



**"No way did I ever  
think of stopping"**

**Experiences of  
running small  
community projects  
for older people  
under lockdown**

**Addendum to the BAB Community Kick-Start Fund  
evaluation**

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## ABOUT THIS REPORT >>

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# Overview >>

## THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

The Coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has had a major impact on all aspects of the Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) programme, with potential consequences across all project areas. Much of BAB's work relies heavily on face-to-face interaction or in-person activity, and there are therefore a number of potentially damaging implications as a result of the outbreak.

For those over 50s who had been actively engaging in BAB activities, the unexpected interruption to the usual freedoms of later life has the potential to undo any progress already made through engagement, and might also cause those who were already feeling isolated to withdraw further. Equally, the virus has impacted heavily on those who were previously active and engaged citizens by - in some cases - forcing them to shield from community activity altogether.

There are also consequences for wider society as a result of this civic loss. For example, the financial contribution made by older people through volunteering is considerable, and when taken into consideration alongside the emotional and physical support offered by older people who perform unpaid caring roles outside the home, the impact of this loss on wider society could be substantial.

Further to the potential consequences for wider society that this loss represents is the impact that the pandemic may now have on the confidence of older people whose sense of value and self-worth might be diminished

as a result of the loss of social contact through their usual societal contributions. Those who were once seen as valuable members of society may now be perceived as vulnerable due to their susceptibility to the disease, thus affecting both their own confidence as well as potentially compounding negative views about the contribution older people can make to society.

However, despite these negative implications, there may also be unexpected benefits to the pandemic and in some cases activities for older people have successfully moved classes and groups online (albeit only as a temporary fix), making them accessible remotely to those who are connected to the internet. The virus has therefore also brought with it the potential to explore new ways of bringing activities directly into the homes of the socially isolated in ways that may have previously been overlooked. This could represent an opportunity to rethink how activities for older people are designed and implemented and - providing older people have access to the necessary technology - groups could be made accessible to all, regardless of mobility issues, transport links, levels of confidence and other common barriers to participation.

It is therefore more important than ever to explore new and innovative ways of working with older people to develop communities that allow them to meaningfully engage, feel valued and contribute to the world around them. In many ways, this challenging and difficult period may even help to contribute to a period of rethinking old approaches to supporting and engaging with citizens as they age, and projects may need to harness technology and newfound ways of working by providing activities across a range of

face-to-face and virtual platforms as we look towards a potentially different kind of future for communities.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY KICK-START FUNDED ACTIVITIES

The Community Kick Start Fund (CKSF) offered funding of up to £2,000 to support the development of new activities, designed to reduce loneliness and social isolation in people aged over 50. Activities needed to address these issues and aim to continue beyond the initial funding period defined as 12 months from the point of application. The successful CKSF applications resulted in a range of activities being made available to older people across the city of Bristol, from rowing to reading, ballet, walking, pickleball and art classes, to name just a few.

Clearly some of these activities lend themselves to online tuition more than others, and some have found a way to deliver classes over video conferencing facilities such as Zoom or Skype. Others have recognised that their classes transcend the activity itself, and have prioritised maintaining friendships and bonds

that have already been established in order for members to stay in touch remotely. Some have found a way to continue with classes outside, whilst for others it has not proved possible to continue, and this loss has been keenly felt by participants.

As this continued activity came to the attention of the Community Researchers who evaluated the CKSF and authored the full report, there was an interest in investigating if some of these groups have continued, and if so how facilitators have felt about the 'new normal'. Reflections of participants involved in these activities were also gathered where possible. The case studies that follow were all compiled in the summer of 2020 whilst the UK was still in the grips of the pandemic, but after the easing of lockdown measures in May of the same year.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the facilitators and participants who took time to speak to us and share their experiences of delivering groups during these strange and uncertain times, and hope that these case studies illustrate just some of the ways in which groups might be able to continue to meet in a virtual world.



# Case studies >>

## CASE STUDY 1 - URBAN SOUL

*Jeremy Groome spoke to the facilitator of Urban Soul, a creative writing for mental wellbeing group, on Tuesday 7th July 2020.*

### What did the project look like before Covid-19?

The BAB Community Kick Start funding was the first financial support that Barbara, the facilitator of Urban Soul, had received for her work in the community. She has been a community artist in Bristol for 25 years and has worked with children and families and had always wanted to work with older people to develop intergenerational activities. She retrained 6 years ago in 'writing for wellbeing' and had been running a course independently. She considered it as being a 'powerful field' and an area that interested her a lot.

