



# **Leeds Neighbourhood Networks report**

**Centre for Ageing Better**  
March 2022

[ageing-better.org.uk](https://ageing-better.org.uk)

# How do community organisations contribute to healthy ageing?





## What they do

- Build and maintain relationships
- Contribute to society
- Meet basic needs
- Provide support for members to learn, grow and make decisions
- Encourage members to be mobile



## How they work

- Range of activities** for older people to access
- Relationships** with and between members, volunteers and other stakeholders
- Responsiveness** to older people's needs and circumstances
- Reassurance** for older people and their families



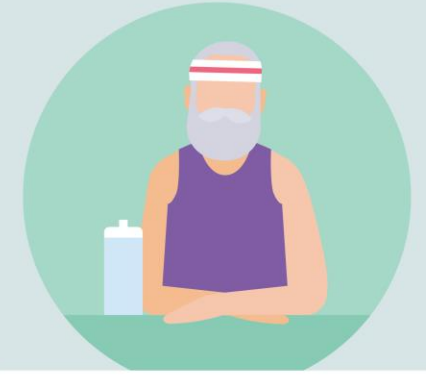
## What they need

- Financial Resources**
  - Flexible core grant
  - Funding from a range of sources
- Human Resources**
  - Paid staff | Volunteers
- Other internal factors**
  - Good governance
  - Effective leadership
  - Access to facilities
- Other external factors**
  - Good reputation
  - Supportive policy environment



## The difference they make

- Increasing social contact and connectedness
- Preventing social isolation and loneliness
- Improving health and wellbeing



## The impacts they have

- Preventing** the onset of ill health
- Delaying** the deterioration of health
- Reducing** pressure on the health and care system, and informal carers

# What are the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks?

They are local schemes that aim to support older people to remain living independently and to participate in their communities through a range of neighbourhood-based activities and services.

Currently, there are 37 Neighbourhood Networks provided by 32 different organisations across the city of Leeds.



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Activities/services include:

- Opportunities for social connection and interaction
- Support to engage in physical activity or exercise
- Learning and development opportunities
- Befriending schemes
- Food-and-nutrition support
- Transport
- Frailty and long-term-conditions clinics
- Volunteering opportunities
- General information, advice and guidance

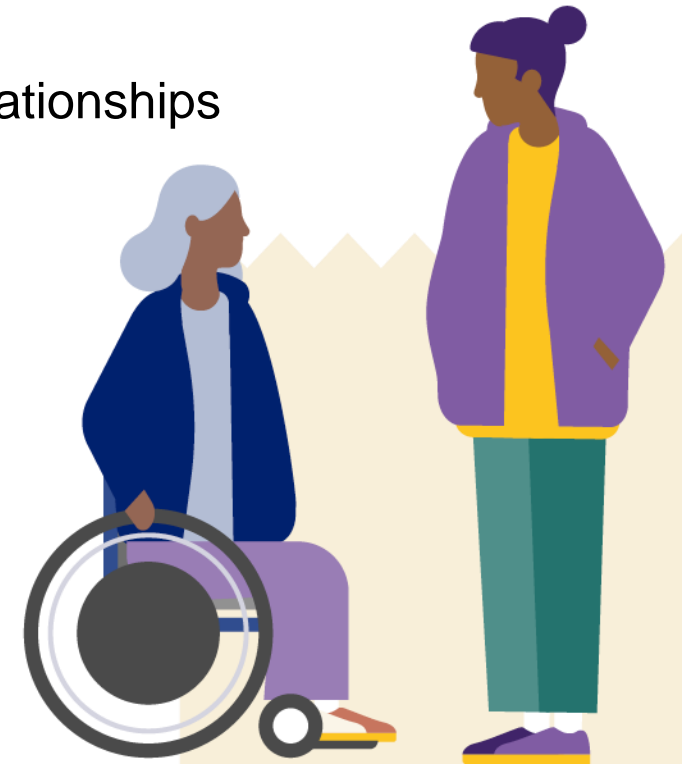
# What is Healthy Ageing?

