

Centre for Health  
and Social Care

Leeds Institute of Health Sciences



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## Leeds Linkage Plus Project

### Summary Report

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*LinkAgePlus*

This report summarises the Leeds project and the evaluation findings.  
It is accompanied four detailed descriptive data reports on the different elements of the project.

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### **Acknowledgements**

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The work was funded by Leeds City Council from a grant from the Department of Work and Pensions.

Pseudonyms have been used in this report to protect the confidentiality of individuals, except in the case of some older volunteers who gave express permission for us to include their names with their stories.

## Leeds Linkage Plus Report

### Section 1: Introduction and context

Linkage Plus is part of a major shift in government thinking about services for older people, focusing on well-being, citizenship and on developing co-ordinated approaches to service design and delivery across all government departments (*Opportunity Age*, DWP 2005). It was influenced by and responded to reports from the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2006) which recognised that many older people are 'excluded' from modern society and highlighted three priorities needed for them to enjoy a better quality of life:

- Joining up services
- Intervening early to reduce costlier services later
- Involving older people in planning and developing services.

Nationally the Linkage Plus project, led by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), aimed to build an evidence base for policy and practice about joined up services, how far they deliver better outcomes for older people and are cost efficient. In partnership with eight local authorities, pilot projects were commissioned, offering diversity of sites and variety of models and approaches, but guided by the Linkage principles. They worked with people aged over 50.

### Leeds Linkage Plus Pilot

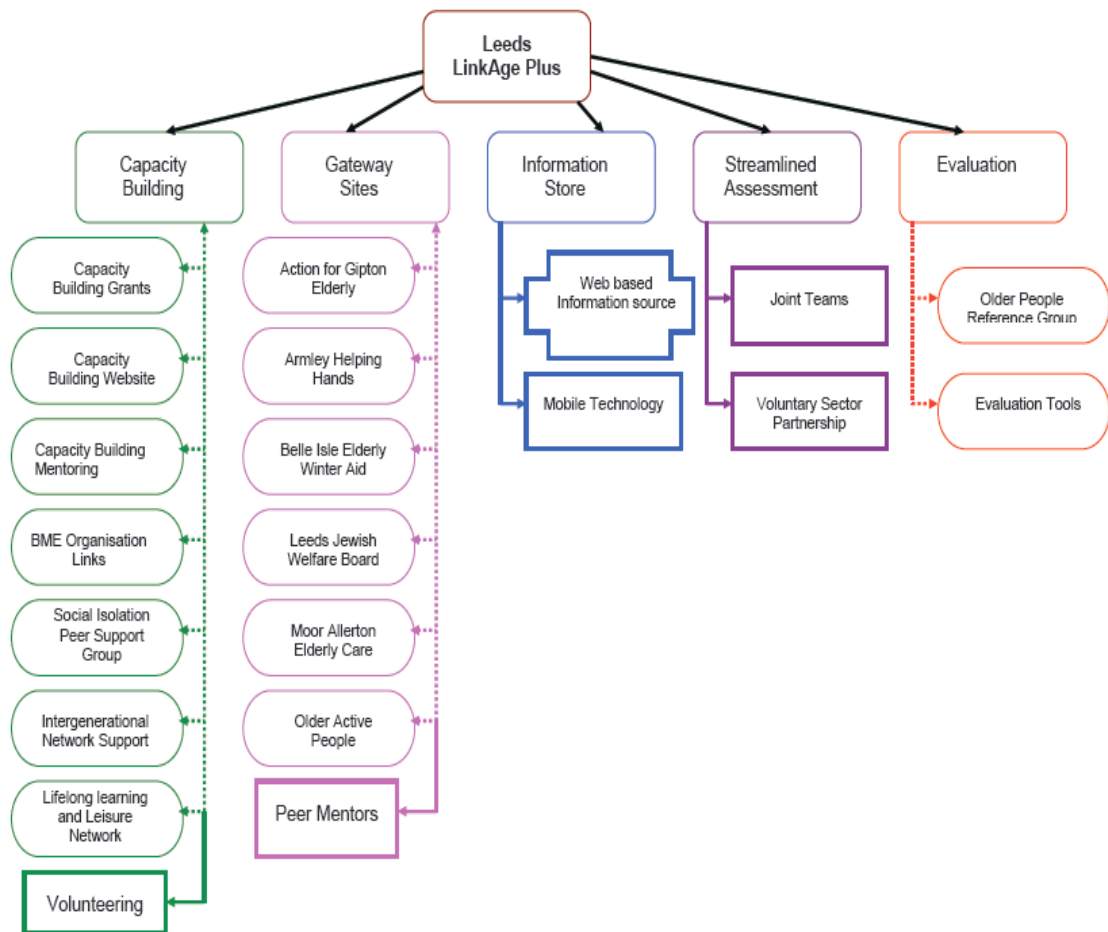
Under the Linkage Plus umbrella, the Leeds project was distinctive in that it was less about starting up new services than about enhancing and improving some of the existing services and structures, which support older people's well-being. It was designed to implement the information aspect of the *Older Better* strategy, which aims to ensure that older people in Leeds are able to receive a range of quality services to improve their health and well-being.

The three broad areas of focus of the Leeds project at the outset were

- Creating better sources of information through the development of an information store.
- Testing out the concept of local access points or service access gateways.
- Capacity building and sustainability in local voluntary sector organisations.

Diagram 1 shows the types of initiatives in each element.

**Diagram 1 Linkage Plus Elements**



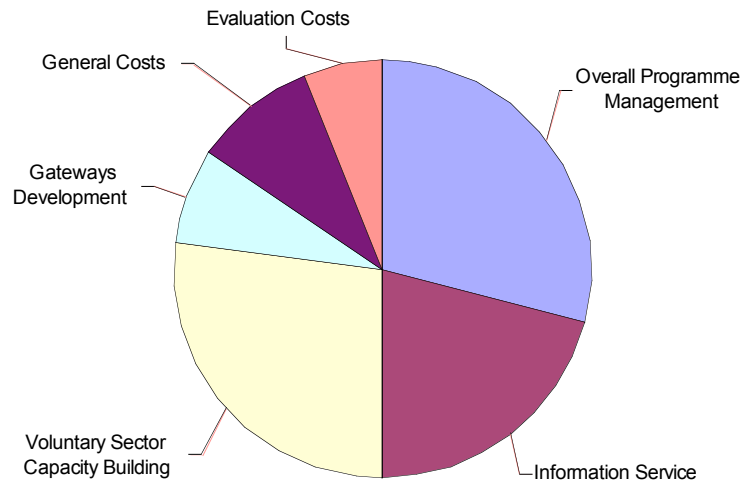
Leeds Linkage Plus aimed at greater engagement and participation of older citizens, facilitated by access to information. Desired outcomes were

- increasing numbers of people accessing information and services
- a stronger and more viable voluntary sector
- older people’s satisfaction with the quality of Linkage Plus services.

These outcomes were translated into targets in the Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Work and Pensions, which also sought to identify the ways in which specific aspects of the LAA were assisted by Linkage Plus.

In order to undertake this work, Leeds City Council was granted £966,853, which was allocated as shown on the chart below.

## Overall Planned Allocation of Financial Resources to Linkage Plus



### The evaluation report

This report summarises the findings from the evaluation of the pilot and is based on four detailed descriptive reports, which are published on Leeds Older People's Forum web site. These reports relate to the Infostore, the gateways, capacity building and evaluation methods and approach.

In the evaluation, we explored three questions

- What has been done under the banner of Linkage Plus and for whom?
- What are the outcomes, what has changed and why?
- What are the lessons for future commissioning?

This was a very diffuse project, so we decided to approach the evaluation by focusing on the voluntary sector 'Linkage gateways', tracking events and people in detail over an 18-month period, since they were the point at which all the elements of Linkage Plus met. Changes in the way the project developed, in time-scales and in the breadth of the voluntary sector capacity work meant that we had to broaden our initial approach, but reduced our longitudinal focus.

The Leeds approach to the project, with its emphasis on building on existing services and support mechanisms (dubbed by one voluntary sector worker *brave but valuable*), brought challenges of delineating 'Linkage' work and of attributing causality. Some of the capacity work dealt with intangibles like relationship building which are difficult to measure. However, these in themselves reflect the real world

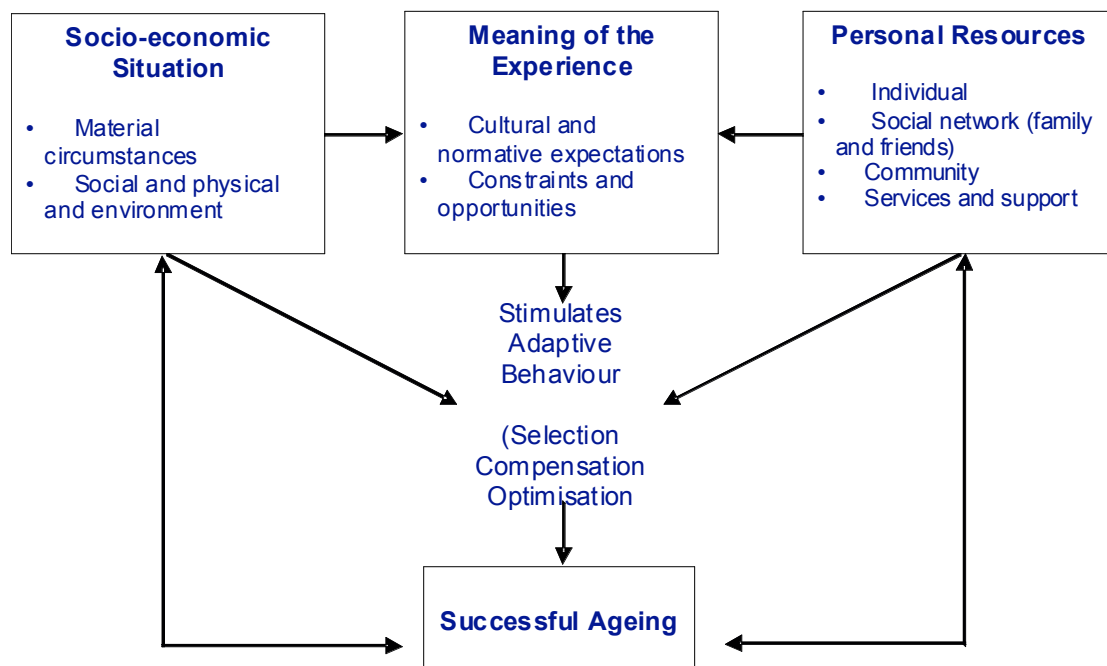
challenges facing commissioners in developing holistic and preventative service systems and in understanding the value of service infrastructure, as well as the actual service elements, and of cultural changes to accompany the shift of resources.

## Section 2 Background

The *Opportunity Age* strategy seeks to support older people (aged 50+) to live in a society which values its older population as equal citizens who are social and economic assets, rather than as dependant and problematic. The health and well-being of older people is intimately bound up in this vision. Many research studies on this topic have identified the key elements of well-being, notably engaging with others in meaningful social activities, having a role, being in control of one's own life, being able to help and to rely on others and having sufficient resources to live comfortable, safe and secure lives. Health and mobility are major enablers of well-being.

Ageing is a dynamic process, bringing with it opportunities such as more time and freedom to take up new pursuits in retirement, new roles such as grand-parenting and volunteering, and losses, e.g. loss of work role, bereavement, changes in health status. As the diagram below (from Godfrey et al 2004) depicts, the way each individual copes with these changes is both shaped and supported or hindered by the personal resources available to him and the social situation in which he lives. Of significance then for an older person is the ability to maximise opportunities and minimise losses by mobilising resources across a range of sectors and of differing types – socio-economic, psychological and social.

**Diagram 2: The dynamics of aging and quality of life**



From this diagram flow several points:

Firstly, the older population is heterogeneous with wide variations in the extent of different resources available to individuals. Linkage Plus was conceived as the implementation arm of Sure Start for Later Life which described the nature and extent of social exclusion of older people and aimed to redress this imbalance. It conceived of accessible gateways offering a single point of access for older people.

