined in the guidance developed by Friedli *et al.* (2009).

Difficulties engaging

Despite the collaboration with the existing Neighbourhood Council and through access to many of the existing networks, Randall *et al.* (1999) still warn of the 'difficulties related to obtaining neighbourhood [sic] volunteers'.

In presenting a case study, Williamson *et al.* (2010) also highlight the need for extensive 'team building' amongst community researchers. They note that 'no attention had been paid to selecting people with specific attributes and almost everyone who volunteered was accepted'. Wicker and Sommer (1993) also highlight a number of potential difficulties encountered by resident researchers including facing complex ethical issues, needing to pay special attention to community relations and experiencing role conflicts.

Part of the difficulty in engagement may be explained by the results of a study by Dupere and Perkins (2007) which investigated how communities experiencing different environmental stressors (such as fear of crime, social and physical disorder) and social resources (such as informal ties and formal organisational participation) affected the well-being of adult residents.

Impact of engagement

Attree *et al.* (2011) acknowledge that there have been few attempts to review the impact of 'engagement' on the lives of individual participants. These authors conducted a rapid review of 22 mixed method and qualitative research projects, following NICE methods. Engagement activities were categorised into types of initiatives such as 'area based', 'person based' and 'particular interest' groups. The positive effect of community engagement on participants' social relationships was a recurring theme of the studies under review. These positive effects included a perceived reduction in loneliness and other negative psychological states. However, there was also evidence

that the experience of engagement was not positive for all participants in all circumstances. For example, the authors suggest that individuals with underlying health problems or disabilities which lead them to be unable to engage may not be physically or mentally able to cope with the demands placed on them by statutory agents.

Vulnerable groups

One of the central features of the RSA paper is the discussion of the stigma of mental health and how this creates a real barrier to individuals engaging with their communities despite available opportunities (Morris and Gilchrist, 2011). This barrier highlights a definite problem for the NAL programme as some of the most vulnerable to loneliness are misjudged and mistreated within their own communities or neighbourhoods. Other groups may suffer from similar stigma associated with stereotyped preconceptions: young people, members of ethnic minority communities or single parents.

APPENDIX 3

Evaluation methodology

Community surveys – methodology

During November and December 2011, early on in the programme, Qa administered a baseline face-to-face (doorstep interview) community survey with residents in each of the four NAL neighbourhoods. Qa repeated a similar exercise for a follow-up survey in November and December 2013, aiming to examine any differences in residents of the neighbourhoods at the end of the programme.

Qa designed a questionnaire that JRF/JRHT approved before fieldwork began. The baseline questionnaire covered a range of themes including awareness of and involvement in NAL, social and inter-racial trust, political participation, giving and volunteering, faith-based engagement and health. The questionnaire also included questions from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey short-form (SCCBS)³⁶ and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Where possible, the follow-up questionnaire was identical with the baseline to allow comparisons between both sets of findings. The follow-up questionnaire included a new question asking about awareness of any of the NAL-based groups that were now active in the neighbourhoods.

Qa consulted with the programme manager and visited the neighbourhoods before selecting a sample of approximately twelve broadly representative streets per neighbourhood to target. Qa agreed with JRF/JRHT a completion target of 50 interviews each for New Earswick, Carr and Denholme. However, due to the diverse mix of ethnicity of the population in Bradford Moor, Qa agreed a completion target of 100 interviews for this neighbourhood. Loose completion quotas were set for respondent age for all the neighbourhoods; and for Bradford Moor an ethnicity quota was set of up to 40% white British and at least 60% other ethnicities.

Interviewers gained parental consent for respondents aged 12–16 years, who received the opportunity to enter a free prize draw to win a £20 Love2Shop voucher.

After the fieldwork was completed, Qa carried out data analysis. After the baseline survey, Qa provided data tables and an interim report to JRF/JRHT. After the follow-up survey, Qa incorporated the findings into this evaluation report – see Chapters 2 and 4.

Community surveys – completions achieved

The fieldwork achieved 250 completed baseline surveys and 290 follow-up surveys. Using statistical rules, we can be 95% confident that our research findings have a potential variance of no more than plus or minus 5% from the figures shown. These standards specifically apply to ‘confidence levels’. An explanation is provided below:

Confidence levels

This indicates how representative findings are of the resident body as a whole. In this instance we have used 95% confidence levels – or put more simply, this requires that the chances of the sample group reflecting the wider resident population will be 95 out of 100. The confidence level is essentially a fixed value which must be looked at in conjunction with standard error.