The World Health Organisation defines healthy ageing as:

“The process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age”

This ability allows people to:

- Meet their basic needs
- Learn, grow and make decisions
- Be mobile
- Build and maintain relationships
- Contribute to society



# Evaluating the contribution of the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks

Drawing on the experience of volunteers, staff and members, the evaluation examined the contribution of the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks to three stages of 'healthy ageing':

- **Prevent:** prevention of ill health through community-based activities and support
- **Delay:** helping people to manage long-term conditions in order to delay illness severity and maintain a good quality of life, as well as ease the demand on health and social care services
- **Reduce:** assisting individuals with significant support needs, including frail older people and/or those with chronic or multiple conditions such as dementia or cancer, in order to reduce pressure on healthcare providers



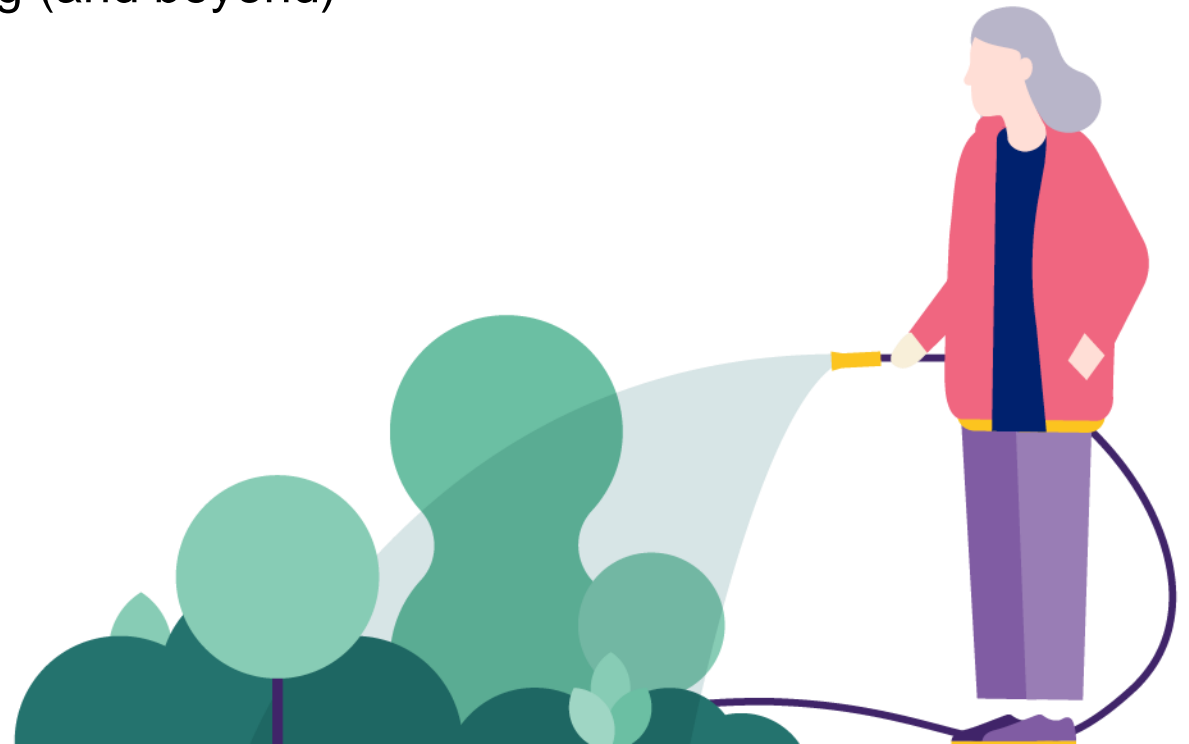
# What is Healthy Ageing?

## Methodology

- Qualitative, evidence-based evaluation
- Building on phase 1 of the COVID-19 Real-Time Evaluation
- Six in-depth case studies of Leeds Neighbourhood Networks:
  - Review of existing data and evidence
  - 8-12 interviews per case study (staff, members, volunteers, stakeholders) – 58 in total

## Result

A large, rich qualitative dataset enabling understanding of how the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks contribute to healthy ageing (and beyond)



How do the Leeds  
Neighbourhood  
Networks contribute  
to the three stages  
of healthy ageing?





# Prevent

## Prevention of ill health through community-based activities and support

### 1. Increase in social contact, reducing isolation and loneliness

By giving older people the opportunity to participate in social activities, the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks enable them to build and maintain relationships with their peers and other community members.

“I think the biggest benefit is social interaction”

**Member**

“I do get lonely sometimes, but my daughter thought it would be a good idea [to join a Network]... it's an absolute godsend”

**Member**

# Prevent

## 2. Improvement in mental health and wellbeing

As well as providing structure and a sense of purpose to members' lives, the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks boost older people's confidence and self-esteem.