**Diagram 3: Accessible gateways for services**

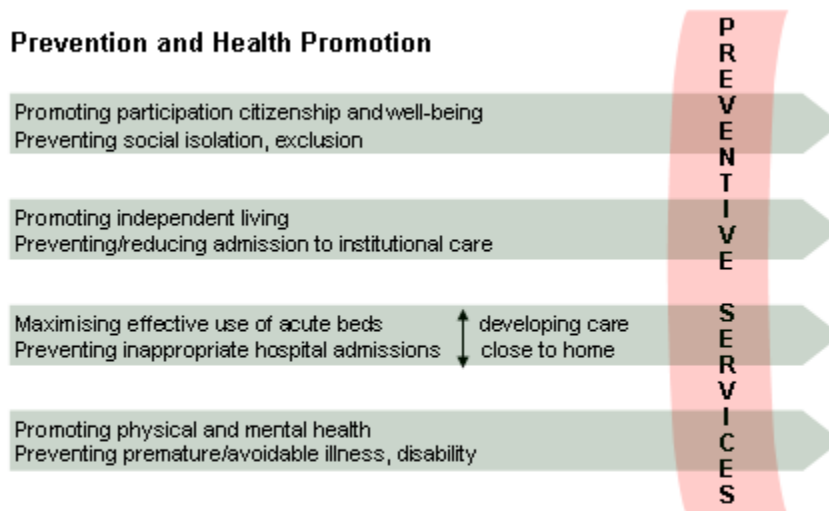


Secondly, the purpose of well-being programmes like Linkage Plus is to facilitate partnership across a wide range of sectors, including informal networks. The Leeds project is based in the understanding that community networks, developed to reinforce and supplement individuals' personal social networks, play an important part in promoting well-being and that linking these effectively with service support will offer older people better options. Putting People First stresses the importance of the voluntary sector as a partner in tackling social isolation. It therefore aims to improve joined-up working between the voluntary/ community sector and statutory sector at all levels.



Finally, well-being policies are frequently described as preventative from a service viewpoint, because in economic terms, savings are likely to be made in costly high-level services from lower level, cheaper interventions. From an older person's perspective they are more likely to be described positively as promoting a better quality of life. The possible areas of prevention apply across the whole service system, as shown in the diagram below.

**Diagram 4: Prevention and Health Promotion**



We consider briefly the knowledge background behind two key elements of the Leeds project – information and capacity building.

***Older people and information***

Information, which was a key plank of the Leeds work, frequently arises as an unmet need in consultations with older people and is seen as giving power and control to individuals. The conundrum is that with huge amounts of information available in all forms of media, people still feel excluded and confused and fail to access services and support to which they are entitled or which would be of help to them. Yeatts' study of access for black elders to services in USA (1992) offers a typology which we have used in this report to consider access. He identified three main categories of lack which impact – *awareness /knowledge* i.e. information about a service; *access* which include a range of practical resources such as transport, money, and *intent* by which he meant the recognition that a service or support might be appropriate. This

could include both recognition by referrers or by the older people and cultural issues and self image. Any one of these aspects might inhibit use of services, which underlines the complexity of access to information in general and for older people in particular.

Godfrey and Denby's literature review for the Linkage Plus project (2007) highlighted the work of several recent studies undertaken for JRF about how older people conceive of information. Thus, Dunning (2005) suggests that information, advice and advocacy may be best conceived as '*circles of support*' as opposed to different points along a continuum. Kerr and Kerr (2003) also found that older people may need help to define what questions to ask or where to go and help to utilise information given and that this may be provided by their peers. Quinn et al (2003) concluded that information was not seen as useful in itself but as a means to an end and in this way challenged notions of a simple 'signposting' provision.

It is clear too that there are often trigger points in people's lives (major change events in life such as retirement, bereavement, moving house) when they have particular need to access information as well as coping with the daily hassles. This point from the literature was reinforced by our Older Experts group who were discussing the 'hard-to-reach' and pointed out that at some time in our lives this may apply to us all, *because we don't know what we don't know*. There are multiple ways of accessing *the circles of support* but informal networks are frequently very important.

The idea of a web-based information store has bubbled up in a number of consultations in Leeds over the last few years. It reflects an increasing emphasis on use of technology and E-government in national policy and dovetails with the aspiration to improve access to information, advice and advocacy for older people. One element of this, outlined in O'Reilly (2005) quoted in Godfrey and Johnson (2008) is the development of a second generation of web-based technologies which harness the network effect of large number of people actively engaged in generating and reviewing content. Some social networking sites are now specifically designed for over 50s. However, a key consideration is the digital divide. Here it is clear that older people are the least likely of any age group to use computers and the Internet, but that this is an evolving situation and that from 2003-5, the biggest increase in Internet use was in the younger-old (Dutton et al 2005).

Furthermore, Internet use to access information is highly stratified by age, gender, disability, marital status and educational background, which combine and interact in

advanced old age to create new forms of disadvantage (Godfrey and Johnson 2008). On all the forms of access listed by Liff and Sheppard (2004) – to computers, training and take-up – older people are most disadvantaged. Godfrey and Johnson concluded their consideration of the issues by stressing the importance of the 'infomediary' to mediate older people's access to information.

In Leeds, this literature study, together with consultations with local older people and voluntary organisations, was important in understanding that the Infostore could not stand alone but to be successful had to be part of a network of support to access information.

### ***Voluntary sector capacity building***

Capacity building is a strong theme in government policy, in relation to both statutory and community services. Importantly there has been recognition in the last decade that the third sector is a vital part of service provision. Government policy to enable this objective has two strands; one focusing on supporting and enabling not-for-profit organisations so that they can deliver high quality public services, become more effective and efficient and exhibit entrepreneurialism and growth (Strategy Unit 2003 cited in Cairns, Harris and Young 2005). The second goes beyond service provision to recognise that working with and in the voluntary and community sector offers the potential of added value in the form of community cohesion and regeneration. HM Treasury Cross Cutting Review 2003 recognised a mutual interest in building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to enable it to cope with the additional demands on it. Substantial investment has been made by the government in this aspect of work, through Future Builders, ChangeUp and *capacity builders*.

While the need for capacity development is widely agreed, there is less consensus about precisely how this should be done, both in where the resources should be targeted and at what. *Capacity builders* note on their web-site that in the consultation on their strategy in 2006 many local voluntary organisations expressed concerns that they were *investing in bureaucracy*. The Audit Commission (2007) also refer to this scepticism from small community organisations about the value of capacity building schemes and noted that there is little evidence of benefits at the front-line.

The second issue relates to where the capacity building is directed. Is its aim to teach the third sector how to behave like the statutory sector so that it can be commissioned more easily or to develop healthy organisations which can contribute to their communities as well as provide services efficiently? A recent publication on

co-production (NEF 2008) raises this question; the Audit Commission report (2007) also emphasises the need to ensure that the added value of voluntary and community organisations is fully recognised and valued in *intelligent commissioning*. These tensions at the heart of capacity building policies were debated as the team made its plans. Philosophically, their aspirations lay with notions of co-production and community building, linking back to the gateway ideas outlined above. Pragmatically, this translated for small groups into resources to enable them to do their work and for commissioners into work to understand the nature of the services provided and to equip the community sector for new contracting processes.

### **Section 3: The Infostore**

The Infostore is rooted in two elements of city-wide work for older people, Older Better and POPP. Combined funding from POPP and Linkage pilots provided information managers with resources (£180K) which offered *a huge opportunity to be innovative and daring*. It enabled not only the basic development of the web-site but additional features. These included the commissioning of research prior to the design phases, investment in community development through the gateways and work with the BME focus group and plans for more imaginative technology, such as touchscreen. Some discussions at the very start of the project, for example, envisaged the possibility of an interactive site, 'owned' by local communities.

In April 2007, the concept of the Infostore was outlined by the Communications Team. A joint venture between health, voluntary sector and Leeds City Council, at its core are a database and web-site *to support older (and disabled) people in maintaining health and independence, maintaining a healthy active lifestyle and wellbeing, by being able to find out about and access information and services in good time*, which are easily searched by all relevant stakeholders, inclusive of the needs of people from BME communities and updated regularly.

#### **Activities to develop and promote Infostore**

At the outset of the project a new edition of the A-Z of Services for Older People (15,500 copies) was published.

From April 2007 around 80 older people and staff with different backgrounds and experiences were involved in consultations on the development and general feel of the design of the Infostore site and in trialling its use. A formal tendering process was undertaken with help from LCC IT procurement for web-site developers and detailed involvement in technical development.

From January 2008, the site was promoted to staff and public. This included distribution of promotional materials – pens, stickers, posters and banners; articles published in local authority, health and voluntary sector mailings; paid adverts and listings in other Council publications. The Gateways also supported this publicity effort directly, circulating newsletters reaching around 10,000 people.

Personal presentations by the Infostore Development Manager were made within Leeds Linkage and externally at national good practice events. Beyond Linkage there have been presentations to ASC senior managers and to the LCC Customer Focus Board. Staff in four gateways undertook demonstrations about Infostore to

people in their local communities. Feedback indicates that the personal approach is an effective mode of dissemination, although it has clear time implications for staff. Partner agencies, such as the PCT and voluntary sector staff, also promoted the Infostore when they were involved in community outreach as well as through staff networks. The Infostore was included in the Basic Internet sessions to older people at Leeds libraries (204 sessions in 2007-8); while the Councillor member of the project board ensured dissemination of information and pens to all Leeds councillors.

The initial agreed 'milestone' was to launch by August 2007 but delayed recruitment of the Infostore Development Manager made this an impossible target. The 'soft' launch occurred in January 2008, with a formal launch in March. However, the MOU target for the Infostore of 5000 hits by the end of the first year was massively exceeded in the first four months. The POPPs' target for the web-site was 30,000 by the end of the second year.

**Thus, by July 2008, the following outputs had been achieved**

- There had been 21,512 hits (35,000 hits at November 2008).
- The content of the web-site included 10 themes, 103 topics, 405 services/ organisations and 153 documents. Around 45 documents were in community languages.
- Work was well advanced on the development of an introductory video clip and six video clips on benefits in four spoken community languages, English and British Sign Language.
- There were regular news stories – 27 of which were published in the four months from March to July.
- E-mail newsletters were published on a monthly basis from end of April – 152 individuals and organisations were enrolled as subscribers.
- Ten people from a range of agencies covering different sectors were acting as 'Theme Champions' contributing to information in their theme (12 Theme Champions at November 2008).
- Linkage contribution to costs of Infostore is in total £162K. This includes £52,000 for research and technical development, £13,000 for consultation and promotion and £10,000 towards a pilot directory, all of which are set-up costs.

### **Outcomes – is it a widely accessible source of comprehensive information?**

Creating the Infostore was not simply a technical task but was about promoting its acceptability, accessibility and usage. The process of development adopted by the Infostore Development Manager – through consultation and working with older people – paid dividends, although its extent was constrained by time pressures. The desired outcomes for Infostore were challenging because of the wide range of ‘relevant stakeholders’. We consider below how far these have been addressed, looking at key issues of access – ease of use, awareness, access to computers and training and people’s understanding of its appropriateness for older people (*intent*).

#### ***Acceptability of Infostore***

The professional quality of the site has gained national recognition by winning the prestigious first prize (New Media category) from the Association of Social Care Communicators. In Leeds, there appears to be a general agreement that the site is clear, easy to follow and contains useful information.

Some people are very positive about it, others display ambivalence.

*It’s absolutely fantastic, a great invention. It needs to be available for all levels and age groups.* Community worker

*It’s a useful resource – easy-to-follow as well.* Housing manager

*It’s really impressive, but it would be handy to be able to search for a word like on Google, rather than working out how the site is organised. I use the site occasionally, but because it hasn’t had what I’ve been looking for a few times, I have been put off. Such a massive task though.*

Several people who are used to Google-type searching preferred that search method while staff who had used it at an early stage of development were worried about the availability of content. Feedback from BME groups’ training was that they would have liked the language clips to be available at the outset. Efforts were made to ensure that documents in community languages were on-line from the outset and the video clips will be published from December 2008.

#### ***Awareness of the Infostore***

The number of subscribers to the email bulletin gives an indication of awareness – this grew to 152 from April to July 2008 and three months later by 76% to 268. There is a good range of contacts in health, social care and voluntary sector but

there is a need to move beyond these organisations. 139 subscribers have non-organisational addresses so may be individuals with an interest in the system.

In terms of the spread of the system, our small snapshot survey (83 people) suggested a reasonable penetration of the older people's service sector in six months, with 75% of respondents having heard of Infostore and 61% having used it. However, it also indicates apparent gaps of knowledge among family carers, with little evidence of specific targeting of this group, and among front-line staff in statutory agencies.

To date, most of the dissemination has been focused on older people's services and within health and social care. There is a strong view that there should be much wider marketing and promotion.

