

# Community Development with Older People in Greater Brislington

## Evaluation of Bristol Charities' Bristol Ageing Better project

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Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) funded a series of 10 projects focused on Community Development for Older People (CDOP). **This document contains the executive summary for the evaluation of the CDOP project in Greater Brislington, delivered by Bristol Charities.**

This evaluation was conducted by UWE Bristol and a team of Community Researchers. The full evaluation report will be available in Spring 2021 on the BAB website.

### Background to the project

One aspect of the BAB programme was the commissioning of projects in strategic parts of the city with the aim of working with older people in order to make those **communities engaging, vibrant and age-friendly places to grow old**. The aim was to **empower older people to participate in the co-production of their own activities**, as well as to **provide opportunities** for those individuals to engage in their communities through volunteering or by organising and actively participating in groups within their local area.

Greater Brislington was one such locality, having been selected due to a lack of previous investment in the area. Bristol Charities subsequently submitted a tender to deliver the work, and were successfully awarded the Community Development for Older People (CDOP) in Greater Brislington contract in 2017, to be **delivered over a three year period**.

### Executive Summary

The Greater Brislington area benefited from a number of successful initiatives over the period that Bristol Charities were running the CDOP project, and the Community Development Worker (CDW) was a **consistent presence in the area** throughout. The CDW began the project by walking the area, getting to know it, **finding out what was already going on locally and where appropriate venues and resources** could be found. He built **strong relationships with local people**, and as a result was later able to provide compelling evidence of impact through successful completions of the BAB wellbeing questionnaire with older residents.

One of the many successes of the CDOP work in Greater Brislington was the **publication of a number of local resources**, including a **'What's On Guide'** that included information for the over 50s; a **toilet map** of the local area; and a leaflet that aimed to address some of the **perceived barriers to participation** in activities for older people. The CDW managed to find **sponsors** for the 'What's On Guide' which **helped it to**

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**be sustainable** after the project was concluded, and had the added benefit of widening the audience (and therefore advertising revenue) by including the details of all activities for all ages in the area. The project had also begun to develop some **innovative ways of reaching out to isolated older people** towards the end of the project, such as using local tradespeople who may come into contact with such individuals in their homes as a first point of contact to signpost to local activities.

The project was successful in holding a number of **taster days and pop-up events** in order to showcase local activities and these **proved to be effective in increasing attendance**. The CDW was **mindful of sustainability** and consciously **built in strategies from the start of the project to ensure activities were viable long-term**. If some activities proved to be unpopular they were adapted accordingly, or if attendance was low then participants were encouraged to bring friends and family along.

Having originally started the project with the idea of **creating a steering group** for older people, when numbers of those attending these meetings started to decrease the group was incorporated into the wider 'Greater Brislington Together' group. This – along with the popularity of the less segregated 'What's On Guide' (as opposed to one specifically for the over 50s) feeds into a **recurring theme across the BAB programme about whether it is necessary to single out older people for targeted activities**.

Using **validated before and after questionnaire measures**, the Greater Brislington project was able to show positive outcomes for **reduced loneliness, and improved health, wellbeing and social contact**. This was a good achievement for the project given the limited time and resources and the challenges involved in measuring change for individuals in community development practice.

Finally, where other CDOP projects struggled with staffing or management issues, the Bristol Charities **staffing structure remained strong** throughout the funded period, allowing **consistency in delivery** across the three years. The CDW was well supported by his line manager during this time, and was given **sufficient support and freedom to deliver a project that fully embraced the BAB 'test and learn' ethos**.

## Key learning points and recommendations

1. **'What's On Guides'** with a specific section for the over 50s age group are a very effective way of advertising activities. These can fund themselves through advertising.
2. **Over 50s forums** can be an effective way to both consult with older people but also to publicise local activities. Care must be taken to ensure that people **stay engaged** however, as there can be some drop off if people are solely attending for information purposes.
3. **Sustainability** needs to be embedded in projects from the start. This is perhaps best achieved through **successful community engagement**.
4. Need to support a **wide range of activities** to suit as many people as possible across a **range of sub-categories within the 'older' age group**, and recognise that some people may not identify as belonging to the 'older' age category at all.
5. **Innovative ways of reaching out to the lonely and socially isolated** need to be tested and embraced (for example the layman's guide aimed at hairdressers, cafes, local tradespeople, etc. to signpost issues in their clients to key agencies). Either through choice, apprehension or other barriers, those who are lonely and socially isolated **may not feel able to attend activities without prior support**.
6. Older people need to be encouraged to be **proactive in the recruitment of new members** to activities if they want them to be sustainable long term.
7. Continue to **build links with social prescribing services locally** in order to ensure that some project activities are sustainable through project partners.
8. Increase the number of **intergenerational activities** – this will allow diverse groups to socialise together whilst also sharing the funding across different funding streams.
9. **Taster days** can be a great way to pique people's interest in activities.
10. **Better transport links** need to be established for specific activities that are aimed at the less mobile, but also on a broader level to increase accessibility for all through the existing transport network.

Further BAB learning resources including the full CDOP Greater Brislington evaluation report (available Spring 2021) can be found at:

<http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/learning-and-evaluation-hub/>

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