Any progress following retraining was hindered for a lengthy three year period by ill health and subsequent loss of work facilities at Hamilton House.

The writing workshops supported by the Community Kick-Start Fund started in September 2019 with a plan to run two groups in parallel, each of 10 people. Initially, one group was set up; the members were all white-British, 8 women and 2 men (considered as break-through considering the topic), most in their 60s with one in their early 50s and one who was over 80. The programme was designed to have face-to-face group meetings once a week at the Community Room at St Werburghs City Farm. The meetings were



*"I realised early on that the name for the activity should have been 'Words for Wellbeing' and not 'Writing'. People are put off by thinking that they have to write - like ages ago at school!"*  
- Facilitator

preceded by a social coffee morning as a get-to-know you session and the group subsequently met for 10 weeks after that with a specific topic supported by handouts. This approach usefully provided a 'teaching practice' element for the facilitator.

The sessions, in addition, provided the opportunity for members to meet to discuss their lives and through this to examine their individual degree of loneliness and expose how much they had in common. Barbara had been working towards encouraging members to meet together later without her, and by the

final meeting there had only been one drop-out (a participant had changed work and could no longer participate at the agreed time). During a social event following the tenth meeting she had given the participants a task to complete with the idea of encouraging them to meet again after a further 2 months with individual support in the interim as required.

She then started advertising for the second group and in an attempt to diversify the client base wanted to advertise at the St Pauls Community Learning Centre. Unfortunately, this was not allowed as the event was not directly sponsored by nor held at the Centre. Using other sources and contacts 3-4 people had shown interest, and Barbara felt inspired by the good results from the first group and knew what she wanted to achieve with the second group and how to do it.

### **What has the group looked like since the lockdown came into place?**

Covid-19 then struck and Barbara herself became ill and was advised by her doctor to self-isolate. She therefore went into lockdown on March 13th, partly because she is in a high risk group herself. Following discussions with BAB she agreed not to start the second group but to continue working with the first group. The reasoning here was that there were vulnerable people within that group who would need support during the lockdown period. Her approach was to continue the weekly group activities but to move online, which proved relatively easy as all participants had access to suitable equipment.

Barbara had never been trained to work online and she and the participants found there were challenges in using the new technology. Initially, the group used Zoom which offered limited but free introductory sessions; however, the group did not have the £45 to continue after

this introductory offer. Also, the majority of the group found Zoom very frustrating and it was difficult to get everyone 'in the room'. Every week the first 20-30 minutes of the session - planned to be 1.5 to 2 hours - was taken up with technical issues; trying to get everyone able to see and hear each other. Outside the group the facilitator has participated in a number of activities on Zoom and they have all worked without any problems; this made her think that the tech problems were 'her fault'!

The group subsequently decided to move to Skype. This has worked well and it has been easier to get everyone together. However, the system doesn't have the same flexibility or features, such as the chat function where people can type messages which can be limiting (Barbara would like to upload a poem for discussion, for example). She is still learning and the teaching approach has been adapting all the time. Some weeks she feels that things are going well - both for her and the participants.

At the moment, Barbara is working weekly with a maximum of 6 participants out of the original 9 but sometimes this number drops to 5. Those not participating include the eldest lady who suffers with anxiety, something which was always an issue for her during the face-to-face sessions; she has lost a close family member in the pandemic and has withdrawn from any involvement in the current activity, although Barbara still sends her regular social messages. Another lady - also with a high level of anxiety - immersed herself in craft activities and could not deal with the tech; and a third lady had the same feelings about the tech and has also withdrawn.



*Words for Wellbeing meeting on 15th July 2020*

» *"[I am still] learning to run a class during a pandemic online!"*  
- Facilitator

### **What made you decide to continue classes/ activities during lockdown? Did you think about just stopping?**

Barbara is a very committed community worker and saw her participants as people who had actual or potential problems with isolation and loneliness and the process of maintaining contact was all part of the therapy. Barbara felt very inspired - although she was ill herself for 3 weeks and locked herself down at that early stage of the pandemic when there was little advice on what to do.