A local community worker said

*There is some wonderful information in there... It needs better dissemination and publicity.*

The Infostore Development Manager agreed with this:

*For phase two there is loads to do continuing marketing and more marketing. I think if there was a year where we did nothing new but marketing, getting established, that would be the ideal really, but there is not going to be that opportunity.*

Overall there is a picture of steady growth and uptake which should be developed further with additional marketing and wider partnership links

### **Access to IT**

Using the Infostore depends on basic access to computers and to broadband, which led some inner city voluntary staff to worry about the sustainability of IT for their clients. Similarly the lack of modern IT hardware in small community organisations and its impact on staff's regular usage of IT should not be underestimated. Linkage offered some opportunities to address these issues with IT equipment/ upgrades in the gateways sites (£10K) and capacity grants to a further 17 groups (£25K).

Similarly there was IT training for older people as part of the Infostore and gateways development – this included courses in eight BME organisations for 68 participants. There are signs of growing interest from other NNs and older people's organisations in older people learning about IT. The courses offered were simple taster sessions



and many people felt there was a need for follow-on courses or one-to-one support to be able to extend learning, if this is not to be a tick box exercise.

There are many other opportunities for IT learning in the city – in the libraries where there are 550 computers for personal use, community learning, colleges and Silver Surfers scheme, with which Linkage Plus had only tangential links. We concluded that Linkage has given stimulus and some additional resources to the energy and interest around IT access for older people in Leeds, but that for the future there needs to be more work on a coherent infrastructure of training and support.

### ***Intent – older people and use of IT***

The issue of older people and IT as our culture shifts towards an increasingly technological age is at the heart of the debate about the value of the Infostore. The aim of the Development Manager was that having a website, which was easy for older people to use, *would open up all sorts of things to older people that the general public have access to.*

In our interviews, conducted with a range of older people many of whom were in advanced old age and experiencing some restrictions in their lives, several expressed feelings of being excluded by technology. We described their different responses to IT use as *'enthusiastic users', 'willing starters', 'reluctant attempters'* and *'absolute refusers'*. The balance was towards the negative end of the spectrum. Joyce's story exemplifies the *'willing starter'* approach which we found in a small cluster of people associated with the Linkage gateways.

Joyce is 86 years and has worked as a volunteer receptionist at a NN for several years. She had few computer skills, but had input data into a dental programme in a previous job. She was keen to learn about the Infostore in part because she felt excluded by, for example, the way in which the BBC invited listeners' comments to a web address, *assuming that everyone who is able to answer has the means to do it and it is not so.* She was apprehensive about the training course and unsure whether at her age she could cope. However, she now uses the Infostore to obtain information for other older people who call into the office. She has acquired a computer for herself, *is amazed at the wealth of information available on-line* and uses Google to solve her crosswords. Her family think that *it is magical that at my age I have been given this opportunity.*

However, for the more reluctant attempters and those who feel this is absolutely not for them, it was recognised from the outset that there was a need to do more. Some staff argued that paper based material is realistically what is needed for their clients and were very positive about the A-Z directories – *our little Bible*. Most believed that many of the older old would continue to need help to access information.

*I don't think people of that age (70s and 80s) will ever start to use the Internet to find info. They might do it in a computer class as part of learning skills but I don't think they will ever go to the Internet to find out about benefits or to get their Blue Badges.*

The concept of the gateways and peer mentors in the initial plan for Linkage Plus was designed to address this issue – to offer older people a mediator who could help them to access information with advice and support. We will explore these aspects of the project in the next section but in practice the development was very limited in relation to peer mentors. This was a key omission of the project but some of positive indications from what was done together with the thinking about ‘infomediaries’ offer a basis for future development

### **Summary points**

The Infostore element achieved much in creating a web-site which is regarded as clear and helpful in a short space of time, although late recruitment of the Infostore Development Manager and other changes of project staff hampered its progress. The need for an output in a short time-frame also impacted on the innovative aspirations for the site – notably organisation of data around life events, interactivity and community language clips – which were deferred or are just now coming on-stream, so that the product which was launched was more conventional than originally conceived.

Good partnership working with the Gateways, LOPF and the PCT public health team in particular extended the dissemination and promotion of the Infostore. Similarly, the use of theme champions is an effective way of extending engagement and of enhancing the integrity of the data.

The Infostore can be seen to have potential to contribute to policy in a number of ways

- Promoting access to information for older people.
- Enabling better inclusion into society.
- Opportunities for older people to extend their interests and networks using IT.

There have been strenuous efforts to disseminate and promote the Infostore but more is now needed in two directions, to reach out to the community at large and to more socially excluded people

- Better partnership work with generalist, mainstream agencies and services.
- Direct targeting of front-line staff and families of older people.
- More systematic work on 'infomediaries' and peer mentors.
- Development of more taster and on-going courses and support open to older people.
- More work on community languages.
- Addressing the issue of access to good quality computers in community based and voluntary organisations.

A crucial issue which was not addressed until late in the project was governance and sustainability. There has now been work done to address future governance, which were not dealt with during the project. However, the breadth of the future agenda outlined above indicates that the strategic direction of the Infostore has not yet been clarified. This applies in terms of different agency priorities but also in respect of ideas of co-production of information with older people's involvement.

The Infostore was linked from the outset of the project to a raft of government policy such as *Independence, Well-being and Choice* and to E-Gov. These are essentially around health and well-being, which is the focus of the Healthy Active Life group within which the project's subgroup now sits. The Cities in Balance grant funding aims at this broad community based approach. During the project, *Putting People First* with its emphasis on transforming social care and the personalisation agenda required that *all local authorities should ensure access to a universal information, advice and advocacy service for people needing services and their carers, including those funding their own care*. The ongoing funding for the Infostore Development Manager comes from the social care reform grant.

It is important for the development of Infostore that the needs of agencies to drive their transformational agendas and the needs of older people in a broader community context are discussed, reconciled and agreed to give a clear way forward.

## **Section 4 Linkage Gateways**

### **Introduction**

*A Sure Start for Later Life* developed the notion of single accessible gateways, which could offer excluded older people access to a range of services. In the initial discussions about the Linkage Plus pilot within ASC, the view was taken that the Neighbourhood Network (NN) schemes which already exist in Leeds bore strong resemblance to such a concept. The forty plus NNs have been developed across the city on a good neighbour model, rooted in their local communities to develop support for local people. A key feature is that they involve older people in all aspects on the organisations – management, volunteering as well as taking part in activities and receiving services and support. A decision was taken to invest £10K into 6 local voluntary organisations, five of which were NNs and one offering a city-wide service to Jewish elders, in order to

- Test out the hypothesis that these function as *Sure Start* style gateways and develop better understanding of them
- Explore ways of improving older people's access to information through the gateways.

Two NNs volunteered to act as comparator sites for the evaluation. (see list on page 53 of the schemes involved in the project)

The NNs are small and very local organisations. There is a high degree of consensus among them about the outcomes they seek to achieve and the broad areas of core work. All see their purpose as the reduction of social isolation and believe that they have a role as a local point of information, advice and support. Additionally most also offer activities to promote health and well-being and housing related help such as security checks and smoke alarms. Linkage Plus put the spotlight on one key aspect of their multi-faceted work – information provision.

### **What older people told us about Gateways**

At the beginning of the project, focus groups with 216 older people from six NNs provided a clear picture of what those older people valued in NNs. These included opportunities to have a social life, together with the availability of a local point of contact which was trusted and accessible and in which they felt they could play a part (Big Talk 2007).

We interviewed 49 older people and volunteers who have been involved with the Linkage sites (gateways and comparators) during the project. From them, we learnt

what they found helpful about the information-giving aspect of the NNs' work. Firstly all spoke about the friendly reception they received and some mentioned the fact that they were spoken to with respect, *not like a disabled old woman*. Proactive information giving was valued, so that help was offered and ideas were explored rather than them having to ask:

*They tell you about things – you don't have to go grovelling.*

Their knowledge and experience of aspects such as housing and benefits which family and friends may not be able to advise on was also noted as was the fact that people could ask about a wide range of things. Many older people stressed the reassurance they felt by obtaining information – for example about reliable tradesmen – from a trusted source. They appreciated the availability of a point of reference where they had relatively easy access to staff if anything cropped up – either by dropping in, mentioning things at an event or telephoning. Finally, using information is not simply a matter of having the right form or knowing about something but actually doing something with it. The hassle of following up information was simply too much for some of the older people who were delighted that this was done for them or help was available with form-filling.

The proactive, needs-led nature of information giving can be illustrated by Mrs Allcott's story.

Mrs Allcott, a 63 year old widow who is profoundly deaf and has other health problems, lives alone in one of the most deprived areas of the city. She called into the NN centre one day to ask if the Council could mend her fence. The worker talked to her for a while and began to uncover more needs. Since her husband died, she had rarely gone outside the immediate area because her balance is upset when she travels on the bus. She fears to cross busy roads because *her husband was her ears*. Inside the house, she left her door open because she could not hear the door bell. She felt frightened and depressed but had not sought help. The worker did a home visit and contacted the specialist fire safety officer to fit suitable alarms, the Centre for the Deaf for bells and telephone, and applied for Attendance Allowance for this lady. She is now going to a social group at a local centre.

It is clear that while not all information contacts require this level of input, for many of the older people in touch with the NNs, simple sign-posting was not enough and more advice and support was needed if the information was to be useful.

The ways in which people spoke about help from the schemes and the benefits they received from their contacts with the schemes were remarkably consistent across them, which led us to conclude that the ways in which neighbourhood schemes work with older people (their *process outcomes*) are of great importance.

Four over-arching outcomes could be drawn out from the benefits which older people described

- Improved physical and mental well-being is most often spoken about, coming from friendship, companionship and enjoying meaningful social contacts, activities and trips.
- The presence of the NN as a resource and a safety-net is of almost equal significance for the older people interviewed; to assure them of access to support when necessary and this to aid independent living in their own homes
- Access to a whole range of support to enable independent living in their own homes
- Widening of opportunities both inside the schemes and in the wider community.

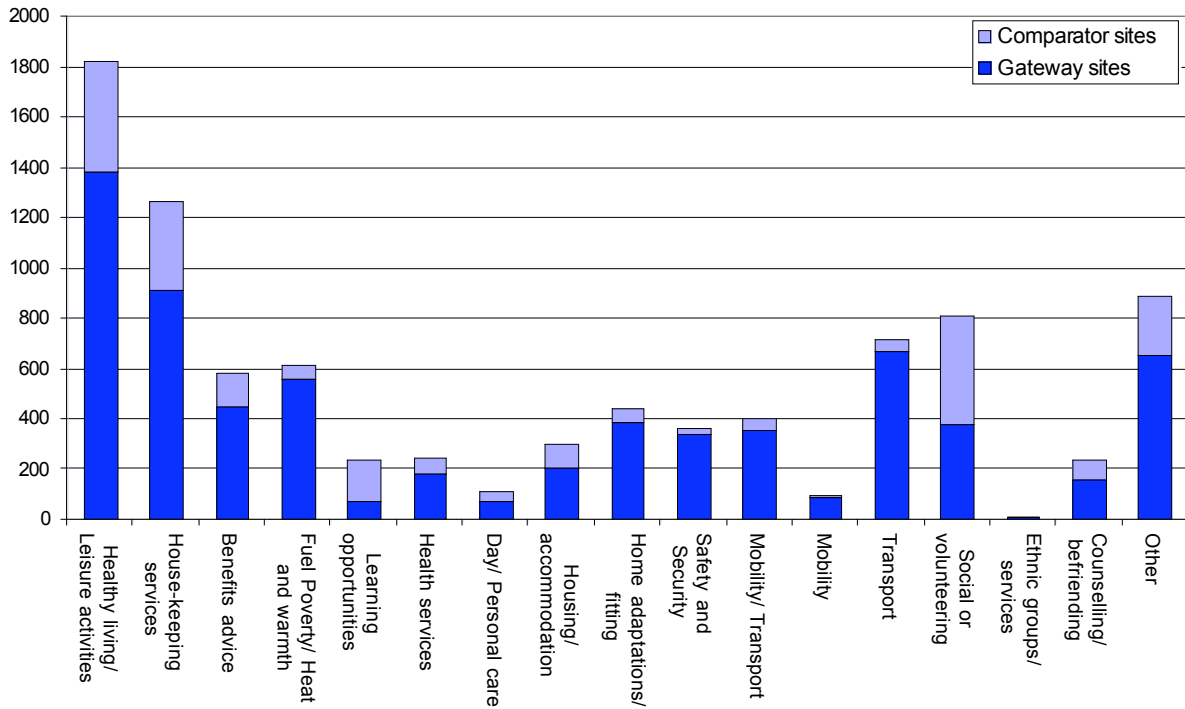
Mrs Edwards' story is typical of many of those receiving regular, on-going support and encapsulates most of these outcomes.

