

Good Friends for All

Age-friendly and
inclusive volunteering
grant programme
evaluation

January 2021



In partnership with:

About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

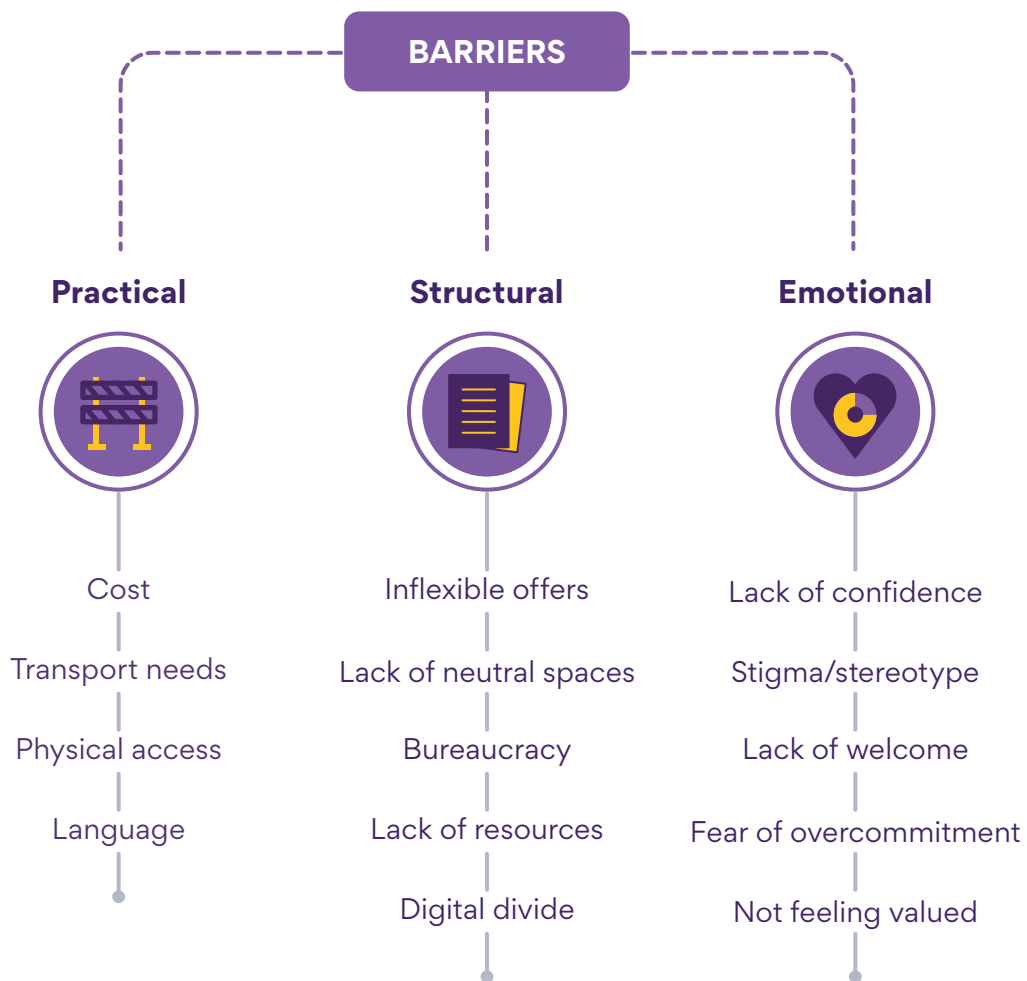
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Introduction

The Centre for Ageing Better, in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) undertook a review into community contributions in later life in October 2018. The review found that many older people, who would benefit most from contributing to their communities, encounter practical, structural and emotional barriers that prevent them from taking part, or from remaining involved as life changes. It called on voluntary organisations to do more to tackle these barriers and set out six key principles for achieving this.

Barriers to participation



Age-friendly, inclusive volunteering is:



Flexible and responsive



Valued and appreciated



Enabled and supported



Meaningful and purposeful



Sociable and connected



Makes good use of my strengths

Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering grant programme

Following the review, the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering fund was set up to put these principles into practice. The programme grant-funded five projects to develop and document models of good practice in supporting older people's voluntary and community activity. The focus was on those most at risk of missing out on the benefits of contributing to their communities.

The fund has three priorities:

- Sustaining lifelong contributions and helping people remain involved throughout major life changes such as bereavement, caring or developing a health condition.
- Helping people connect to and take part in voluntary activities and opportunities that suit their life circumstances, including informal and self-organised contributions.
- Providing practical support to include older people who currently face barriers to volunteering (for example due to health, language, and cultural or social factors).

The project initially intended to only address the priority ‘Helping people connect to opportunities to suit their life circumstances’. However, in practice, it had some impact on all priorities.