Once she recovered she adapted the earlier group activities to a journalistic approach of 'keeping a Covid diary'. With this off the ground, she then alternated this simple recording and reporting approach with a completely different activity to create a distraction from the difficulties of the current isolated existence of losing contact with their families. Over the weeks the 'diary' has become much more than just a record of activities and

participants have been encouraged to become more imaginative. This, Barbara hopes, 'creates an atmosphere and helps take them out of their real world of day after day and hour and hour of day-time TV.'

### **Do you have any concerns that moving online has excluded people? In what way might they have been excluded?**

Three of the original group, as mentioned above, have had fundamental objections to using any form of electronic distance technique (they were very phobic and mistrustful of 'that sort of thing'). She contacts them individually every week to remind them of the activity and invite them to re-join, but without success - so far. Also, one of the male members was a frontline worker in social care and feeling very stressed - he decided that he could not take on the new approach. Again, Barbara maintains contact with him through occasional social messages.

**How does it feel running the class online? Have you had to get used to it? What have you learnt?**

Initially, the new tech created exactly the opposite atmosphere to the one needed to run a session on 'writing for wellbeing'. Barbara also found this very frustrating as facilitator but as time has progressed the technical problems have been overcome and group members have developed and maintained their mutual support.

Barbara has developed a wide range of topics to work within the group as options to the Covid diary. Currently, the group has been discussing 'what do you see in nature around you' which she considers to be especially stimulating when you are stuck indoors. Eventually this will become a poem, and in the process help people become connected through social media.

Additionally, she has set up yet another activity; sharing and discussing 'letters from abroad' (letters she has encouraged from her own contacts around the world). The idea has been to describe how Covid is affecting people in other countries and how we in the UK are perceived from abroad. She has told the group about this correspondence but has not yet circulated the material. Eventually she hopes to turn this into a blog.

**Are you aware of any members that are in contact outside of the group, for example staying in touch via Zoom/Whatsapp/email/telephone etc?**

The participants hardly talk to each other outside the group meetings but Barbara's original intention was to try to help people go forward in a positive way either independently or working amongst themselves and not retain their reliance on her as the facilitator.

» *"No way did I ever think of stopping; I was inspired to carry on even though I was ill myself"*

- Facilitator

However, it appears that at the moment they still rely on her to link them together.

There has been some exchange of addresses and perhaps this has led or will lead to ongoing contacts in the future.

The eldest group participant is 'alone for the first time' and has previously had lots of contact with grandchildren, but since lockdown has become withdrawn. For another lady the group has been a lifeline and the idea of having a routine has helped to give her week a structure.

**What are your hopes for the group in the immediate future (i.e. whilst we are still in some form of lockdown)?**

One priority is looking for more funding to protect vulnerable members in the community because Barbara considers that the whole process of lifting restrictions has been undertaken too fast, has been badly managed and is moving in the wrong direction. Little advice has been given to people coming out of shielding and none of the local funding agencies have this as a topic of interest.

She has suggested meeting up outdoors in a socially distanced way and all of the group said yes but for one. The Community garden at St Werburghs has been identified as a 'safe' place; other locations are often too populated and to get to a safe environment would need the use of transport with socially distanced seating which is too expensive. Barbara is determined to continue with her existing group and support them out of lockdown by some means or another.

Another immediate activity for Barbara is to organise a post-Covid Bristol Facebook page entitled 'Citizens in response and engagement'. She has been working with a lady who is a BAME nurse to provide advice on safety for the individual in a post-Covid environment. It is hoped that this approach will help combat conspiracy theories, for example not wearing a mask because people think it takes away personal freedom.

**What are your hopes for the group in the long term future now?**

Barbara hopes to continue offering online classes, firstly with the current group. Barbara wants to offer support for another group; she feels there is a strong place for that.

She also believes that another important target group are university students as she is aware that there have been some suicides in Bristol. She believes the writing group approach could help them out of their mental isolation. The problem is getting funding, but Barbara's dream is to link the older and younger members and create a real community.