She is a lady of 84, living alone, quite disabled after a stroke and hip fracture and a *bit forgetful*. She received intermediate support after the two hospital incidents and was given a list of numbers for help. However, having failed to get home care because she was not eligible, she did not make any further contacts. She lived, lonely and miserable – *I felt like sticking my head in a gas oven* – quarrelling with her family because she wanted them to visit her more often and looked after by a neighbour. Eventually her neighbour telephoned the NN and asked if she could attend the lunch club. Since then, Mrs Edwards feels her life is transformed. She has been helped to obtain Attendance Allowance before which she said *I had to go without – well I was neglecting myself a bit*. Now she has bought a new wheeler to walk out to local shops, can use a taxi to attend the doctor, is paying a cleaner to help in the house and has been on holiday with the scheme for the first time in 32 years. The NN have arranged for the path outside her house to be repaired as it was unsafe, they take her on the assisted shopping bus once a fortnight and she goes regularly to social groups and has taken part in all the Linkage activities, even, to her own amazement, attending the computer class.

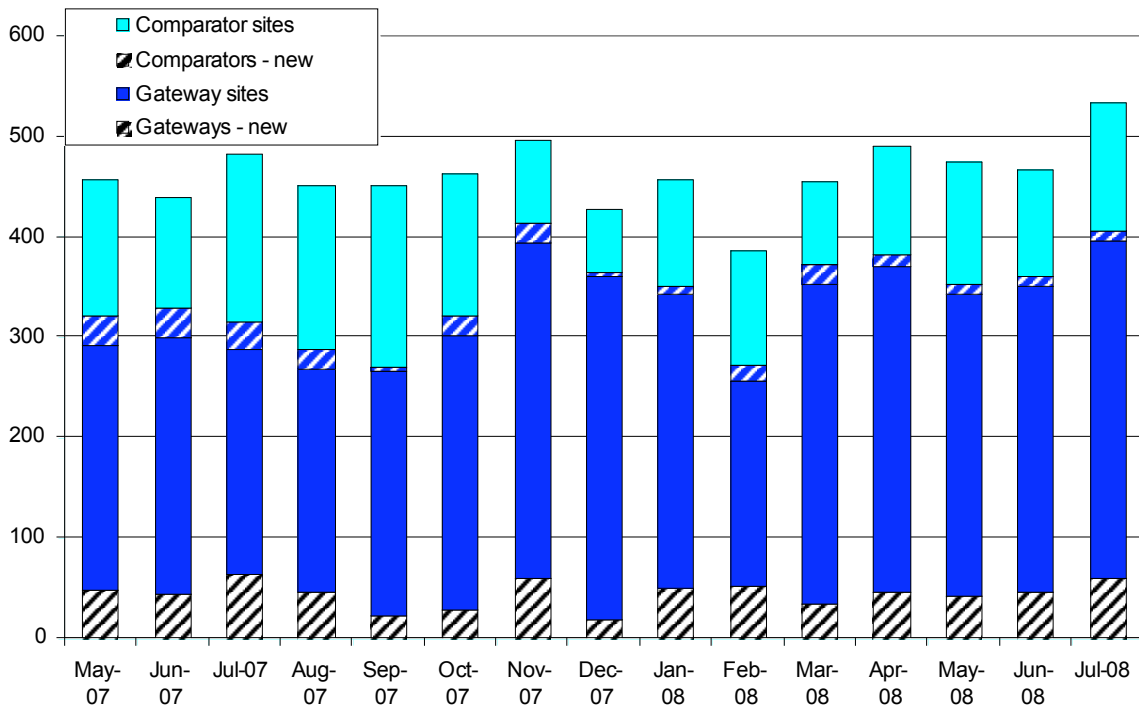
### Information giving in the Linkage sites

Within the eight Linkage gateways and comparator sites during the fifteen months monitoring period, there were 9172 enquiries on a wide range of topics. Overall they were helping older people to access information relating to broadly based aspects of well-being, health and leisure as well as key areas linked to living independently at home.

**Chart 1 Nature of enquiries, 15 months total**



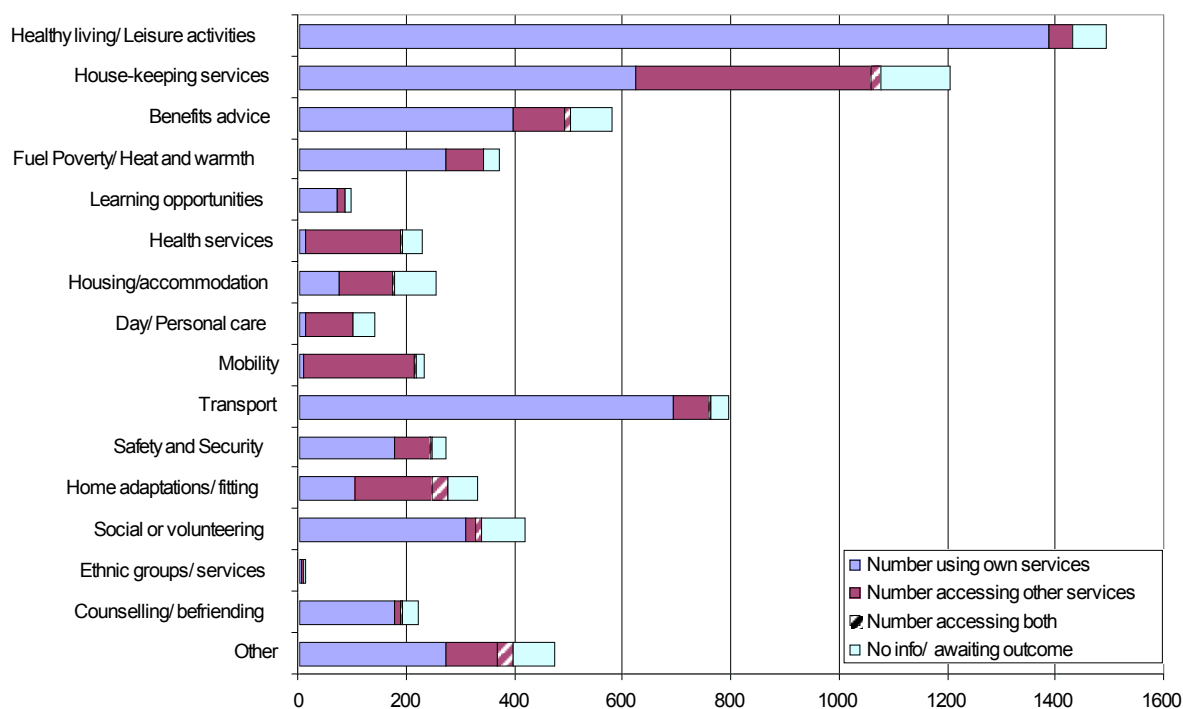
**Chart 2 Number of people accessing advice or information – showing numbers new to service**



6932 people received information. As shown above, the majority of contacts were with existing members but 909 people new to the schemes received information.

We asked schemes to track what happened as a result of giving people information. This was difficult especially with simple drop-in enquires but of the 7102 that were followed through, 89% accessed the support or service they wanted. 72% of these were received directly from the schemes themselves and 26% provided by other agencies, 2% from both. The outcomes of information contacts are shown below in Chart 3.



**Chart 3 Outcomes from information contacts**

### Who uses the Linkage Gateways?

We found that overall, the majority of the people who were receiving information and services from the schemes are women, aged 80 years and over, who lived alone. Five of the sites were in areas of high social deprivation. . Around a third and more in schemes are frail older people.

There is substantial variation between schemes with regard to the groups of older people who are in a minority overall. The percentage of men 'on the books' ranged from 6% to around 45%, with the LJCS standing out for the number of men who regularly use its facilities, inspired by the café and a daily card group. However, in AHH which had one of the lowest male membership rates in the city, those men were heavily represented in both their information contacts and use of services.

Younger older people (aged 55-70) are in a minority, in part because some schemes actually have charitable aims focused on people aged 60 or 65 years and older. On the whole, they appear to be less likely to join activities and more to use information services. The exception to this is OAP where the younger members are disproportionately involved in their activities, possibly relating to the significant number of BME members for whom they have organised social activities (groups and Bollywood events).

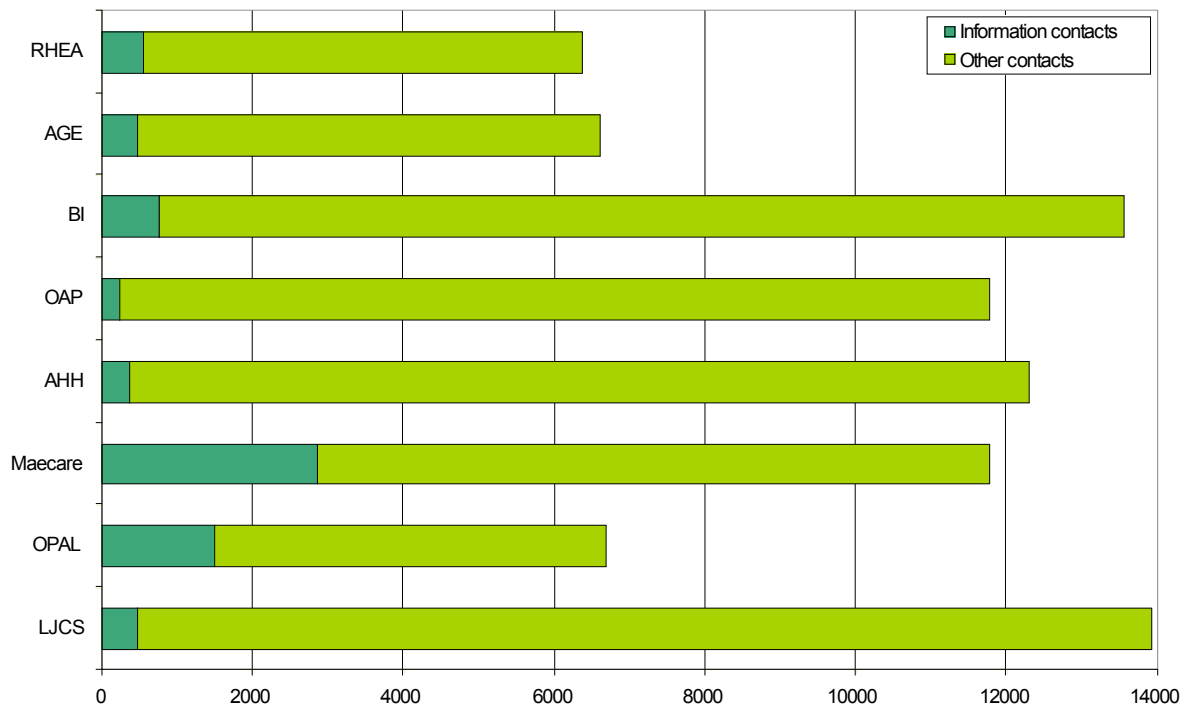
The BME population of the local areas in part determined the number of BME elders in touch with the schemes but only OAP had substantial numbers of BME members (25%). However, only 10% of their information contacts were from BME communities. There is concern in the city as a whole about the extent of access for the minority populations. It is disappointing that the Linkage project did not have more emphasis on this aspect of the work, stimulating links between the gateway sites and the NNs to explore partnerships work in this area.

We concluded from our interviews and quantitative data that although the schemes are flexible and are boundaried only by age and locality, they do not provide universal services within their area. Most of their members make contact with them at a point of need and many stay in contact for the rest of their lives. It is important to recognise this in respect of Linkage Plus and Infostore. Many would be classed by the DWP as *assisted or special needs users* in terms of access to IT; in fact the gateways were used by people most likely to be excluded by the digital divide. The different balance of clients suggests a need for schemes to examine their membership against the balance of the local populations and to assess how they might reach to under-represented groups within their area. Linkage data, combined with the Review of NNs will have provided them with the tools to do this.

### **Variations between schemes**

The chart below shows the total numbers of information contacts and other service contacts offered in each scheme over the Linkage period. It reveals considerable differences in emphasis on information giving within the schemes, as well as overall volume of contacts. Belle Isle, OAP, AHH and LJCS also provided many minibus journeys for clients to attend activities.