Each project received approximately £50,000 to run over a one-year period between April 2019 and March 2020.¹ The grant programme adopted a grant-plus model, supporting projects to maximise their learning and outcomes through project development, action-learning and evaluation support. The focus was as much on development, learning, sharing good practice and sustainability as on immediate outcomes and impact (the grant-plus model was funded through additional funding from the Centre for Ageing Better above the £50,000 for each project).

The scale and activities of the projects are different, each working with older people in different circumstances and settings and using different approaches. This provided opportunities to learn about, and measure the impact of, different models of tackling barriers to community contributions in later life and supporting older people’s voluntary and community activity.

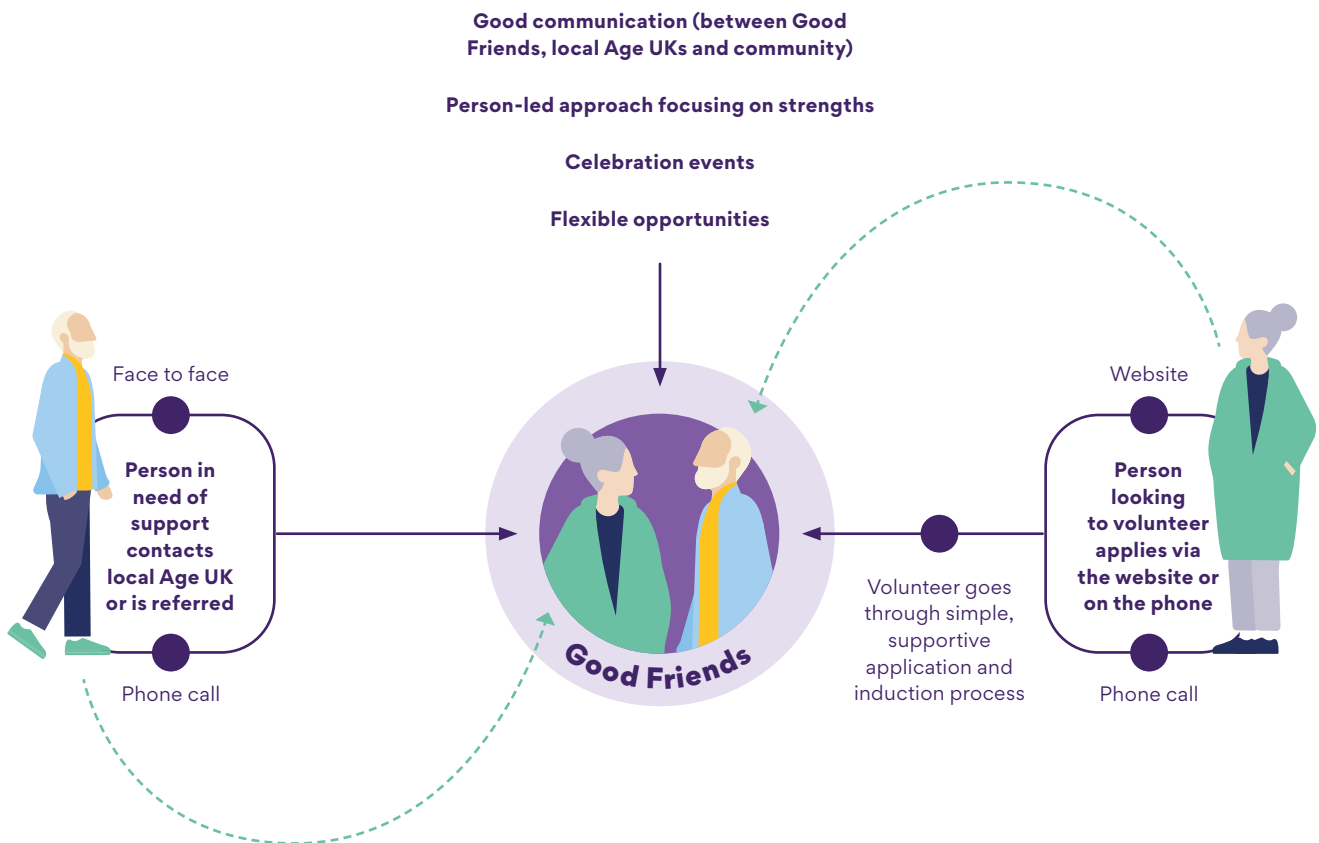
¹ The end of the project and the evaluation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted on completion of the project. Consequently, this delayed some evaluation activity and access to information, although most of the evaluation activity was conducted prior to the lockdown.

Good Friends for All

The Good Friends for All project builds on, and learns from, a similar scheme in Darlington and involvement in the Centre for Ageing Better’s original community research and review into age-friendly and inclusive volunteering.