Standard error

'Standard error' demonstrates how answers provided by sampled residents potentially vary from the responses that would be obtained if all residents had responded. In the research industry, commonly accepted levels of error are +/- 5% and +/- 3%. In this work, +/- 5% was achieved. This means, for example, that if the observed statistic for any question is 50%, then if the research was repeated, this percentage will be no less than 45% and no more than 55%. The standard error is calculated on the basis of the total number of possible respondents and the number that have responded to the survey.

The tables below show the specific quota completions in each of the neighbourhoods for both baseline and follow-up surveys.

Table 3: 2011 Baseline survey completions

	Age							No response	Ethnicity		Gender			
	12-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+		White British	Other	Male	Female		
New Earswick	4	9	6	7	3	9	14		51	1	15	37	52	
Carr	11	8	6	7	9	7	2		50		24	26	50	
Denholme	11	8	7	4	11	3	5	1	49	1	18	32	50	
Bradford Moor	29	21	15	14	5	9	5	2	28	72	44	56	100	
													Total	252

Table 4: 2013 Follow-up survey completions

	Age							No response	Ethnicity		Gender			
	12-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+		White British	Other	Male	Female		
New Earswick	7	9	7	8	11	9	13		59	5	19	45	64	
Carr	5	9	9	8	10	16	2	1	56	4	22	38	60	
Denholme	5	4	10	8	16	9	9		58	3	24	37	61	
Bradford Moor	26	36	12	10	10	6	5		27	78	56	49	105	
													Total	290

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the help and dedication from community researchers this evaluation would not be insightful and useful to others – our greatest appreciation goes to them. Qa would like to thank the NAL programme manager and the JRF/JRHT staff team for their support in the completion of this evaluation. Thanks also go to the stakeholders who contributed their time to the consultation; to the members of the Programme Advisory Group; and to Professor Mima Cattan.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Angela B. Collins is a Research Director at Qa Research specialising in engagement of those who are marginalised from society. She heads up the Children, Young People and Families Team and has worked at the organisation for over ten years. Angela has developed particular expertise in consultation with those who are marginalised including drug and alcohol users, homeless people, young parents, care leavers, offenders and those serving custodial sentences. Angela is also a JNC trained, and experienced, youth worker and is a Trustee at York CVS. Angela was responsible for Breaking the Cycle which won the 2008 MRS Award for Public Policy and Social Research.

Julie Wrigley is experienced in managing quantitative data collection projects, conducting qualitative fieldwork and writing clear, usable reports. She is particularly interested in research which engages with, and gives a voice to, more vulnerable individuals. She designs participatory appraisal activities to engage hard to reach respondents and has recently consulted with individuals with disabilities, mental health issues or dementia about well-being and quality of life. Julie has developed her strong oral and written communication skills throughout her career as a researcher and, before that, in public relations, features journalism and personal life coaching. She has extensive voluntary experience over the past 20 years, with young people, those with special educational needs, those in the youth criminal justice system and carers.

Established in 1989, **Qa Research** is a full service research agency working with a range of public and third sector clients. The company is based at dedicated offices in York. Since the company was set up they have recruited and developed people that specialise in key sectors such as Education, Children and Young People, Business and Skills, and Tourism and Communities. This means clients receive research outcomes that go beyond the data and offer actionable recommendations which inform policy and practice. With over 20 years of social research experience Qa offers expertise and efficient use of valuable resources.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy-makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of JRF.

A CIP catalogue record for this report is available from the British Library.

All rights reserved. Reproduction of this report by photocopying or electronic means for non-commercial purposes is permitted. Otherwise, no part of this report may be reproduced, adapted, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise without the prior written permission of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

© Qa Research 2014
First published 2014 by the Joseph
Rowntree Foundation
ISBN: 978 1 90958 636 9 (pdf)
Project managed and typeset by
Cambridge Publishing Management Limited

Joseph Rowntree Foundation
The Homestead
40 Water End
York YO30 6WP
www.jrf.org.uk