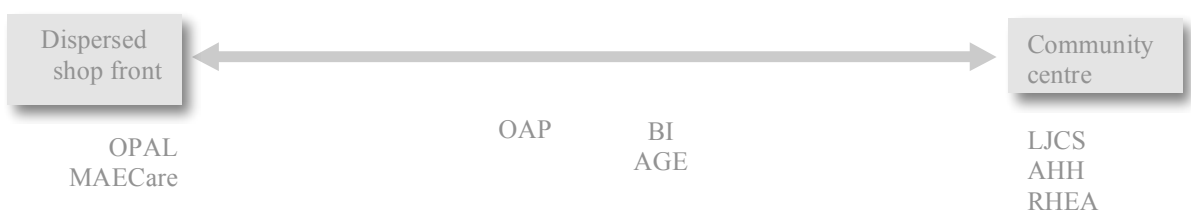
**Chart 4 Information and Other Service Contacts**



The volume of outputs appears to correlate with the schemes’ total incomes which differ greatly; hitherto this variation has been the main focus of attention. However, looking at variations in the nature and volume of information contacts, other factors had an impact; these were

- ***The physical location of the schemes and their external face to the public affects how people access information.***

We mapped these along a continuum which we described as ‘dispersed’ to ‘community centre’. ‘Dispersed’ describes the two schemes in outer city areas based in shop-front premises in local shopping centres. These attract passing trade and drop-in contacts – their information contacts were the highest in the schemes we sampled. Other schemes were located in community centres – from the superb purpose built accommodation at LJCS, to offices shared in local community centres. They varied in the extent to which staff officers were immediately accessible to people from the street. Where they were separate, many of their contacts were with members attending groups or by telephone.

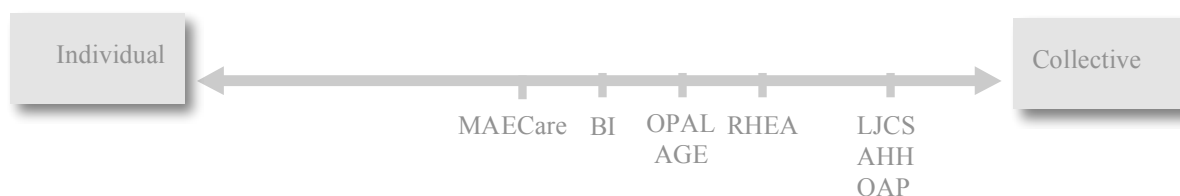


- ***Different balance in approach to support.***

By analysing all the service contacts in the schemes over the period we were able to create a picture of the variation of services and support available and the balance between differing ways of offering support: for example social support may be via individual contacts with older people e.g. friendly visiting and/or through group activities (these are illustrated by the pie charts in Appendix 2). The diagram below describes the continuum.

Both factors impact on how information contacts were made and the numbers recorded. In the dispersed model, enquiries were often made on a drop-in basis, which was unlikely in some of the community centre models. Where group activities predominated, there was a high likelihood of information being passed between members. Thus, for example, in Autumn 2007, several enquiries were recorded at OPAL about the national bus pass, which was advertised in their newsletter and on the shop window. At LJCS, the co-ordinator said that they hardly needed to publicise this – one person attended the café with her new pass and by the end of lunchtime everybody knew.

Balance in numbers of service contacts between individual and collective contacts



- ***the local community served and volunteer resources to be drawn on***

The number and intensity of volunteer support varied across the sites and seems to correlate with the availability of dedicated staff time to support them (Townsend and Moore 2007, Dunne 2008). A key difference between schemes was the extent to which volunteers were involved in administrative work, reception and telephone follow-up. These particularly happened in the dispersed schemes in the outer city areas where they recruited people with prior experience of this type of work. Similarly in LJCS, volunteers were heavily engaged in using their skills as tutors and group leaders. The socio-economic make-up of the local area appears to influence the types of work which volunteers do and had implications for the development of peer mentoring in the Linkage activities.

### **How did the gateways promote older people's access to information and to the Infostore?**

Once the gateways had been selected there were individual negotiations with each scheme to agree how they might help to achieve the overall MOU targets for Linkage Plus. In terms of promoting access to information, most looked outside their organisations to outreach work. The exception to this was LJCS who aimed to set up a volunteer-run information service within the centre.

Three different approaches to outreach are described below

#### ***Community development – Armley Helping Hands***

Initiatives targeted at local businesses included development of a Community Loyalty Card whereby local businesses offer members of AHH discounts. The Charming Armley Cake competition and photographic exhibition, undertaken with local PR companies, businesses and university students, offered opportunities for the whole community to socialise together and improved links between local businesses. There was further development of an on-going partnership with a local company, Premier Farnell which has increasingly demonstrated mutual benefits for both partners that were recognised by a regional award. The outcomes of the work have been very positive for the scheme in raising their profile in the local community, extensive media coverage and fundraising and for improving community cohesion. It has resulted in new links with local BME faith groups and the benefits agency. Older people using services and activities have increased, though not in information contacts. The group now has capacity problems and waiting lists, which it is trying to address by further partnerships with other local groups.

#### ***Outreach information 'surgeries'***

Belle Isle ran a series of eleven sessions, supported by new publicity banners, leaflets and checklists, in their own locality and in neighbouring areas, located in pubs, clubs, sheltered housing, the library and the Family Centre. In all they met around 250 people and dealt with 22 enquiries from older people, half of whom were under 70 years of age. Experienced members of staff were surprised to learn through these activities how many older people, new to them, could be reached in the social afternoons offered by local pubs and clubs. They found unmet need on the periphery of their area and in working with other local groups, which suggested that information sessions may be a good area of collaborative working to share particular

expertise. These sessions were essentially an effective way of extending their existing service under the banner of Infostore, rather than promoting the web-site itself for older people to use independently.

***Promoting the use of Infostore via local networks***

MAECare organised seven tea parties with home baking for around 29 local staff and volunteers. They demonstrated the use of the Infostore and then people worked together to explore the site using scenarios. The response on the day was extremely positive; six months later, follow-up calls to six professionals found that they had all made use of the site themselves in their work and had told older people and their colleagues about it. There had been an effective 'snowballing' process. A housing manager from ENE homes had cascaded information to all her wardens and publicised the Infostore in the tenants' newsletter. A community nurse, on secondment to the PCT had ensured that details of the Infostore were included in carers' awareness training for community health staff city-wide. These targeted personal demonstrations appear to be an effective way of publicising the Infostore and have the important effect for the scheme of valuing their partners in local community work.

**How far was the Infostore inserted into the Gateways' practice and ways of working?**

Responses from the co-ordinators indicated that overall the Infostore had made little impact on their own service delivery. In one scheme, it had been integrated into their work, with volunteer receptionists trained to use it for simple enquiries and the staff using it to update their knowledge. In other schemes, it was used occasionally but seen as most helpful for induction and training of new or inexperienced staff. A relatively new worker commented that she found it helpful to get to grips with the range of services available for older people.

The biggest achievements of Linkage Plus were seen as the monitoring data, together with tangibles like improved computers/Broadband and publicity materials. Monitoring for the evaluation was considerable and had imposed a heavy workload on some sites, especially where they had poorly developed data systems at the outset. Nevertheless, most sites said that they found it valuable to have had to collect the data which gave them a better understanding of what they were doing and enable them to present their work better to funders and commissioners. Two sites had well-developed electronic databases prior to Linkage Plus. One recognised an

impact in forcing them *to pull their socks up ....to perhaps get more reliable information*. The second noted the added value of focusing on outcomes

*One of the things we have added value to our own service that has come as a result of this pilot has been the tracking system we have developed. It was designed to help us to complete the monitoring form but it is actually quite an improvement to the service that we probably would not have got to if we had not been involved with the project. The benefits are an improved service to our clients which is the important part of it.*

Most schemes including the comparator sites intended to continue elements of the monitoring after the pilot and saw the value of a shared database across schemes, developed in partnerships with commissioners.

### **How far did the peer mentors develop and in what ways?**

The original plans for gateways envisaged peer mentors, older people who would be trained to support access to information through the Infostore within the gateways (MOU target of 60 people). As soon as negotiations began with the gateways it became apparent that most sites did not see this as a way forward for them – several did not see information giving as a role for volunteers.

The four stories below illustrate roles undertaken by older people, which showed positive benefits for themselves and other older people. All these volunteers shared a commitment to their community, linked into the scheme they belong to, a desire to use their skills and have meaningful activities for themselves and to give something back. They were also keen to ensure older people receive information and were 'willing adopters', if not already 'skilled enthusiasts' of IT.

Loretta is a retired computer professional, formerly responsible for trialling systems in large banks and supermarkets. She and her husband have a long history of volunteering within the Jewish community. She was looking for an interesting way to use her skills, when, at a Mitzvah day (when Jewish people make commitments to support their community) the Linkage Plus plans were outlined and she volunteered to be a peer mentor. She described their enthusiastic plans to run an information session, designing the leaflets and considering issues like confidentiality as well as the interest of being involved in developing the Infostore. This involvement, so close to her professional expertise, was a source of satisfaction. Despite extensive publicity the results have been disappointing. All the volunteers were frustrated when they

received no clients at their info-point but concluded that people who are already at the centre have easy access to a wealth of information. Loretta feels that the people who need to be targeted are those with nobody close to them. There are new plans to try the sheltered housing complexes.

This role developed in LJCS is closest to the notion of a 'peer mentor' envisaged at the outset. There is no reason to doubt that if it could be established it would be helpful to older people. As a service model, it appears not to fit the LJCS community centre model and may be better in more dispersed schemes. Here, it is possible that lessons learnt from the village agents in Gloucestershire may be of benefit. The centre is well-integrated into the Jewish community and word-of-mouth encouragement by volunteers in the synagogues and social groups might improve information take-up by people who are not using the centre at present.

Jean has been a member and volunteer for BI since her retirement from work in 1993, taking on office support duties, a key feature of which for the past 10 years has been phoning their vulnerable members to check on how they are getting on. This aspect of her work has grown dramatically this year when, as part of developing their information service for Linkage, it was decided to increase calls from a six-monthly basis to three monthly. Each week, Jean comes in for the morning to phone around 25 older people

*People do appreciate it – really they like to talk because they are lonely. I just phone and say this is Jean from Belle Isle. I'm ringing to see if you want any help with anything. Sometime people will just say, I was going to ring you – my light bulb's gone. If they don't want anything I ring off, though as I say, they do like to chat.*

Jean loves her contact with the scheme. She goes on some of the social outings, is a member of the management committee and of the 'Guinea Pigs' group which tries out new ideas and activities. She has attended the computer classes offered at the centre.

*I get satisfaction and company (out of volunteering). Since my husband died I'm extremely lonely. I think it is often the case when you have had a strong happy marriage and one partner goes, you feel like a spare part. ....I feel as if I am giving something back by doing this work.*



Joyce found out about MAECare and volunteering by chatting to a woman on a bus. She is very appreciative of that chance encounter that came just as she had retired from work and led to her being involved as a volunteer receptionist and administrative assistant for the last four years.

*Not only does it get me out of the house twice a week, it offers the chance to learn something every day, to help not just the staff but the older people. It is the feeling of belonging to something that is important.*

Joyce's work on reception has extended since the Infostore was launched. Prior to this, she had very limited acquaintance with IT through her previous job but now she is very positive about being able to use the Infostore when people come into the office and describes its contribution to the service as *another arm, another brain*.

*There have been one for two occasions which have made me very pleased when people have come in with a problem where before you might find a leaflet or something but now you can go straight into the programme and give them a phone number or an address and print of the information and I think it is marvellous. I'm as amazed as the client when you find the right information for them. They can watch the screen while we are doing it.*

For the future Joyce thinks the main essential activity for the Infostore, and for the NN, is more publicity; not simply via word of mouth but using local TV programmes and the Yorkshire Evening Post in a campaign which will enable more people to know what is available for them.

Within these two schemes, Linkage Plus has extended existing volunteer roles, adding in the case of MAECare the Infostore as a way of dealing with simple enquiries. This appears to be a role which could easily be adopted in other schemes.

When Doreen moved to Leeds a few years ago to be closer to her family, she had to rebuild her social networks. She had spent her life in 'helping jobs', working with vulnerable people and has kept active in retirement through the Over 55 group in her locality. Once she found her feet in Leeds, she joined AHH where she is on the management committee, actively involved in many activities with the group and is also Chair of her local residents' association. She says that *AHH has kept her brain alive*.

*If I did not come out and do this, I'd be bored stiff and probably depressed.  
We do a good job passing things on.*

When Linkage began, Doreen was one of a small group of designated 'peer mentors', which in this scheme signified that she would be involved in the Linkage activities and would feed back information to others. She attended the training course at the University for peer researchers and the Older Experts group. Doreen also joined the computer course organised with the local college which is co-located at the centre. Doreen is an avid collector of information leaflets and is passionate about trying to ensure that *people have got their entitlements*. She also makes sure that any information she acquires is disseminated at the centre and has helped to run information stalls at outreach events.

