

Tackling the growing crisis of lonely men: exploring what works through the Time to Shine programme

Introduction

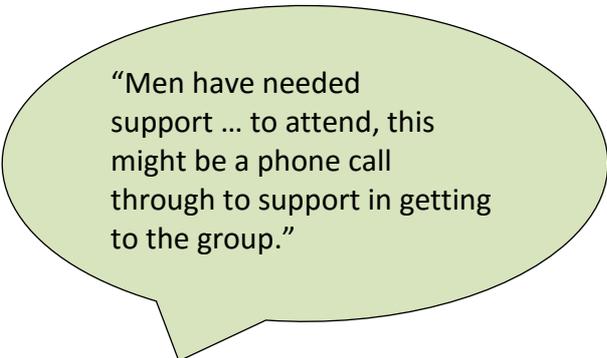
Men are living longer and while this is good news, research indicates that older men are increasingly experiencing loneliness. The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness estimates that eight million men (of all ages) in the UK feel lonely at least once a week, with nearly three million reporting that it is a daily occurrence. One in ten men said they would not admit to feeling lonely. Emerging findings from an ongoing evaluation of a programme in Leeds, called Time to Shine, provide learning on how to support older men who are, or may be at risk of being, lonely.

What is Time to Shine?

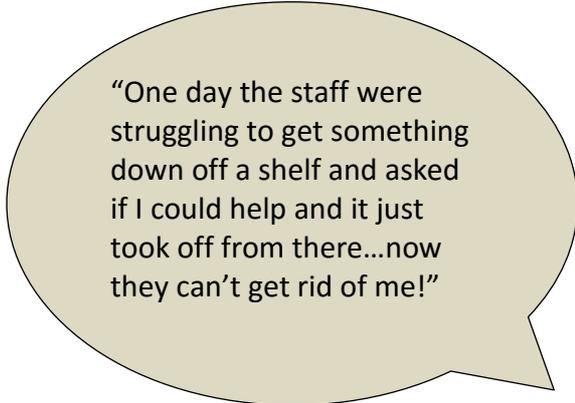
The [Time to Shine](#) programme, run by Leeds Older People's Forum, aims to reduce the loneliness of the older population in Leeds. It is funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better initiative. The support provided through the programme, including provision exclusively for older men, involves a range of activities, from physical pursuits to bringing together older men with similar experiences to volunteering. So far, around one-third of participants supported in the programme are men.

What have we learned from Time to Shine about activities that engage older men?

The provision of support to older men needs to be initiated through effective ways of encouraging them to take up the offer. The success of encouraging older men to participate in Time to Shine has been driven by **promoting activities in venues where men go** (such as the pub or working men's club), **avoiding use of terms with negative connotations** (as some men said they were too proud to ask for help) and ensuring men **feel they have something to offer** (such as by presenting an activity as making a contribution to the organisation). The latter worked especially well for an intervention where men were encouraged to volunteer in a charity shop.



"Men have needed support ... to attend, this might be a phone call through to support in getting to the group."

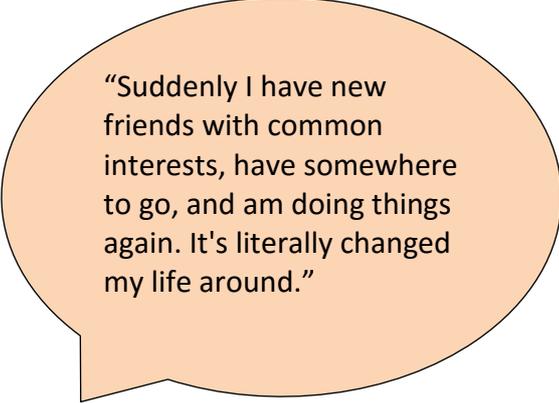


"One day the staff were struggling to get something down off a shelf and asked if I could help and it just took off from there...now they can't get rid of me!"

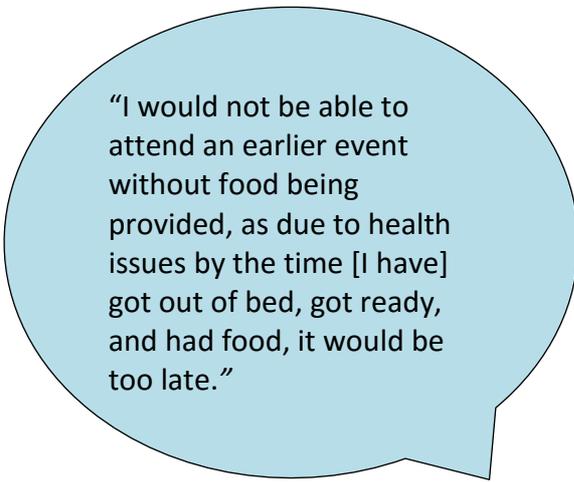
What have we learned from Time to Shine about activities that appeal to older men?

Providing a **range of practical activities** such as gardening or DIY, especially activities that **generate a sense of purpose**, such as enabling them to teach skills to others (ICT training) or help out in a charity shop (Your Warehouse), has successfully encouraged participation. Where the activity has also provided the opportunity to **share skills**, this has provided a way for some men to build their self-esteem.

Creating a supportive environment has also been a driver for encouraging older men to participate in the activity offered. Focus group participants attending The Breakfast Club said that what was on offer was less important than having company, meeting like-minded people, getting out of the house, and not just sitting indoors. In this case, the project supported attendance by providing a free meal, and the coordinator texted men to remind them the activity was taking place (this worked particularly well for those living with dementia, or who struggled to plan due to ill health).



“Suddenly I have new friends with common interests, have somewhere to go, and am doing things again. It's literally changed my life around.”



“I would not be able to attend an earlier event without food being provided, as due to health issues by the time [I have] got out of bed, got ready, and had food, it would be too late.”

Are there other examples of projects which have successfully engaged men?

The importance of creating a supportive environment where older men feel a sense of purpose has been demonstrated through other initiatives too. For example, Men in Sheds, which offers a space where men can feel comfortable and at ease, share skills, socialise and carry out activities that bring benefit to the local community, is a popular activity amongst older men. Many local Age UKs run Men in Shed clubs for older men in their locality.

Forthcoming Research on Older Men at the Margins

Though it is growing, the evidence base on the best ways to support older men who are, or may be at risk of being, lonely, is still limited. In partnership with Age UK, Dr Paul Willis at University of Bristol is leading a 2 year qualitative study called [Older Men at the Margins](#). The purpose of the study is to identify ways of alleviating loneliness (and reducing isolation) for men aged 65 and over across hard-to-engage and marginalised groups. The final research findings, expected in 2019, will provide a valuable insight into the development of effective group and community-based services for diverse groups of older men.

Summary

While men may not all enjoy the same things, some ways to support older men who are, or may be at risk of being, lonely, are to:

- provide a supportive environment
- offer activities with a practical outcome, which generate a sense of purpose amongst men
- offer activities that enable men to share skills
- promote activities in locations where men go, using appropriate language which makes men feel they have something to offer.

About the authors

This article was written by Care Connect (a research and innovation hub at the University of Sheffield) and Age UK. For further information, email s.alden@sheffield.ac.uk or evaluation@ageuk.org.uk

Key References:

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University of Bristol & Age UK Research Study - Older Men at the Margins. More information available at: <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/current/older-men-at-the-margins/>