Age UK North Craven worked with Age UK North Yorkshire and Darlington, and other local partners, including Settle Timebank, to implement Good Friends in Craven (both North and South Craven) and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering. The project builds on an existing befriending scheme in North Craven and other volunteering taking place including through Settle Timebank. The project also took place within the context of North Yorkshire County Council’s Nurturing Neighbourhoods programme, which is also supporting the scheme. The ‘for All’ element of the project references embedding the six age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles within the existing Good Friends model established in Darlington, and extending it to new areas.

Good Friends works by matching together people self-referred or referred into the service with a volunteer “Good Friend” based on their needs and interests who can help with a range of issues.



Learning and evaluation

A ‘light-touch’, independent, evaluation of the project has been conducted to capture learning and identify emerging impact. This is a one-year developmental programme and therefore the focus is more on evidence of good-practice models that can overcome practical barriers and embed the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles, with only an expectation of emerging individual and organisational impact. The light touch evaluation and the length of time that the project ran makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether the project has led to working with volunteers from more diverse backgrounds than would have otherwise happened and/or whether the volunteering experience (despite being good) was better than it would have been otherwise. However, the findings do illustrate how practice has been adapted in line with the principles of age friendly and inclusive volunteering and began to explore a new approach that hopefully with more time would lead to a greater diversity of volunteers and a better volunteering experience.

Specifically, the evaluation sought to capture evidence about how the model has:

- Helped meet the fund’s priorities.
- Overcome practical, structural and emotional barriers to community contributions and volunteering.
- Tested, validated and embedded the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles.
- Impacted on individuals and organisations involved in the project.

Monitoring and evaluation has been embedded in the programme and project from the outset. This includes the following activity, which has informed this report:

- Quarterly monitoring reports and other documentary evidence provided by the projects to the Centre for Ageing Better.
- Co-creation of a Theory of Change working document to help shape the delivery of the project, establish expected outputs, outcomes and impacts, and provide a guide to evaluating the model (see appendix) (the Theory of Change was co-produced with the project at the development stage of the programme, and subsequently some elements may have evolved over time).
- Learning logs maintained by the project to capture learning, ongoing feedback, progress and impact.

- Development of evaluation materials to capture evaluation insight from individuals and organisations involved in the project.² This includes interviews with 12 Good Friends and the people they support, and stakeholders involved in delivering the project and other stakeholders and organisations involved.

² These materials were co-produced with the project and Centre for Ageing Better and are available for use in the continued monitoring and evaluation of the project and model. They were used by the evaluators towards the end of the project to independently capture learning and impacts through face-to-face, telephone and digital methods with individuals and key stakeholders involved in the project and programme.

Learning and impact

What activities have taken place? Process, challenges and learning

Project leads found **participating in the programme a positive experience**, with the grant-plus elements of the programme enhancing project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation:

“It’s been a very positive experience being part of the programme. It’s a unique programme to be involved in, where they provide you with lots of training, help and support. It is great to have reflective time and they have been a very supportive funder. They’ve also been flexible, letting us as a local organisation determine how best to use the funding, whereas some funders are overly prescriptive.” Stakeholder

“I found that being part of the programme was like taking part in a mini-MA in volunteering. There’s been lots of helpful support, which we have found useful for this project and as an organisation, and we’ve learnt so much. The theory of change and other support helped with developing our approach and keeping us focused on the outcomes.” Stakeholder

The project identified a **key challenge creating a spectrum of volunteering opportunities, from informal through to formal, to suit different circumstances:**



Two new Good Friends for All schemes set up in North Craven (building on an existing befriending scheme) and South Craven (building on an existing scheme but making it more age-friendly and inclusive).



80 Good Friends for All matches in North Craven area alone.



Person-centred support to ‘Good Friends’ to help overcome barriers and promote age-friendly and inclusive volunteering practice through interview/guided conversations, inductions, quarterly ‘Good Friends’ meetings and training.

“We had hoped to create different ways for people to volunteer, a portfolio of flexible volunteering options. The befriending part of Good Friends is very important, but it is a bigger commitment and more formal, although the extent and type of support can vary. However, we always imagined more informal ways of volunteering sitting alongside this, like micro-volunteering and helping your neighbour. It is something we want to work on because it is part of creating that volunteer pathway, encouraging people to volunteer informally and then moving into more formal volunteering. But it didn't really take off, partly because it didn't really seem to need to happen [as much as initially anticipated by the project]. People just do that sort of informal help for friends and neighbours without needing involvement from another organisation like Age UK, while the main priority is supporting people with higher needs, which requires a more hands-on and committed approach.” Stakeholder

Related in part to the above, the scheme found it **challenging to recruit new volunteers:**

“It's difficult to recruit volunteers to meet the demand. We did a lot of marketing, including presentations, radio, posters, newsletters. We've struggled to grab people. We've realised there are a lot of people helping their neighbours and friends informally and don't see the need to sign-up to a scheme like this. We do need to keep promoting it and thinking about how we can do things differently and offer different ways for people to get involved.” Stakeholder

The project was building on an existing befriending project in Craven, adapting an existing Good Friends model in a neighbouring area (Darlington) to North Craven and South Craven, and delivering this project alongside another funding pot (North Yorkshire County Council's Nurturing Neighbourhoods programme). Consequently, it is not always possible through this evaluation to discern the impact of the Age-Friendly and Inclusive Volunteering programme's funding and support, over and above other activity. However, the main focus is whether Good Friends for All helps overcome barriers and embeds age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practice. The emerging evidence suggests that the Good Friends for All scheme has developed positively in this regard.