She believes strongly in the need to raise awareness of benefits and other information and pushes hard within AHH for this to happen. In her view, over the past year, the profile of information had been raised in the scheme.

In many ways Doreen resembles a 'village agent'. Her former employment, experience and outgoing personality equipped her to help other older people, both in accessing information and in promoting older people's views on a wider stage. Such a role could be a development of the existing skills of volunteers in many schemes as part of the process of raising the profile of information and ensuring better engagement of older people in their own schemes and more widely in society.

It is a disappointment of the project that the notion of 'peer mentors' developed only to a limited extent and was an element of the pilot which had less attention from the project team from early 2008. However, these examples from Linkage Plus pilots show the possibilities for development, mainly within existing resources or by extending the range of volunteers who work in different schemes.

### **Are the outcomes of 'Linkage Plus' in the gateways sites measurable?**

Answering this question is complicated because of the ways in which information-giving activities were integral to the NNs work prior to the study. Here we are trying to identify added value from Linkage funding. Co-ordinators from the gateway sites felt that the broad concepts of prevention and independence promoted by Linkage Plus already underpinned their work and were keen that their general service outcomes should not be simply swept up under the Linkage umbrella. They, therefore, defined the impacts of Linkage in their schemes quite tightly, in terms of

the specific inputs which they had committed to in the contracts with ASC. They were lukewarm in their assessment of the impact of Linkage on their service delivery (around 3 on a scale of 1 to 5), but did in general agree that involvement in the project offered their organisations and members some long-term benefits (around 4 on the scale).

Headline data paints a picture of positive change in a number of key indicators.

- Overall, information contacts rose by 27% from 1078 (Q1) to 1373 (Q5).
- New people accessing information rose by 13.1% overall, with 11% in the comparator sites and 13.7% in the Gateway sites.
- Service contacts rose by 13% from 14,127 (Q1) to 15,991 (Q5).
- From the 568 volunteers across the eight organisations at the start of the Linkage gateways project in May 2007, there has been an increase of at least 48 (8.5%) and 95 (16%) if we include the OAP helpers.

However, if we examine data relating to individual schemes, they are difficult to interpret and to attribute causality. Every site shows growth and development in some elements but there is little commonality across the different elements. Some of the sites with increases in information contacts can link these directly to their Linkage work, though increase in numbers of information and service contacts is not confined to gateway sites. The increase in percentage of new people accessing sites is 2.5% higher in gateways than in comparator sites.

After consultation with sites, the main reason for much of the substantial rise in information contacts over the period appears to be better data capture and, because the comparator sites were also engaged in monitoring, their numbers increased as well as the gateways. Focusing on their information activities made the sites more aware of what they are doing.

### **Summary points and lessons learnt**

Overall then, Linkage Plus gateways element has offered a number of benefits

- In particular, it has enhanced the capacity of the schemes and has left a sustainable legacy in the form of improved IT, publicity material and the Infostore.
- It has led to more opportunities to reach out into the wider community and, for some of the older people associated with the schemes, offered chances to participate in new activities and in IT.

- There has been useful learning about different approaches to extending information access. However, the late start to outreach work (from about March 2008) means that the numbers of new people reached by these events has been small to date, though information giving activity is still ongoing in some schemes.
- A function of the research has to make explicit what was previously implicit and in doing so, has built people's understanding of their own services and developed greater emphasis on this aspect of the work in both the Linkage sites, and to a lesser extent, other NNs in the city.

There are also lessons about how more benefits could have been achieved within the project.

- Some of the opportunities would have been better developed if the timing of the project had been better aligned. There were also frustrations about lengthy procurement processes for IT, with insufficient support available to schemes.
- There is also evidence of the time it takes to effect cultural changes to practice at the front-line and of differing levels of enthusiasm across and within gateway schemes to the Infostore.
- The issue of support to BME elders should have had a higher focus at the stage of making contracts with the gateways sites to ensure that outreach to these groups was addressed more effectively as part of the pilot.
- While all the co-ordinators valued the support of the capacity building worker in sorting out practicalities around IT and grants, there were clearly times in the project where more guidance would have been productive. The gateways meetings were seen by some co-ordinators as a useful opportunity to share ideas but others chose not to attend, finding them competitive or a low priority for their time. The meetings did result in sharing of good ideas which were adopted by other groups but there was perhaps too much reporting of what had happened rather than actual problem solving at the meetings. This stems in part from a lack of clarity at overall project level about whose responsibility it was to performance manage the projects.
- Finally, as in other parts of the project, not only were the gateways in their own 'silo' within the Leeds project, but opportunities for them to learn from Linkage work outside the city were not made available. Links between Leeds, Tower Hamlets (network centres) and Gloucestershire (village agents) at front-line level could have offered useful opportunities to share ideas and learning.

## Section 5 Gateways as part of the city-wide prevention agenda

In the section above we focused on the information aspects of the gateways work. We consider here how the gateways and NNs and other voluntary organisations more generally are located within the broader prevention strategy of the city. Prevention initiatives are often constructed at ascending levels of complexity, as described below. This is a useful shorthand for statutory agencies to describe the technical levels of interventions. In the case of community based organisations like NNs however, their **service** intervention is at the base of the triangle but the people they work with and support on a regular basis in their 'good neighbour role' may be receiving interventions at all levels of the triangle. We have focused here on falls prevention to illustrate this pattern of partnership working but similar patterns can be seen in respect of other types of preventative initiative.

### Falls Prevention work

Leeds has an integrated falls prevention strategy, based on three tiers of input

- Tier 1- Screening and promotion of health active living
- Tier 2- Specialist falls assessment and interventions such as enablement
- Tier 3- Specialist multi-disciplinary falls assessment (acute-based)

There is much evidence about the negative impacts of falls both for the individual and in relation to costs in the wider health system. There are also some positive indicators that the Falls safety work is having an impact. This is at Tier 1, where the Care and Repair Falls prevention service found that 63% of their clients had not fallen since they received the service and at Tier 3 level where admissions to hospital with fractured neck of femur have reduced by 18.2% since 2003-04.

Discussions with the PCT Falls Lead indicate the roles of the NNs which support this strategy. These include distributing health promotion leaflets, bringing people to awareness raising days and involvement in consultation and research. Most recently, the NNs in the West co-ordinated by AHH have supported the piloting of a new Save You sight campaign information leaflet. The public health doctors are delighted with the significant response rate achieved by the NNs in sending this out to their members.

Many also contribute as service providers in their own right at Tier 1, through information contacts and healthy exercise groups.

Our data show that in 15 months, the eight Linkage Plus groups dealt with 1829 enquiries about healthy exercises and leisure and had 13.057 service contacts. These include involving older people in EXTEND, walks, dancing, swimming and Tai

Chi – either at the centre or by facilitating transport and companionship to encourage people to go.

Mrs Hare had been enabled by her NN to get back to the swimming she enjoyed so much.

*I was quite ill at the back end of last year...before that I used to go swimming a lot to try and keep myself fit, which it did really, but, I had to give up swimming and everything else you see, and I was upset about that because I'd no way of getting exercise then you see, but then I found out...when I was beginning to feel better...I found out there was the swimming group. I thought well, that's fine because I'd become rather nervous in the state of health I was, of going out on my own especially going swimming on my own to start again, so I started in April going with the NN swimming group once a week and that got me back into being able to exercise which does me a tremendous amount of good.*

Two NNs helped to co-ordinate the Day of Dance, and small grants for more healthy exercise groups have just been awarded. Several NNs have also been involved in Sloppy Slipper campaigns.

They also both refer to Care and Repair and support its work on the ground, as Mr Thackray's story shows.

Mr Thackray lived alone after the death of his wife. He had become muddled about his medication after a stroke and his Social Worker organised a regular check visit from home care and referred him to the lunch club and stroke club at the NN. They made referrals to the Care and Repair Falls service and have helped him to get chiropody and specialist footwear. They keep a close eye on him at the clubs and call in for a chat if they have any concerns. 16 home visits have taken place in the past year. On a recent visit, they found that Mr Thackray, who likes *to mend things in the house*, had fixed wires across his stairs and had replaced the rugs which had been removed to prevent falls. Because they have a long-standing and close relationship, the worker was able to persuade him that he should remove these hazards.

The relationships between the NNs and Falls prevention work in the city reveal the dual nature of the 'gateway' concept – enabling older people to access information and support of help to them but also in supporting the prevention initiatives offered to improve the lives of older people. In general, statutory staff

were very enthusiastic about their NN partners; though some noted the patchiness of involvement by the schemes.

### **Reducing social isolation**

*Sure Start for Later Life* and Linkage Plus started with a concern for socially excluded people and *Putting People First* has made it clear that the government sees the community sector as a significant partner in addressing these issues.

As part of the Linkage evaluation, we worked with the gateways and the Social Isolation Peer Support group to track, over a period of a year, 51 socially isolated older people. Eight groups took part in the research completing anonymous monitoring forms about a small number of their clients.

The brief pen pictures of the older people show both the elements that frequently lead to social isolation and the fact that people were often faced with a constellation of difficulties. For most of them, poor health and mobility impacted on their ability to get out of their homes and for around 25%, physical problems co-existed with mental health difficulties, notably mild dementia, confusion, depression and loss of confidence and motivation. Five people were either blind or profoundly deaf.

Workers spoke of other individuals as being very private and not wanting to be dependent. Many were widowed, some recently so that bereavement was a key factor in their isolation and a few had never married. Moving to a new area, often in conjunction with other changes in people's lives resulted in social isolation for two people. Five people were long-term carers. Socio-economic factors were poverty, poor or unsuitable housing and problems in accessing transport.

A small number of older people were very socially excluded to the extent that they were out of the mainstream services altogether. One person did not have a GP.

The voluntary groups did not work alone in supporting these older people. Asked to identify other partners who were regularly involved with them, they noted a range of others among whom home care and other voluntary organisations as well as family, figured. Most of the older people received a home visit and initial assessment, followed by a range of interventions. In the past year these included

- **Social support (36)** – walking club, whist club, trips, holidays, lunch clubs, social centre, exercise groups, accompanied shopping trips, tea parties, computer class, dancing, walking the dog.
- **Befriending (11)** – volunteer friendly visitors
- **Telephone contact** on a regular basis **(28)**

- **Bereavement work /carer support (4)**
- **Advocacy/support to try to obtain statutory services (6)**
- **Practical support (28)** including benefits, transport, house-keeping help, gardening, housing, aids and adaptations, shopping and meals on wheels.

Key outcomes from this work particularly centred on developing confidence and enabling people to exercise some choices or control, but for many also included help to better manage physical and mental health and to participate in leisure, and learning activities. For a few people, it was clear that the support had prevented imminent admission to residential or nursing care. Around 27% had had help in the past year to maximise their income.

Several lessons can be drawn from this tracking of 51 socially isolated people. Firstly to understand the range of activities which occur in the community-based voluntary organisations in the city and in regard to Linkage in particular, it is important to note the high-level work which may be going on in the gateways at the same time as social activities and less complicated information giving. Some of this relates to key statutory priorities such as support for older people with mental health problems and safeguarding vulnerable adults.

Mrs Springfield, known to the group for some years, was suddenly reported to them as acting bizarrely. They visited to find her in a distressed state, hearing voices, frightened to leave the house, refusing to unlock her doors except to them. Their serious concerns about her health were reported twice to the GP who visited but felt that there was no serious problem. The NN worker continued to support her, they dealt with her sometimes on a daily basis – reading any letter which arrives, dealing with telephone calls. Finally they referred her to the community psychiatric services directly for diagnosis and treatment. They have persuaded her to have meals on wheels and they continue to support on day-to-day matters and to help her elderly sister-in-law to obtain Lasting Power of Attorney. At present Mrs Springfield is stable and managing to continue living in her own home.

Secondly it is apparent that sometimes the answer is not simply more services but enabling and resourcing the community to develop the solutions (co-production) as in this example where the NN co-ordinator has facilitated access to community resources and helped to repair Miss Woods' informal social networks.

Miss Woods, an elderly spinster, was referred by her niece who was concerned that



she had become isolated. Because of a recent diagnosis of mild dementia, she had started to attend a mental health day centre but everyone agreed that locally based community activities would suit her better. The NN worker met her for an assessment visit and spent some time persuading her to try a local lunch club. Eventually Miss Woods agreed and a volunteer driver picked her up, together with a close neighbour whose own deteriorating physical health meant that she too could not get out by herself. Travelling together encouraged companionship and the two ladies now see each other outside the lunch club.