**What do participants think of the move to online?**

» *"During lockdown I have found Writing for Wellbeing to be so helpful. It is my only sociable safe space in the week and I look forward to Wednesdays. The group's social dynamic is always positive and there is no pressure to write brilliantly. As a bonus, it has inspired me to do more writing on my own and I find this very therapeutic, so thank you for this chance to participate."*

- Participant One

» *"Barbara's class has been an absolute life saver during lockdown. It gives me an anchor in the week with an opportunity to journal about my experiences and share with others. I've even written a poem outside of the group as a way of dealing with an upsetting event; not something I would ever have thought of doing before we started the class. It had definitely combatted the isolation for me."*

- Participant Two

» *"As someone with a history of mental health issues and being quite new to Bristol, Barbara's writing group has helped me to stay the right side of sane during what has been a very difficult time for me. This shared creative outlet has been a great help."*

- Participant Three

» *"Yes, this Wellbeing in Words has been really helpful during lockdown. At first, I was aghast at the idea of keeping a Covid diary, but I did wait to meet-up on-line. As soon as I started writing I felt I got a handle on some very positive activity which was safe and combatted the terrible isolation of lockdown; we laughed, we cried. I found out what I needed to say to myself and others at this time. Barbara and the group are supportive and help to lighten the load and fear. And I feel positive about my words on paper. Success!"*

- Participant Four

## CASE STUDY 2 - ST PAUL'S ART GROUP

Jan Fullforth spoke to a member of the inner city St Paul's Art Group on 14th July 2020.

### What did the project look like before Covid 19?

This group was part of the St Pauls Community Development for older people (CDOP) project which ran until April 2019. It had been meeting at the Scrapstore in St Werburghs since January 2019 which offered free accommodation to the group. An application for Community Kick Start funding was made but was unsuccessful, however some BAB money was made available for art materials.

The group met weekly for 2 hours on a Tuesday, and roughly 12 people attended each time. Some of these were a core who attended regularly, and others who came and went intermittently, and the group had been growing over time. There had been no leader/teacher of the group for some while but the members provided mutual support and inspiration to one another.

### What happened to the project during the UK lockdown?

The group has not met since lockdown and the Scrapstore suddenly closed (and remains closed at the time of writing). Some contact and continuation of art activities has happened informally, and two members of the group are known to have continued doing art on a Tuesday in their homes and sharing their work. A friend of the interviewee has taken up art during the lockdown and sends her drawings and paintings, which has kept her in the loop. Sometimes she does some drawing or other art work herself but not much (she has a new grandchild and is quite busy).



» *"It's been really tough...everyone had a gift to give"*  
- Participant

### What challenges did the project face during this time?

As there is no leader for the group, there has been no-one to organise any continuation of activities during the lockdown, and no-one holds a contact list of members. There has been no contact from the Scrapstore. It has been difficult as no one has known how long the lockdown will last – there are lots of unknowns. The interviewee believed that everyone in the group had been self-isolating and some have been shielding on account of their additional vulnerabilities. They had not seen each other during lockdown and there was a feeling that they had lost touch.

### What does the participant think about what has happened?

The participant misses the group a lot; it provided a routine and something to look forward to. She is still being cautious about the lifting of lockdown restrictions and commented on how she has found that people's attitudes towards risk-taking with the virus varied and how this can cause tensions. She went out to the shops for the first time since lockdown recently, with a friend from the art group. The friend was disappointed that it wasn't busier, but she was happy that this was the case.

### Do you have any further thoughts and reflections?

The members were learning a lot from each other, for example by someone demonstrating a technique. The informal nature of the group was greatly valued and there was freedom to 'do your own thing' if this is what people wanted, and participants could just come

and chat if they wished and did not have to do anything. Getting together was the most important thing, particularly as all the members relied on a pension, and had little money to spend.

### What does the future look like for the group?

The participant hopes that they will be able to resume meeting at the Scrapstore, but has no idea when this might be possible.



## CASE STUDY 3 - YOUNG BRISTOL

*Jenny Hoadley spoke to a representative from Young Bristol on 14th July 2020. Although Young Bristol is youth charity, in 2017 the organisation received Community Kick Start funding to offer a rowing club aimed specifically at those over 55 years of age.*

### What did the project look like before lockdown?

In 2017 Kick start funded Young Bristol's first rowing club for the over 55's based on the 6-rower gig. One unanticipated bonus of this was the employment of a younger instructor from the organisation who provided an important intergenerational experience for everyone involved.