A further challenge of the project was working across two areas, with two different organisations. Age UK North Craven led the project, while Age UK North Yorkshire and Darlington delivered the project in South Craven (Skipton). The project lead from Age UK North Yorkshire and Darlington left their post after the development stage of the project. There was limited direct involvement with the programme delivery from the area thereafter. This arrangement meant that the South Craven part of the project may not have addressed barriers and embedded the principles as much as North Craven, and also may not have benefited as much from the wider programme support.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of the Good Friends for All scheme

The scheme has reported that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been an increase in need, including requests for help with basic support such as food shopping and getting prescriptions, as well as supporting people that are isolated or lonely. This increase in need has been met by a substantial growth in new volunteers from across the age range. Volunteering has taken place flexibly, including over the phone and on-line. Age UK North Craven reports that the work over the past year to develop Good Friends for All and embed the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles has provided the platform for being able to meet the challenges of the pandemic. This includes supporting more people in need, and efficiently recruiting, inducting and supporting new volunteers to provide help flexibly, suiting the different circumstances of volunteers and meeting the different needs of local older people.

How have barriers to age-friendly and inclusive volunteering been overcome?

The Good Friends for All scheme **appreciated the importance of reducing barriers to volunteering amongst older people:**

“We want to make it as easy as we can to help people volunteer, so we can help more people. This means reducing barriers and being more supportive and flexible, more person-centred in our approach. This will help us attract and retain more volunteers, which is important because the demand is there for help.” Stakeholder

Practical barriers have been overcome through making the volunteer application and induction process much less bureaucratic:

“We want to promote flexible volunteering and that should start at the application stage. We’ve worked on reducing down the requirements, simplifying the process and making it easier and better, and also trying to be much more supportive. This includes at the induction stage, which is now about supporting people to be good volunteers instead of going through lots of rules and dos and don’ts. We think this will be less off-putting and create better volunteers. These are good processes relevant for all ages and communities volunteering.” Stakeholder

“I said I wanted to volunteer as a Good Friend and within a couple of weeks I’d been matched with someone. It felt quite easy. I didn’t have to fill in lots of papers or go through a long interview or training process. It may have helped because they already knew me, but everything seemed proper and I felt like I had the support I needed.” Good Friend

Structural barriers have been considered by trying to make volunteering opportunities flexible, albeit within the constraints of a relatively formal volunteering role:

“Essentially it is a befriending role, which comes with certain commitments and responsibilities. However, we try to be as flexible as we can and to be needs led. So it’s not about having to see someone at the same time and same day each week. It can vary, depending on the needs of the person and the availability of the volunteer. It is then just about good communication and understanding. In that way it is more of an informal and flexible befriending role.” Stakeholder

“They go with you to meet the person at first, to make sure you’re right for each other. But after that it is mainly up to you about when and how you help someone. I like that flexibility. I don’t want the commitment of having to do something at a certain time and date. I find that off-putting. But I do have the time to regularly help someone, at a time that suits them and me.” Good Friend

The project has increased the amount of support provided to volunteers, to help overcome **emotional barriers**. This includes quarterly meetings of Good Friends to provide ongoing support, training, and help to build connections and peer relationships between different Good Friends:

“The support meetings and an open-door approach are all about trying to support our volunteers. We want our volunteers to feel part of something, both a Good Friends scheme, but also the wider Age UK family and the local community. The feedback we’ve received from our volunteers is that they feel supported, better looked after.” Stakeholder

“The people at Age UK regularly check in to make sure everything is ok and to see if I need any help or support. I rarely do, but it is nice to know the help is there if you need it. It means you don’t feel alone.” Good Friend

Reducing barriers and increasing access to volunteering opportunities

Although the project said it struggled to recruit new volunteers, it has worked to reduce barriers and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles. There are examples of where this has facilitated the involvement of new volunteers and provided strong foundations for the future (and the scheme subsequently reports that this has proved the case with the substantial increase in volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic):

“Our approach is much more flexible and supportive now. We can recruit, induct and support volunteers quicker, hopefully not scaring anyone off and getting them helping people sooner. We have managed to recruit some new volunteers during the last year, but not as many as we’d hoped, although we do not have lots of clients waiting for a Good Friend. Nonetheless, our main challenge is recruiting new volunteers, which is something we will continue to work on over time and we hope that the [age-friendly and inclusive volunteering] principles we’ve adopted will place us in a good position to attract and retain new volunteers in the future.” Stakeholder [before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the growth of volunteers became known]

How have age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles been promoted and embedded?