However, there are clearly other cases where the socially isolated person is not hard-to-reach but has been over-looked or deemed ineligible by the system and the voluntary agencies in the community are 'minding the gap'

Mrs Harrison has been a long-time member of her local NN but is now completely housebound because of ill-health. She has been dependent on a close neighbour who during the year became ill. Mrs Harrison did not want to go into residential care but could not see how she could manage essential tasks such as shopping, collecting her pension and paying bills. She does not require personal care so is not eligible for Social Care support. The NN worker organised a laundry service through Keeping House and a volunteer from the scheme does the shopping. The NN worker has sorted out all the financial matters. This support had prevented this lady from moving into residential care

Finally, these examples illustrate vividly the purpose of the social isolation peer support group, which was supported by Linkage capacity funding from 2006-8. This was continuation funding to maintain a group which had developed at the request of front-line workers and membership rose from 35 to 66 (88%) over the Linkage period. It aimed to provide a relaxed place where front-line staff could meet to share information and issues and to develop training and support for staff. The importance of such a forum for staff engaged in this type of work should not be minimised; many staff themselves feel isolated and disabled by the systems within which they work.

*It is really helpful to me as a front-line worker to be able to talk to other people.*

*You don't feel as if you are on your own so much – it is very supportive and you can find out about how other people cope.*

NN worker

*It is the fact that I very much work by myself so it is useful to be part of a network so you can bounce problems off other people, you can hear what they*

*are doing and it is someone to talk to about things...or say I don't know what to do, can someone help and the group will come up with various suggestions.*

*That is very useful because it is knowing who to go to for their answers and the help which you only really get if you do networking.*

Library development worker

Training and a resource pack were developed from discussions at the group. The pack has been hugely popular across a wide range of agencies and at all levels. It 'sold out' immediately and is now into its second edition with growing demand. It has been greeted with particular enthusiasm by the housing agencies (ALMOs) who have paid for additional copies so that all their wardens can use the pack. Since no single agency may be able to meet all the needs of some of these complex cases, information and good communication across a range of agencies at the front-line is often required. A large-scale multi-agency workshop at the Civic Hall with 97 front-line staff engaged in discussion about the challenges of social isolation and developing ideas to meet those challenges.

To conclude, much progress has been made in Linkage Plus to develop this work at the front-line and vibrant new partnerships such as with the ALMOs have been developed. They are now fully engaged in the Healthy Active Life group and have begun to link their development work into the Older Better action plans, so that for example there has been a significant push on benefits training for wardens with corresponding uptake on benefits, as well as interest in physical activities and in promoting the Infostore.

In terms of joined-up services, it is essential that the experiences of socially isolated older people and staff are fed up the system to high-level policy makers so that their needs can be properly addressed within both mainstream and community based services. There has been an explicit commitment from senior managers in Adult Social Care that the ideas generated in Linkage Plus workshops will be taken up. The social isolation work stream has already been carried forward into high-level strategies and action plans.

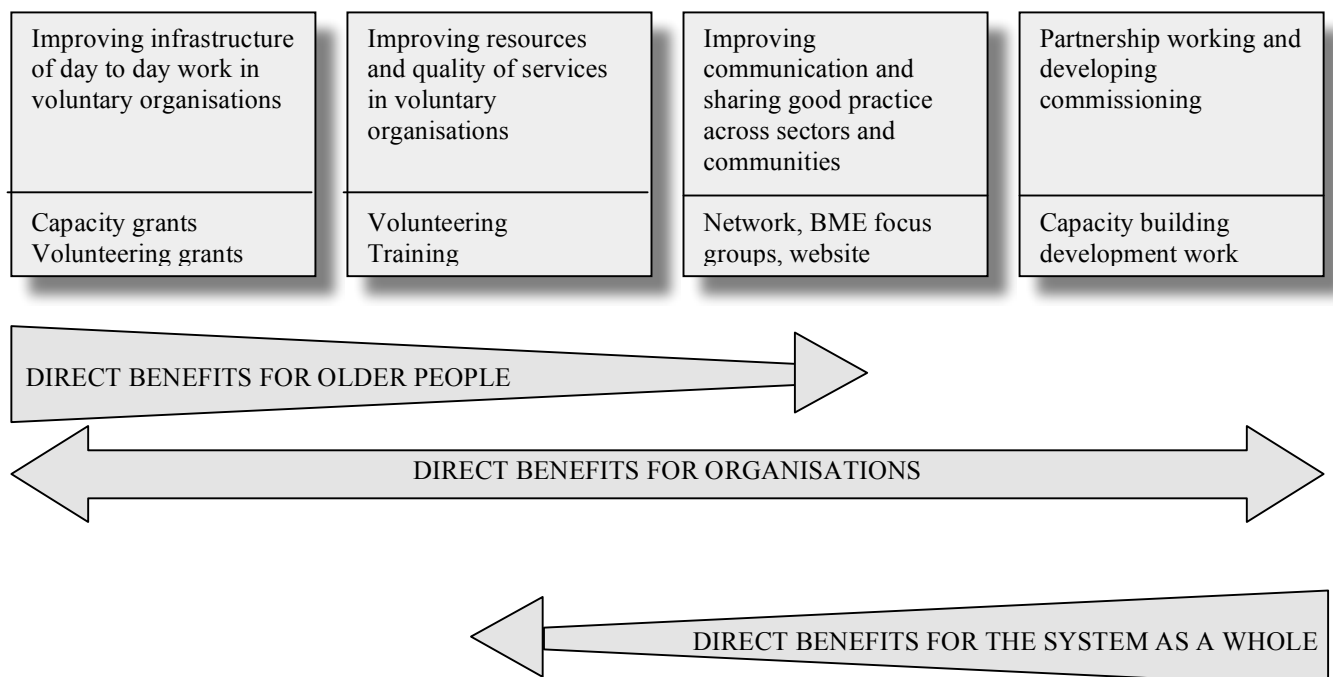
## Section 6 Capacity building

As Linkage Plus was formulated in Leeds, discussions took place between LOPF and ASC about how to develop this aspect of work, and they devised the overall plan based on views from members and their own perceptions. Once the funding was in place, there was active involvement of more stakeholders through the capacity building group, which was comprised of representatives from Social Services, LOPF, local voluntary groups and NNs and older people, about how different elements of the programme should be progressed. It must be said that there was, and remains, a view from front-line voluntary organisations that, if they were given resources directly and consistently, this would be the best way to build their capacity. However, the range of work undertaken through Linkage Plus reflects a desire to achieve a balance between the individual needs of front-line voluntary organisations, the higher level needs of the voluntary sector more widely and relationships with commissioners.

Within Leeds Linkage Plus, there have been four key areas –

- Improving infrastructure of day-to-day work – capacity grants
- Improving resources and quality of services – training and volunteering
- Improving communications and sharing good practice – networks, BME focus group, website
- Capacity building in respect of commissioning.

The chart below shows this diagrammatically and also indicates the type of benefits that we might expect to see in each aspect of capacity building activity



Resources which supported this work directly were:

- Capacity building and volunteering grants and IT support for gateways – £65,826
- Salary costs of development and administrative workers at Leeds Older People's Forum including consultancy paid to UpBeat (social enterprise organisation) – £125,833
- Project contract with Voluntary Action Leeds for volunteer support – £10,000.

Additionally LOPF received FCR costs for management support to their staff – £27,000 over two years

The work was also supported, at times intensively, by the Linkage Project Development worker based at SSD and the project manager (estimated proportion of salary costs) £17,500.

Most of the capacity building resource was spent in the voluntary sector: approximately 27% of the capacity building money was spent directly in the grass roots voluntary sector organisations and 66% in voluntary sector infrastructure organisations

## **Outputs**

In the chart of Linkage activities and the capacity building report, the different work streams have been described in detail. However, certain types of outputs cut across the capacity building work streams as we show below

- **Training**  
29 training courses for 472 people (93 older people, 115 volunteers, 207 staff and 51 staff and volunteers).  
Two ten week accredited courses in volunteer management due in January 2009 (30-40).
- **Consultation and Research** – 316 older people and 38 organisations.
- **Workshops and conferences** – 4 events involving 652 people – front-line staff, older people and volunteers.
- **Capacity building grants** made available to 58 voluntary organisations
- **Volunteer recruitment and retention**  
New focus at city-wide volunteer recruitment bureau on older people (increase of 23% in first 6 months on previous year from a low base).  
Two events in colleges for BME groups.

Four voluntary organisations funded to promote and market themselves to potential volunteers.

Volunteering Wiki devised for Jan - March 2009.

Grants used for volunteer training or thank you events.

- ***Information and communication***

Publication of Social Isolation resource pack (over 500 distributed by July 2008)

Booklet on Setting up a volunteering project published Oct 2008

Leeds Older People's website – 5199 hits

Strong multi-agency networks (BME, Social Isolation, Lifelong Learning and Leisure and Intergenerational work (233 members involved in networks)

### **Examples of capacity building work**

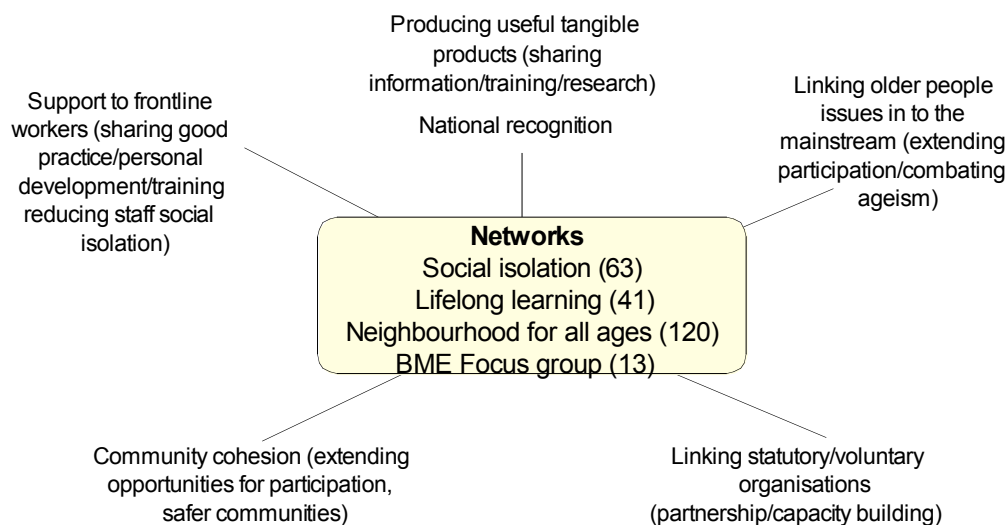
#### ***Grants offered to community groups to build capacity.***

These grants were offered early in the project, were very popular and heavily over-subscribed – £40,700 was awarded and applications for a further £29,000 had to be rejected. Single grants of £2000 were made to individual organisations and £5000 to joint bids. The greatest demand was for money for computers and IT hardware, followed by software and training. BME groups were well involved in the project through the BME Focus group. Grants went to 26 organisations (41 benefited because of joint applications) supporting around 24,000 people between them. 95% of grant-holders thought that their organisations enjoyed long-term benefits as a result of the grants. This aspect of the work was not only highly valued by the groups who received grants but also by the LOPF workers who were delighted that money had been spent directly at the front-line. This was generally felt to be a project element people would like to have invested more in.

#### ***Networks***

Another highly successful element of capacity building work were the networks of workers, facilitated by the voluntary sector but reaching across the sectors. Each focused on a particular area of interest – social isolation, lifelong learning, intergenerational work and BME groups – and developed its own work programme. In all there was strong evidence of good partnership working both within the groups and spilling out into everyday work and into higher level partnerships, which is now being further developed in city-wide agendas.

## Outcomes of capacity building networks



## Outcomes of capacity building work

Outcomes from capacity building work are difficult to measure. The outcomes listed here have been drawn from interviews and feedback forms across the range of capacity building work.

### *Benefits to older people*

- Better easier access to NNs (e.g. new phone systems)
- Improved quality of service
- Increased participation of BME elders in Linkage Plus work and cross community enjoyment of arts project
- Improved access to learning and information

### *Benefits to older people as volunteers*

- More information about opportunities to volunteer
- More access to training and support
- Increased confidence

### *Benefits to organisations*

- Increased efficiency and effectiveness in day-to-day working
- Improved staff skills and knowledge through training and networking
- Improved access to information
- Improved access for external referrers
- Better image to outside world
- Sharing ideas and good practice

- Reciprocal awareness of shared areas of work across sectors

*System wide benefits*

- Older people's issues and contributions into the mainstream services (particularly learning and leisure, intergenerational work)
- Recognition across the system of specific needs of socially isolated older people
- More awareness of needs of BME older people
- Partnership working and networking enabling cultural changes
- Improved communication between voluntary organisations and commissioners

Opportunities to be involved were spread across the city and not simply concentrated in a small group of organisations. However, there were areas of work which were not fully developed or where opportunities were missed.

