H&F's BIG COMMUNITY BRAINSTORM
on Loneliness & Isolation
12 June 2018

Thoughts from the day and feedback since

What an amazing turnout – we had more than 70 people in the room. It was a bit crowded but there was so much interest in at the event that it kept growing. We'll bear in that mind for the future.

We had some really helpful comments on the day, including about what we could have done better. You really welcomed the opportunity to be in one room at the same time and hold important conversations together. You enjoyed the brain food and the creative approach to getting us thinking differently. You also felt some of the facilitation could have been better – we agree and will make changes. You loved our inspiring visitors from Yorkshire, Debbie and Phil.

Other feedback on the day was:

"Excellent mix of people and agencies"

"I loved that we were trying to be as radical and innovative as possible"

"I wanted more workshops"

"We needed a more targeted outcome"

"This opportunity to sit together and discuss this issue is extremely valuable"

This event was a first step, an occasion for local *organisations* to think about a collective response to the issue. Like everyone, we're clear that the wider community needs to be fully on board from here on in.

1 Just what is the problem?

We agreed that loneliness and isolation affected people of all ages right across the borough – and that loneliness and isolation were two different things: you can be lonely in a room full of people and isolated by only using social media.

We discussed the different impacts of loneliness and isolation on our borough. People may use GPs as their connection to the world or may suffer if they have long-term conditions which aren't picked up in time. This means that ensuring people stayed connected could save money. But we also felt it was about more than saving money – it was about building resilient communities and growing local assets.

Some of us said austerity had made people more isolated and services which kept people connected had been cut.

We were interested in building connectedness at a grassroots, community level. Funding mattered but we were interested in thinking widely about how to work collectively and move away from the answer being more "services".

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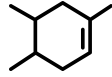
Connecting

We're aware of some of the support that exists but don't know enough about how to connect to it. We need a community system and a framework for connecting.

Is the onus on us, the organisations, to take responsibility to connect more with each other and the wider community?

We need to understand what assets exist in our community – who's offering what.

We need social prescriptions, instead of long-term medication: arts classes, gardening, walking..
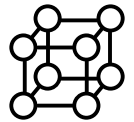
Growing new things

There is so much we can do at local level, for example by using schools and churches to reach out or by building micro-communities, such as close neighbours.

We should take responsibility for going out into our community and connecting. We could think about micro-business and things on a very small scale

What we do should not be based on a negative model: we need to reframe this in positive language and look at it with positive eyes.

We need a network, something that pulls us all together and connects organisations. This could be intergenerational and include business and other partners. It would be more than a directory – something active and dynamic which promotes partnerships

Mixing things up

We need to give incentives to the wider community to be involved – such as the power to take their own decisions or work experience.

Let's create a sense of pride.

Too many familiar faces and loud voices can mean others who want to get involved don't have a chance or feel overpowered. We need to mix up who gets heard.

We need to identify the barriers to break down, such as language and culture.

Diversity is important when developing these strategies. How can we make sure we reach everyone?

To get a better understand of the issues, we must speak to those from the community.

We should identify leaders within pockets of the community – create a mapping system. They know people's needs better than 'professionals' guessing (e.g. do older people not attend events or functions because of poor hearing or transport?)

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3 Alchemy –what's next?

We need to build more connections with isolated people and find those who need help but aren't part of a network. Everyone is known to someone – we need to work out how to connect.

GPs and organisations could collectively figure out who they know and how to get to those we're not in contact with. Some people are not hard to reach – they're hard for us to hear. They could be reached but might not be understood or heard.

We need to face this in partnership with the community, not just as individual organisations.

We can ask the community to find those who are isolated. We could find leaders or community connectors from within each group. The Somali community, LGBT people and others have regular meetings. We should go to them – and act on the feedback they give us.

We should empower individuals to seek us out rather than us just finding them.

Create social occasions that are interesting and relevant to different groups, e.g. young people and music and sport, lone parents and play dates, etc. Perhaps create a buddy system.

Talking about isolation is okay among ourselves but a leaflet through the door with the words loneliness or isolation will put people off. We need to be smart about our language and present activities to the public in a positive way, e.g. Creative Minds, community gardening, etc.

We should take this forward with events with the community, including local firms. But how best to bring the community together? Who usually attends events? People who most need help? People who know and understand? We need to systemise our actions. There are too many agendas amongst us and not enough connectedness.

Our next step should be to create a steering committee. Who wants to join?

4 Feedback since the meeting

After the meeting, we asked participants to tell us about their three main outcomes of the workshop.
The short survey was sent to all participants and we received 10 responses.

Many respondents welcomed the Health and Wellbeing Board's initiative and the push given for changing the approach to loneliness and isolation, which would be "more positive and less condescending", as one respondent put it.

The event gave participants the opportunity to see that there are many individuals, groups and organisations in the borough who want to make a difference and share a "real desire to do something".

Many liked the opportunity given to network and "connect".

Many also highlighted the need to find new resources and pull together on resources.

A few also gave some tips for the next meetings, such as making sure that all materials and meeting are more inclusive (for example for deaf and hard of hearing people) and ensuring that next time there would be enough time for everyone to say what they want to say.