The rowing club continued after the Community Kick Start funding ceased, although this meant that there was a cost of £7 per session

In April 2019 Kick Start+ funding was awarded to the group, allowing them to build on this success by providing funding for multi-water sports activities for 12 months, all of which were free of charge. These included a continuation of the gig-rowing, kayaking and canoeing. 38 people signed up at the start of the activity, and there is currently a core group of 14 who are regularly involved. More enquiries were also received just before the Coronavirus lockdown.

All of the crafts go out for a 2-hour session together and then finish with tea and a social meeting. A couple of all-day sessions had been planned, with one scheduled to take place during lockdown. Sometimes a 3-hour session would be arranged so that 12 people, in 2 shifts, could go out in the gig – the other group

staying in the Mud Dock Café; other times evening social events have proved popular with the group.

### Why did the project decide to continue during lockdown?

After Lockdown all rowing stopped and the Young Bristol leader was furloughed. However, her instinct was to keep the group together during this period, and although she felt the group worked well in person and were good at including new people, she was unsure how far they were in touch with each other outside of the group activities. She was also aware of mental health issues and issues associated with loneliness within the group. So, in her own time, she emailed the core group of 14 to ask them if they would welcome a virtual meetup. With their agreement she did some research into which platform to use (she was not a regular social media user herself) and opted for weekly 40 minute Zoom sessions. All 14 have participated at least once. Now there is a core of 6-8 participants each week. These are mainly group members who are isolating because they either have a medical condition themselves or are caring for a parent or partner who has. One group member works but has few family around. Conversations during the Zoom sessions centred on puzzling out how the lockdown rules were to be interpreted, places to visit, and gardening!

» *"It was a new activity for me and I find I enjoy it very much as it provides a chance for fresh air, exercise and appreciation of the beautiful Harbour we have in Bristol."*

*- Original member who is still rowing*

### What are some of the challenges the project has faced in moving online?

Fortunately everyone was able to access the internet and no-one dropped out because they did not have the appropriate technology. Most people sorted out how to download Zoom or found someone to help, although the group leader helped two people online.

Zoom was seen as a flexible platform as it gave people the option of turning off the video, which one member prefers. The main frustrations centred on the unreliability of internet access – for one couple, their access only supports one device at a time which means there can be a clash of scheduling. For another, who was using a phone, the connection was unreliable.

### What were the participant's views on the lockdown arrangements?

Clearly the online meetings were no substitute for being out on the water. However, many people turned up regularly for the meetings, so it was obviously appreciated as a way of staying in touch.

### What do you think the classes will look like in the immediate and long term future?

From July 13th 2020 kayaking restarted because it meets the 2-metre social distancing rule, but only for pre-booked groups of 5 and only for those who are already members. This will preclude those members who are most confident in the gig or a canoe, and there will be a charge of £7 per session. If the 2-metre rule is reduced then the group leader will raft two canoes together (for 4 people) to give more stability for the less confident members.

The future for the current group of members will depend on how long social distancing is in

place. Offering new members the opportunity to join looks unlikely at present, but the level of demand in 2019 is as much as the current resources of Young Bristol can support anyway. Any major increase in membership would require Young Bristol to attract more funds for boats and staffing.

### What has been learned over this time?

In her own work, the group leader may now consider using Zoom to talk to new members and introduce them to rowing before they join the group.

Young Bristol itself may also maintain the virtual youth clubs it has set up, following the compulsory closure of their youth work sessions. Virtual youth clubs might be of particular benefit to those young people who are carers and who therefore are less free to go out. Offering total family group water activity experiences is another possibility, which might be even more feasible, where people work from home and are not tied to "office hours". Like many other organisations, Young Bristol will probably need to re-consider the use of its office space and adopt more home-working.

» *"[Young Bristol has] enabled me to have a go at gig rowing - something I've always wanted to try, but thought I would be too old. [Young Bristol] helped me overcome my doubts...[it] has given me a new outlook on life."*

*- New member*

## CASE STUDY 4 - REVIVE FITNESS 'HAPPY HEARTS' GROUP

This interview was carried out by Anne Jensen on 9th July 2020 with the organiser and instructor of Revive Fitness, Amanda.