Good Friends for All **sought to embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles into its model:**

“We’ve adopted a more flexible approach to volunteering, which is person-centric. We don’t judge or let age get in the way of volunteering. This meant trying to remove barriers, and be flexible and supportive.” Stakeholder

Flexible and responsive:

The Good Friends for All scheme sought to make the volunteer application and induction process flexible, to remove barriers and avoid putting off new volunteers. It also aimed to make volunteering flexible, so that volunteers and clients could determine the type and frequency of support:

“The initial process was very simple, which was helpful. I didn’t have to fill in lots of forms or go through a lengthy training or induction programme. Instead had a verbal conversation with them, which felt structured and considered, but was also light touch. It meant that I wasn’t put off by anything and could start volunteering quicker.” Good Friend

“I like that I have the independence as a volunteer to decide when and how I should support someone. You don’t have to go each week or do a certain thing. I help when it’s needed and when it suits. Sometimes I may visit weekly if needed, and other times I may just make a phone call. It just depends.” Good Friend

Enabled and supported:

The Good Friends for All scheme tried to be supportive to volunteers, partly through regular group Good Friends meetings and also through an open-door policy, as well as initially facilitating the first meeting between the Good Friend and the client:

“The meetings are a good idea. They try to cover something different each time, to help develop your skills. And you get to meet other Good Friends, sharing your stories and learning from one another. It makes you feel like you are supported, part of something bigger and not just acting on your own.” Good Friend

“They try to support and help you and I’m not sure I’d have carried on without that help. They facilitate the first meeting so you and the person you’re supporting can make sure you’re right for each other and to set the foundations for a future positive relationship. They’re [Age UK] resourceful and helpful, picking up the phone to you if you have any questions or need advice, and calling you regularly to see how things are going.” Good Friend

Sociable and connected:

Being a Good Friend helps volunteers feel connected to their community and create new friendships, both directly through the people they support and with one another, through the quarterly meetings and other activities:

“I didn’t know a soul when I moved to the area, so I decided to make an effort and use volunteering to help settle in. I like helping people and volunteering and enjoy my visits [to the person supported]. We’re now friends and in a way I don’t see it as volunteering any more. I see it as visiting a friend. I’ve also got to know other Good Friends and other people at Age UK. It is a bit like a family and it makes you feel part of a community.” Good Friend

Valued and appreciated:

Good Friends said they can see the direct impact they are having on the people they support, which makes them feel valued and appreciated, and helps sustain their involvement. They also said they feel appreciated and valued by Age UK/ Good Friends for All scheme itself:

“ My second match was a woman in her 90s that lives on her own. She’d just had a fall and her confidence was knocked. I supported her to move to more suitable accommodation and she’s now in a much better place and very happy. She said to me ‘It’s like God sent you to me’, which says it all about how she felt with the help. It made me feel great, very appreciated. It feels good to be appreciated by someone. I love doing it, I really do. You can see the impact you’re having. It’s the highlight of my week. It can be addictive helping people and makes you want to do more.” Good Friend

“ They [Age UK North Craven] keep in regular touch with me to see how my visits are going and if I need any help. They tell me, and so do the relatives of the person I visit, that they really value my help. I’m not so sure I’m as helpful as they say... But it is nice to hear that you’re appreciated.” Good Friend

Meaningful and purposeful:

Good Friends said volunteering with the scheme gave them a purpose and that they felt like they were having a meaningful impact on other people’s lives:

“ I’m retired and after leading a busy professional life, I wanted to stay active and have things in my life that keep me busy and give me a purpose each day. Volunteering as a Good Friend is one of those. Although it is partly a selfish thing to keep me busy, it is also something where I can make a difference, however small, and have a positive impact too.” Good Friend

Makes good use of my strengths:

The Good Friends for All scheme facilitates a matching process between the Good Friend and the person supported, based on a holistic assessment of the client and getting to know the Good Friend:

“ We try to make sure people are a good match, that they have similar interests and things in common or that the need of the client can be met by the Good Friend. It isn’t a science and it isn’t always successful, but more often than not it works out well and leads to a better experience for all concerned, and hopefully better outcomes.” Stakeholder

“One of the things I liked about it all was that they matched me with someone suitable for me and vice versa. We’re a good fit. For example, I’m a dog person and the person I support needs their dog walked. Their dog is their life. They benefit from me walking their dog, which gives them peace of mind and saves them money, and I get my dog fix, as well as some exercise. It feels like a positive situation for all of us.” Good Friend

What have been the impacts on individuals and organisations?