“I was going through a bad depression and I couldn't get into doing anything... they helped me get back into activities, so it's made me feel a lot better about myself”

**Member**

# Prevent

## 3. Promoting and increasing independence

By offering a range of activities, particularly those which encourage mobility, the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks help its members maintain and improve their independence, which in turn helps to prevent illness.

“We promote independence, and we promote keeping active and healthy, and we do that very well”

**Staff**

# Delay

**Helping people to manage long-term conditions in order to delay illness severity and maintain a good quality of life**

## **1. Identifying when health declines and putting the right support in place**

Thanks to the relationships the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks develop with their members they are in a unique position to spot declines in health and intervene appropriately.

“When you befriend members face to face you can actually keep an eye on what they are looking like. If they begin to look unwell, you can contact someone to voice your concerns”

**Volunteer**

# Delay

## 2. Supporting members to deal with and manage long-term health conditions

The Leeds Neighbourhood Networks help delay deterioration in frailty and age-related illnesses such as dementia and cancer. They often work with other health services to support and educate members about health conditions and their management.

“We are able to educate people and help them to understand what they should be doing... it delays the impact on the National Health Service”

### **Volunteer**

For example, one neighbourhood network was working with local health services to deliver a course to support people who were frail, suffering from memory issues or needing help with general wellbeing. This covered subjects such as healthy eating, mobility, relaxation and mindfulness.

# Reduce

## **Assisting people with significant support needs to reduce pressure on healthcare providers**

### **1. Relieving pressure on the health and care system**

As well as helping to maintain members' health and independence, the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks ease the burden on health services by providing information and advice to reduce the number of unnecessary calls and visits to GPs and hospitals.

“People have become more confident contacting us [about a health issue]. Most of the people I would visit in the early days would ring 999” **Volunteer**

Members are also helped to navigate the wider health and care system.

“Because of COVID, [we help with] understanding systems and getting tests. We are also making sure people get their jobs” **Staff**

# Reduce

## 2. Relieving pressure on carers and families

In addition to lending support to the friends and families of members who need respite care, the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks provide them with a general sense of reassurance that their loved-ones are being looked after when they aren't around.

“It gives his wife respite as well, because we know that it's quite challenging when he's struggling at home. It benefits both of their wellbeing”

**Staff**

# Lessons learnt from the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks





# Reasons for success

**Range:** Providing members with a range of bespoke activities and opportunities, which enable holistic and personalised care.

**Relationships:** Building meaningful, trust-based relationships with and between members and volunteers; and with other community organisations and groups.

**Responsiveness:** Being responsive and sensitive to members' needs and changing circumstances. In-depth knowledge of members enables staff and volunteers to respond in highly personalised ways.

**Reassurance:** Providing members and their families with a sense of reassurance and security that support is there for them whenever needed.

To maximise success, they also need...

**Resources:** All services and organisations require a combination of different sets of resources: funding, good governance, stable leadership, strong workforce, accessible facilities, good reputation and a supportive policy environment.



# Implications for health and social care policy

The evaluation of the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks has emphasised the following:

## **The importance of prevention:**

The evaluation highlighted the value of the Networks' activities in terms of preventing the onset of ill health. It is therefore vital to ensure that community-based organisations are supported to undertake such initiatives, even though demand to assist older people with more intensive health and care needs continues to increase.

## **The value of long-term investment:**

Core funding has been vital in enabling the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks to develop and sustain their activities over an extended period and provides a platform for future endeavours. All community-based organisations should be provided with core, flexible funding where possible.

## **The need to prioritise support for older people at a neighbourhood level:**

The positioning of the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks within local communities is key to their success. They are able to react to the needs of local people and provide a tailored service, which not only has health benefits for their members but also relieves pressure on other health and social care services in the area.

# Further evaluation

The final phase of the evaluation of the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks will examine equity and access in community-based-support for older people.



It will focus on the following themes:

**Offer:** exploring whether a range of services and activities are available in each area according to the needs of local members

**Access:** understanding barriers to participation – both on a personal level (why someone doesn't take up a referral to a Neighbourhood Network) and a system level (why some people are referred and others aren't)

**Resource:** looking at how the current funding system can be improved or sustained to ensure the Leeds Neighbourhood Networks receive suitable resourcing – both financially and in terms of staffing, volunteers and facilities

This phase commences in March 2022 and will conclude in August 2022.



# Thank you

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# Sheffield Hallam University

*Leeds neighbourhood networks report*

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