### What did the project look like before Covid-19?

This Community Kick Start Fund group started around March 2019 but had been trialed for a short time before applying for the CKSF money, which someone suggested the group apply for. The group – named 'Happy Hearts' – meets every Friday at 12pm in Hengrove Community Centre. Sometimes there would be 10 – 12 people, sometimes there would be 20 in the room, all women, ranging in age from fifties to seventies. The group is fitness based but the emphasis is on fun fitness, and includes activities that people didn't expect they would do. Amanda tailors things like boxing to suit their needs, such as those with bad knees and hips or co-ordination difficulties. It is promoted as a gentle class so as to include people with certain conditions. Some people sit and do what the others are doing standing. There are no floor exercises. One lady wears a harness, her husband stands behinds her thus enabling her to join in.

The charge for the class is £5 weekly, and includes the use of equipment such as boxing pads, pilates balls, rings, mats, resistance bands and balance equipment. Some of this was bought by the CKSF but others come from Amanda's general fitness classes that she runs separately. Amanda has been a fitness instructor for about 3.5 years. Family health problems lead to her interest in exercise, and she is trained to personal trainer level.

### What happened to the group during lockdown?

When the classes stopped Amanda did not leave the equipment at the venue. She gave out the resistance bands and mini trampolines, delivering them when required. The 'Happy Hearts' group is now an outdoor exercise group - weather permitting - and is run for regulars who could not or did not want to use Zoom. This is held twice weekly in the car park at Hengrove Community Centre and Amanda is not being charged for the use of this space. There are 5 participants, all socially distanced. They bring a chair by car; most live nearby. Amanda takes a couple of disinfected garden chairs for those who can't bring a chair. There are 2 participants who are unable to pay at the moment, and 2 people from the original group have stopped attending completely.

The original Friday session has changed to a Zoom class called 'Good Vibes' so as to attract younger people who are less mobile. The Zoom class can include up to 24 participants including the instructor. Amanda's husband is a trained Level 3 personal trainer fitness instructor, and he sits with her, observes and corrects.

At the Zoom class there are some men, partners, and some new participants.

### What made you decide to continue classes/ activities during lockdown. Did you think about just stopping?

Amanda stopped the classes on 23rd March because she knew people had health issues and she did not want to put them at risk. She was devastated at having to do this, but some participants persisted in asking for the classes to continue and with the help of a participant

she had begun running trial Zoom sessions by the end of that week.

The CKSF group Zoom classes are about the same in number as the in person class, with 10 -18 regular participants. Attendees at the indoor and outdoor groups are different, with the exception of a few crossovers. The former general exercise classes continue on Zoom, and numbers for these have increased.

### Do you have any concerns that moving online has excluded people? In what way might they have been excluded?

About 8 people stopped from the original 'Happy Heart' gym group and out of those Amanda has lost touch with only 2. The others moved onto the Zoom class. Those that did not have the technology or did not want to use Zoom have moved to the outdoor group.

### How does it feel running the class online? Have you had to get used to it? What have you learnt?

Amanda has been able to incorporate some floor exercises in the Zoom class as people have furniture at home. She has learnt to use an online booking system, before it was pen and paper.

For some people knowing only the instructor can see them gives them more confidence as they are not worrying about not keeping up. But they can slack off too!

In order to continue Amanda had to do risk assessments and change her insurance policy. Everyone was asked to renew their consent form and waiver and she had to register emergency contact names and phone numbers in case someone had a seizure or collapsed. Amanda reported that this experience has opened her mind to a lot of things.



» "It makes us all so happy and we love doing it and I love the group [Happy Hearts] as much as they seem to love me. I love talking about it and it's been a lifeline for us all I think."  
- Happy Hearts instructor

### Are you aware of any members that are in contact with each other outside the group, for example staying in touch via Zoom/what's app/email/telephone etc?

Some people were already friends when the Happy Hearts class started in 2019 and there is a 'Whatsapp' group. If someone is not well, a card is sent or somebody would pop round (before lockdown). There was a Christmas meal last year.

Some are carers for elderly parents or someone with dementia, so a class at home can be easier for many participants. Roughly half live alone.

**Have you had to give any additional support to participants, for example regarding practical issues such as how to use the tech, or emotional issues to do with anxiety and so on?**

At each class there is a chat and catch-up session to check-in and make sure everyone is ok.