Individuals

Good Friends said they had a **positive experience of volunteering through the scheme**, feeling supported, enjoying the role and hoping that they are having a positive impact on the people they help:

“I enjoy volunteering and being a Good Friend. You feel supported by Age UK and the other Good Friends I know, which makes for a better experience and probably makes you a better volunteer too. I hope that I’m having a positive impact. I wasn’t sure at first, but I’ve seen a very lonely and sad person, who I have seen improve over time in their demeanour and well-being.” Good Friend

Good Friends also said **volunteering through the scheme had a positive impact on their lives**, including their health and well-being:

“I personally get a lot out of volunteering. Helping people, helps me. It gets me out and about, meeting new people. It gives me a purpose each day and I feel good about helping people and having a positive impact on their lives. In that way, volunteering with Good Friends is a mutually beneficial thing.” Good Friend

There are several examples of the Good Friends for All scheme having a **positive impact on people supported through the scheme**. It provides practical and emotional support, helping reduce loneliness and isolation, creating social connections, increasing confidence and helping people be more active:

“One of my best examples is an elderly lady who had lived alone, lived far away from her family who were worried about her, and she had various physical and mental health issues. She was referred by another service and we matched her with a Good Friend. The Good Friend visits regularly, sometimes just to check-in for 5 minutes or for a quick cup of tea, and sometimes to run an errand like popping to the shops together, or taking her out for a walk. We’ve also

worked with the Good Friend and the client to find other activities for the lady to do, take part in clubs and other groups, to help keep her active. The arrangement is fairly informal and flexible, there isn't a set time or date, but the client knows the Good Friend is there for her if needed. The family members feel reassured by the support and the professionals that referred her are also happy. Most importantly the client tells us she is happy. It's improved her mental health, she's less anxious, more confident and getting out more. She's more independent. And she doesn't call the doctors as much. It shows that something quite small, a fairly light touch intervention, can have a really positive impact." Stakeholder

"My mum was lonely and didn't know many people, being new to the area. The Good Friend has been amazing, they've made all the difference. It's had a huge impact on my mum. They've become friends and my mum looks forward to the Good Friend coming. It's improved my mum's confidence having someone visit her regularly." Family member of client

Age UK North Craven, Age UK North Yorkshire and Darlington and other organisations

The project involved three key organisations – the two local Age UK organisations, and Settle Timebank. **The process of participating in the programme and delivering the project helped form stronger relationships, which can be built upon in the future** both in delivering Good Friends and also other initiatives:

"Taking part in the programme has brought us closer together as organisations. It has helped foster good partnership working, which is a positive for us working together in the future, both on this project and others." Stakeholder

The programme has helped **develop the capacity of participating organisations to develop and deliver services and projects:**

"There was so much support, there was almost not enough time to take advantage of it all, but it was a real positive of taking part in the programme. The programme and this support has challenged our approaches and built our capacity across almost all aspects of project development and delivery in the organisation." Stakeholder

The project **attempted to promote age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles amongst local partners and organisations**. This appears well-received and the intention is to use a toolkit and other resources developed from the project to further promote and embed the principles:

“ We’ve presented at, and talked to, several organisations about Good Friends for All and age-friendly and inclusive principles. It was well-received, but didn’t go any further than that. We’re hoping to use the toolkit as a way to then further promote the principles and support local organisations to be more age-friendly in the future.” Stakeholder

Participating in the programme has helped further **promote and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practice**, within both local Age UKs:

“ It’s been transformational for volunteers and clients. Being part of the programme has helped change our culture, change the way we look at people. We’re now more person-centred. The volunteer is now king. And we now look at clients and ask ourselves if they can be supported into volunteering. We’ve tried to embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles in the organisation, to do things differently. This benefits the Good Friends scheme, as well as all our volunteering activity.” Stakeholder

“ As an Age UK I think we naturally, perhaps without thinking, adopt these principles within our work. But participating in the programme helped increase awareness and understanding of such principles, and gave us the space and platform to look at barriers and work with our staff to embed the principles more into our work. They’ve [the barriers and principles] moved from being in the background to being in the forefront of our planning and work.” Stakeholder

What is the sustainability for the future?