- There are very limited outputs and outcomes at present from the volunteering project because of a late start.
- Training in the NNs has been predominantly focused on staff rather than for management committees who will need support to cope with the commissioning process. This was identified at the outset of the project but was not progressed.
- Work with BME groups focused on networking within these minority communities rather than looking at the needs of BME elders more widely in the Linkage Gateways and local services.
- Much of the work was deliberately focused at front-line and organisational level though there has been impact from networks into higher-level policy, which is to be developed further.

While many people in the voluntary sector recognise the value of the work undertaken, its impact on the sustainability of the sector is less evident, in view of continuing uncertainties about funding and the outcome of commissioning reviews. On-going funding for projects was a topic for Board discussions on several occasions but little high-level action resulted until almost the end of the project. Only the BME focus group co-ordinator sought (unsuccessfully) continuation funding from outside the statutory sector. Funding has been allocated from the social care reform grant to LOPF for social isolation and intergenerational work and a bid has been requested for BME development work.

## **Section 7 Partnerships and processes, and lessons learnt**

Nationally Linkage Plus was designed to test out the limits of holistic working and joined up services. Within Leeds, there was a strong aspiration to work in partnership with other agencies and in particular with older people and the voluntary sector. The project was launched at a time which was both challenging and promising – the reorganisations of both the PCT and ASC in 2006 meant that there was a change in personnel and in policy focus, but the drift of central government policy in 2007-8 notably the Joint Commissioning Framework and Putting People First offered significant opportunities. The voluntary sector, too, was facing challenges with the reduction in Lottery funding and a major review of NNs by ASC during 2008.

### **Involvement of older people**

The involvement of older people was important to the way the whole project was run. There were some opportunities throughout for older people's voices to be heard – in their own schemes, in development of the Infostore, through focus groups and interviews, as peer researchers, in the Older Experts' group. The latter was a small scale group of local older people associated with some of the gateway sites and was extremely popular with its participants. They valued highly opportunities for being involved at a local and national level and sharing ideas. Several said they would like a similar group to be developed to enable them to hear about what is going on elsewhere in the city. From our interviews with older people, the opportunity for cross fertilisation of ideas would be a useful development.

Despite these opportunities to shape the work for a relatively small group of older people, there was no consistent place for older people's voices to shape the project as a whole. LOPF lobbied hard at the early Project Boards on this topic but it was not taken up. Representatives of Leeds Involvement Project were engaged in the initial planning groups around Gateways and capacity building but they ceased to attend meetings by mid 2007. A more robust and consistent approach to older people's involvement in steering the project would be helpful for future work, such as Cities in Balance.

### **Partnership with the voluntary sector.**

In terms of the key implementation partnership with the voluntary sector, there is evidence both of good close working and strong personal respect. There was equal input into the formulation of the plans and ideas. However, both parties had to climb



a steep learning curve – the voluntary sector workers recognised that they had started the work with the mindset of grant-receivers rather than partners. New roles were required too in implementation- LOPF is a membership organisation focused on development and representation of the sector rather than performance management. At times, there were real frustrations on both sides with the feeling that the equal partnership in power and responsibilities did not fully materialise. The decision of the DWP to contract only with the local authority rather than directly with the voluntary sector, as had been an initial aspiration in Leeds, impacted here. Difficulties in the city council around the completion of the contract with LOPF, delayed for over a year from the start of the project, caused particular friction but also contributed to lack of clarity about what was expected from individual workers throughout the project.

### **Project processes**

The city was very fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in a project of this kind with a substantial amount of money to spend. A manager spoke about the huge advantages of being involved in a project of this type, but also recognised some of its drawbacks.

*Short-term projects get things going. They are great, they allow you to experiment, to be, to some extent, free of your own management team; they allow you to go off and really pour some thinking, time and money into something. But that comes at a cost. Workers are worrying about whether they have got a job in 6 month's time and you are always aware that they are going to be looking for another job.*

Changes in personnel at national and local level did impact on the project, both in signalling changes in direction and in creating hiatuses in the planned work. In general, too, there were concerns that this was a heavily bureaucratised project at national level, which permeated to the local level and that much time initially was spent in meetings – and *feeding the paper monkey*.

Another tension facing the team lay at the heart of the objectives – to test out and provide a robust evidence base and to disseminate lessons and good practice. The political imperatives of influencing the Comprehensive Spending Review and subsequent national policy priorities meant that early findings were being disseminated very early in the project. For Leeds also, who had delays in implementing some elements, there were pressures towards the end of the project in arguing for follow-on funding. From early 2008, much energy was put into promoting

the project and its objectives, with some success in terms of sustainability but some impact on actual outputs. One community based worker noted that *Linkage does a lot of celebrating*.

The procurement and recruitment processes within LCC appear to be highly complex and to be problematic in a short-term project, especially since some of the team had limited experience in dealing with them. There was a successful tendering process for the Infostore, supported by the City Council IT section, but other elements of the project were hampered by delays. This applied to the recruitment of the Infostore Development Manager, the contracts with both LOPF and VAL and grants to the gateways for IT.

From experiences within the project the following lessons can be drawn

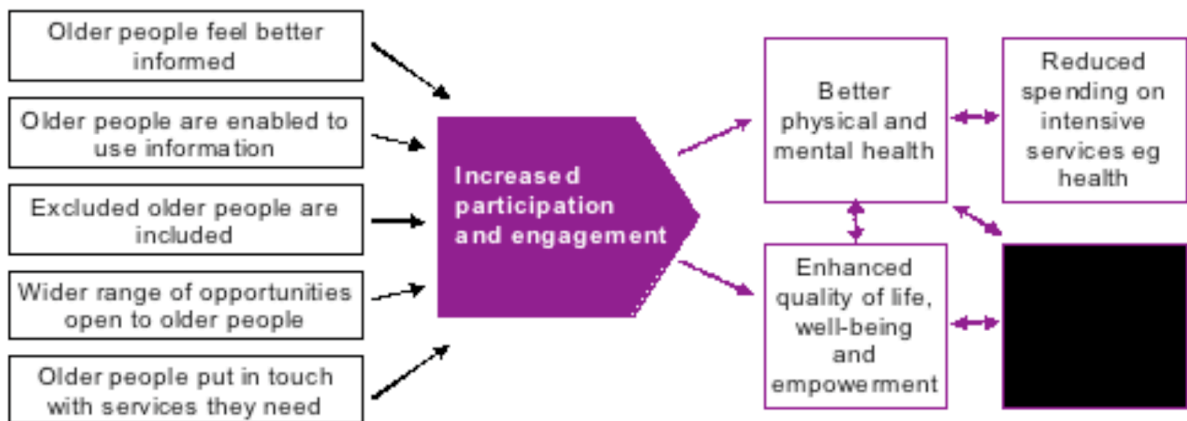
- There is a need for a much wider consultation on ideas and possible ways forward before the project to ensure buy-in and to help to develop more clarity about what the project is about. This should include older people in a decision-making role. The implication is that projects of this type need a longer lead in time.
- Targets and outcomes should be jointly agreed, locally as well as nationally, and measurable.
- There is a need for a project plan, which takes a strategic view across the elements of the project and draws out possible links. The project outcomes would have benefited if some cross-cutting issues, such as BME involvement in the gateways had been picked up.
- Furthermore there needs to be clarity within the plan about respective roles and responsibilities of the project team in relation to performance management/ support/liaison. Lack of clarity in this respect led to elements like the peer mentor work fading from view early in 2008.
- Advice needs to be sought about procurement processes and how to deal with these as simply as possible. For a scheme of this size, a 'buddy' from the procurement team should be sought at the outset and involved throughout to ensure expert advice which is sympathetic to the aims of the project.
- More careful consideration is needed about the balance between resources for front-line development and project management and evaluation.
- Sustainability and governance of major developments like the Infostore should be considered when the project is being developed and be a subject for the Board throughout.

- Buy-in from mainstream budget holders and their involvement in the Board from the outset is important to understand what outcomes they are looking for, if longer-term funding is sought. This is particularly important where more intangible work is being undertaken such as the voluntary sector capacity building work.
- Leeds Linkage Plus was rooted in strong partnership initiatives like Older Better. These have been strengthened and extended as a result of the Linkage work. New high-level partnerships are now strong and well established in the overall city strategies. However, Linkage Plus itself was based in and at times rather limited to ASC and the voluntary sector. This was a consequence of the time pressures under which people were working. For future development, especially around information, wider partnership work is important.
- Nationally, better sharing of the Linkage Plus activities and lessons at the front-line would have been helpful during the project rather than at the end.

## Section 8 Conclusions

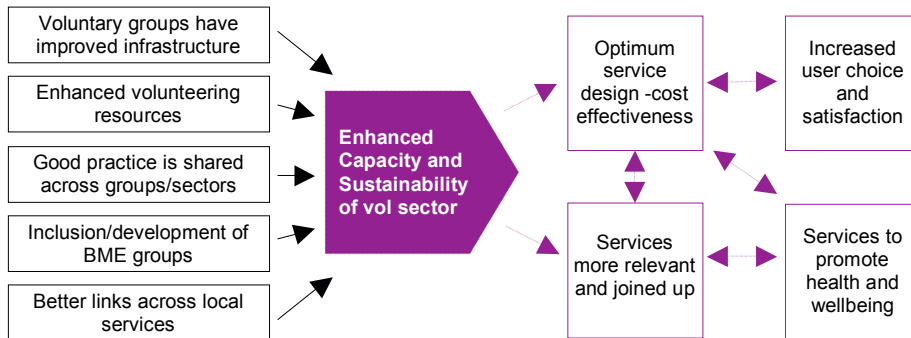
At the beginning of the project, we described the types of outcomes that might be expected from the work which was planned. In a project of less than two year's duration, we recognise that only short-term outcomes were likely to be demonstrable, but that prior research indicates that there is a likely causal link between these outcomes and longer-term, higher-level outcomes that will enable money to shift within the system. Our first diagram, based on work by ODPM (2006), focused on direct benefits to older people. The second, based on work by the national evaluations, focuses on organisational outcomes.

### Direct benefits for older people



The experiences of older people who use the gateway and comparator sites demonstrated many of these outcomes, both short term and longer-term. In terms of direct benefits to older people from Linkage Plus funded information-promoting activities, increased use of information, reaching out to older people who had not previously been in touch with schemes and widening opportunities can be seen. However, only a relatively small number of people experienced these benefits because of project delays. The Gateways work was also only a small part of the overall resource allocation. The Infostore remains a tangible legacy of the project, with some positive indicators of its future outcomes.

## Organisational Outcomes



Many of the outcomes of Linkage are observable at an organisational or system level. The Linkage Plus capacity building work made direct contributions to these outcomes, although work on volunteering was delayed and is still being developed.

In addition to these 'service' related outcomes, there was evidence of wider community outcomes, representing the voluntary sector's 'added value' contribution to citywide community building. Positive affirmation of older people as citizens came from the involvement of older people in all aspects of the gateway type schemes including management and volunteering. Promotion of active ageing and improved understanding of older people's needs occurred through the networks. There were strong examples of community development, for example, in Armley Helping Hands' work with local employers and in the BME Focus Group work, while participants valued the contribution of intergenerational work to community cohesion.

The Linkage Plus legacy in capacity building can be seen in enhanced infrastructure for gateways and other local groups, in flourishing networks which have been linked into ongoing high-level policy work on prevention and in its influence on city-wide commissioning. An important element of the Leeds pilot was to examine these existing services in depth and to demonstrate the nature of support that they provide. Linkage Plus has been able to offer this information to the schemes themselves, the local commissioners and national policy makers. The concept of a 'gateway' to services has been adopted both by the NNs themselves in their self-assessment forms and by the Commissioning Review.

These legacies offer valuable contributions to developing the resources and culture of the city to maximise the opportunities for its ageing population, provided that the fundamental issue of sustainable core funding for the community and voluntary groups is appropriately addressed.

**List of schemes involved in Linkage Gateways work and abbreviations used in report.**

**In receipt of grant funding as 'gateways'**

- Action for Gipton Elderly – (AGE)
- Armley Helping Hands – (AHH)
- Belle Isle Elderly Winter Aid – (Belle Isle/ BI)
- Leeds Jewish Care Services – (LJCS)
- Moor Allerton Elderly Care – (MAECare/ MC)
- Older Active People – (OAP)

**Comparator sites**

- Older People's Action in the Locality – (OPAL)
- Richmond Hill Elderly Action – (RHEA)

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