**What are your hopes for the group in the immediate future (i.e. whilst we are still in some form of Lockdown)?**

Amanda could manage 10 people at each outdoor group, and she is hoping therefore that the numbers permitted could be increased soon. She is going to carry on with the Zoom classes, but is not sure about the gym yet. The gym classes won't restart this year as she does not want to put anyone at risk, especially the outdoor group. She has looked for a covered area but without success.

**What are your hopes for the group in the long term future now?**

Going forward, a lot of attendees are saying that if they return to gym sessions, they would like the option to do zoom classes as well.

Amanda would like to expand the 'Happy Hearts' group. She has a younger friend who is training who might take over the other classes. Amanda would then like to focus on the 'Happy Hearts' group and stretch and mobility fitness as well. She is also doing a BSL course at the moment as she has a deaf client, plus another more specific course in exercise for older people.

Amanda once helped out at a group in Hungerford Community Centre, and the lady who ran it was 87 and there were 40 attendees, some with prosthetic legs. But this lady has retired and the class stopped, so she would like to follow this up as a potential opportunity.

Finally, Amanda would like advice on how she can engage with more people. At the moment people attending are from Whitchurch, Bedminster, Brislington and a few from Pensford.

**Would you be able to ask some participants for feedback for us?**

Without Amanda knowing, the 'Happy Hearts' group along with the general fitness group got together to put Amanda forward for a community fitness award. She has just been nominated as one of the finalists for 2 categories. One is for South West fitness instructor 2020 and the other is the inclusivity award for making fitness inclusive for different age groups and abilities. 28 pages of testimonials were submitted about her and the winner will be chosen in October.

» *"I gave got BAB to thank for [the award nominations] as well as Kick-Start which helped me do more in that area and that has been recognised by the people and they are grateful for it."*  
- Happy Hearts instructor

**Participant testimonials**

» *"Amanda is the most inspirational person I have met, making individual adjustments for people's needs. She is so much fun which gives you the feel good factor."*

» *"Amanda brings great fun to our exercise class and is a very caring instructor."*

» *"I joined Amanda's 'Happy Hearts' after years of inactivity and was nervous about being part of a class and my fitness level. Immediately Amanda put me at ease. Her classes are amazing. She varies her exercises each week, she explains why we are doing each exercise and targets the exercise to meet the needs of 60+ bodies. We laugh throughout and support each other, regardless of our expertise. I come away from each class with a feeling of positivity and wellbeing I haven't had for years. I can feel the difference in my fitness level and my mental wellbeing since joining her classes. She is a skilled instructor but more than that, she is a thoroughly lovely person too"*

» *"Amanda is an amazing teacher. She knows your limits and helps with advice. Our class has lots of laughs. I never thought that I would be able to box at 74!"*

» *"4 words that come to mind when thinking of Amanda are: Inspirational; enthusiastic; encouraging; innovative. She makes each class like a personal training session. She notices how people are doing and always has an alternative to enable them to achieve. I started doing 'Happy Hearts' last year and now have done Rebound, Pure Stretch and Abs Fab. As an overweight lady in my 60s she makes me believe that I can achieve a good fitness level again and doesn't make me feel my age! I think it's great how she has adapted her classes to still deliver during the lockdown"*

» *"I was attending 'Happy Hearts' on a Friday and had just started Rebound until lockdown. Amanda has a unique quality as a fitness instructor, that is empathy. A quality which brings out the full potential in all at her classes. She is doing what she does for us and herself, together we share this wonderful experience"*

» *"...Happy Hearts" is wonderful. Amanda is so positive, enthusiastic, the sessions are a delight and everyone engages. At present, during "Lock Down", we have our Friday classes online on ZOOM. Can you imagine Grannies on ZOOM ..... but it really works.....well done Amanda. Thank You xxx"*

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# Conclusion >>

Although 2020 has brought with it many challenges, some of these case studies effectively illustrate potential opportunities and unexpected outcomes of the lockdown period. Although not all groups have managed to continue during this time, this appears to be largely due to a lack of resources rather than a lack of appetite from participants, and with support - and perhaps some funding - it is possible that other groups will be able to follow suit.

Of course there is a danger that some older people will still be left behind, so it is imperative that measures are put in place to ensure that everyone has access to the internet and the appropriate technology to allow them to join online classes and activities. Time and effort must now be invested in this, and if successfully achieved then the impact of the virus on loneliness and social isolation might at least be mitigated to some extent through an increased use of technology and engagement in the virtual world.