The partners involved in the project are **committed to delivering Good Friends for All in both North and South Craven, and funding remains in place through other sources**:

“We want to keep doing it [delivering Good Friends for All]. We see it as a very important project, meeting local need. We have the North Yorkshire County Council contract, and our residual income, and so the funding is secure for the immediate future. We want to grow it organically, increasing volunteers and new clients by about two people each month. We also want to make sure that the person-centred approach is at the forefront of this, and ensure that we continue to provide flexible and varied volunteering opportunities to suit different people.” Stakeholder

“Our aim is to build and sustain Good Friends. It is an important and successful project, which we want to grow. This funding [Age-Friendly and Inclusive Volunteering programme] has helped us develop Good Friends in Skipton and we can now use other funding to carry it on. The North Yorkshire County Council funding is until 2022, which means the immediate future is fairly secure.” Stakeholder

There are **plans to improve the Good Friends for All scheme, based on feedback from volunteers**. This includes potentially introducing a buddying scheme, to supplement the quarterly meetings, and allowing visits seven days a week:

“We’re considering introducing a buddying or mentoring scheme so that new Good Friends can be supported by more experienced ones. We’re trying to make our volunteers feel as supported as possible, so they have a good volunteering experience. The meetings are a good idea, but a buddying approach is more personal and means that there is more support in between the quarterly meetings. It is also another way of adding value, by creating relationships and building community by bringing people together to support one another.” Stakeholder

“Some of us Good Friends have spoken to Age UK about supporting visits seven days a week. The weekend is the time when people may be at their loneliest and it is also the time when some people have more time to help and support others, which may mean that more people can volunteer. Currently, as I understand it, they don’t allow visits at the weekend because there is no one at Age UK to support us if there’s a problem. That seems like a barrier to volunteering and helping people, and besides, we very rarely, if at all, need support on a day-to-day basis from Age UK once relationships are established. I understand they are thinking about how they can move to seven days, which is good because it means they’re listening to us as volunteers.” Good Friend

The scheme is also **considering how it can make volunteering more flexible**, offering different opportunities, including how it can support existing clients into volunteering:

“There’s more we can do to make volunteering more flexible and offer volunteering opportunities to suit different circumstances. This can include finding ways to help our clients into informal, flexible volunteering opportunities. This can help their health and well-being and set them on a pathway to further volunteering.” Stakeholder

The partners also plan to **promote and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practice amongst other local organisations**:

“We’ve been promoting the principles to other organisations and we will continue to do so in the future. So far there’s been interest, but not much more than that. We will carry on acting as an advocate for age-friendly and inclusive volunteering in the local area. This will happen naturally as we engage with different organisations and grow Good Friends over time.” Stakeholder

“There are lots of organisations fighting for volunteers and we need to work together better. We’re working on bringing together other volunteering organisations to work more closely together and more strategically. The aim is to draw a pathway for volunteers, so there are different activities and routes they can take, helping recruit, share and support volunteers more effectively. As part of this process we intend to be encouraging organisations to think about age-friendly and inclusive volunteering.” Stakeholder

The Good Friends for All scheme reports that the COVID-19 pandemic has ‘revolutionised’ both the demand for the scheme, and the supply of new volunteers. The work over the last year, and embedding the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles, has placed the scheme in a position to support local people during the pandemic, facilitate the recruitment of new volunteers and the consequent growth of the scheme, a situation it intends to build on in the future.

Case study



Positive experiences and outcomes for the Good Friend, the client and their family

William³ decided to volunteer with Good Friends for All to keep himself busy, and give something back:

“I wanted to keep active. It’s important for the mind and body. I had time on my hands and heard about being a Good Friend and thought I’d sign-up. I felt like I could help because I’m still fit and I like to meet new people. I’ve had a good life and career and felt that I should give something back to the community and make a small difference if I can.”

William was matched with Arthur⁴, aged in his 90s and who lived alone in a rural setting, with his family not close by. William has found the volunteering experience positive, feels well supported by Age UK and felt that he has had a positive impact on Arthur:

“It’s not easy because Arthur is quite frail and not particularly engaged, but I’ve worked hard at it. There’s no point starting something if you don’t try your best. I visit once every two weeks and really think about what to do, to try to make it interesting for Arthur. I think about what he’s interested in and prepare things to show or speak to him about, which seems to work quite well. I constantly wonder if I’m having a positive impact, but he does seem to be getting something out of it. Age UK have been very supportive, giving me guidance and they keep on telling me I’m doing a really good job. I think they’re flattering me, but it is nice to hear that I may be doing something right, which encourages me to carry on.”

³ This is a pseudonym.

⁴ This is a pseudonym.

Arthur's daughter is very pleased with the support provided, which she feels is having a positive impact on Arthur, as well as her whole family:

“I think Good Friends is an excellent scheme. My dad lives remotely, in a rural area. He lives on his own and is very lonely. He's become an introvert and doesn't do much. The Good Friend is caring and brings things for my dad to talk about. It gives him something to focus on for an hour or two. My dad has dementia but after the Good Friend has been he remembers the visit and seems more positive and alert. It reassures me and my dad that there is someone that comes to visit and is looking out for him. And Age UK are also very supportive and provide advice about support that's available to help us. If it wasn't for William [the Good Friend], the only people my dad would see are me and the neighbour who rents my dad's field, so the help is really important and we're very grateful for it.”

Conclusion

Good Friends for All appears to have a positive impact on the people supported and the volunteers themselves, helping improve social connections, health and well-being and generating a sense of purpose and value.

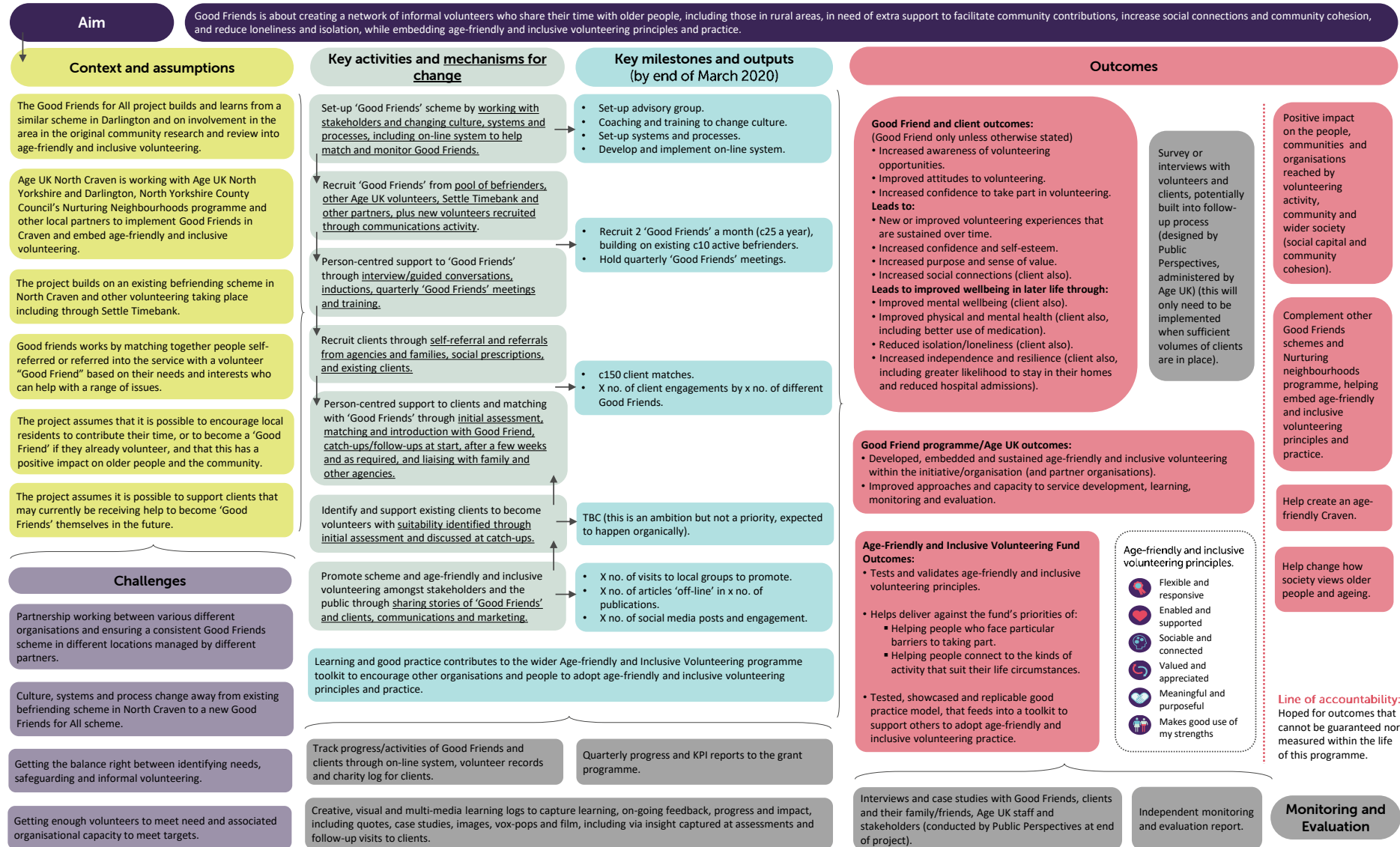
The scheme has been enhanced through efforts to address barriers and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practice, such as trying to increase the support available to volunteers and make volunteering more flexible, so that it suits different circumstances.

The project has highlighted the challenges of attracting new volunteers, although this has changed somewhat following the growth in volunteer numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project has also highlighted the challenges of making changes to long-standing, pre-existing services and models (the project has adopted an existing Good Friends scheme established in a neighbouring area, while it has sought to adapt an existing, long-established befriending scheme in North Craven). Such situations may require a longer-term, gradual, cultural-change approach to embedding age-friendly and inclusive principles and practice in such instances where ingrained systems, processes and attitudes exist, and where working with new partners and establishing new relationships is required.

The project is committed to continuing, developing and growing the scheme using other funding sources. It is also intending to continue promoting and embedding age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and practice within the scheme, the local Age UK partners and amongst other local organisations.

Appendix: Good Friends Theory of Change



Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



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