

Research report

Outcomes of the Active at 60 Community Agent Programme

by Areenay Hatamian, Daniel Pearmain
and Sarah Golden

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 808

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By Areenay Hatamian, Daniel Pearmain and Sarah Golden

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The Authors

Areenay Hatamian led the final report of the research in her role as Researcher at CDF, having been involved in the surveys and interviews with funded groups, Community Agents and older people who participated in the programme.

Daniel Pearmain, Research Officer at CDF, undertook interviews with older people and Community Agents and analysed and reported the findings of the research.

Sarah Golden is Head of Research at CDF and oversaw the research into the Active at 60 Community Agents programme including the initial research design, data collection and analysis and reporting.

Abbreviations and glossary of terms

CDF	The Community Development Foundation
Community Agent	<p>A volunteer with a community group whose role aimed to empower and support older people to become and/or stay active in their later life, and in particular to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• help them take the first step, through encouragement and accompaniment;• show them the ‘value’ they can gain from undertaking an activity, whether this is personal benefit (e.g. improved health outcomes) or ‘giving something back’ to their community;• build ‘social’ contacts, to make activities habit forming.
CVS	A Council for Voluntary Service (CVS)
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
Local Funder	Local funders were generally community foundations whose role was to manage the process for groups to apply for funding and to distribute the funds to successful applicants.
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

Summary

Key lessons learned

- There is value in a Community Agent leadership role. The funding was a catalyst for instigating this role and most community groups who responded to the survey (91 per cent) had continued the role after the funding ceased and most Community Agents who responded to the survey (81 per cent) planned to continue in the role.
- There is a need for the type of support and activities that the groups provided for older people. Nearly all groups responding to the final funded groups' survey (92 per cent) attracted older people as new members and most (74 per cent) attracted those that were living alone.
- Groups were motivated to develop new activities in order to offer more variety and attract new members. They were also aiming to offer activities to keep older people mentally and physically active, to respond to a need and to try new things.
- To engage older people it is necessary to overcome their apprehension, encourage them and sometimes provide practical support, such as transport.
- By socialising and getting out of the house older people interviewed had benefited from building new friendships, some of which developed and extended beyond meeting at the group. Some older people who had felt that they were low or depressed, or considered that they were at risk of becoming so, improved in their mental wellbeing as a result of participating.
- Around two-fifths (41 per cent) of the groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey had extended the range and number of activities they offered, and around half (47 per cent) tailored their activities more to the needs of older people.
- The Community Agent role is beneficial to those who fulfil it as well as those they help. Those who were interviewed benefited socially, enjoyed their role, and gained a sense of satisfaction from making a contribution and having a sense of purpose.
- The local funders had a valuable role in mediating and explaining the message from central government at a local level and helping to ensure that community groups interpreted that message correctly.

Background

The Active at 60 Community Agents programme was launched in March 2011 and ran until 31 December 2011. It was a £1 million Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) fund that was administered nationally by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). The overarching aim of the programme was for community groups and their volunteers to help people approaching and post retirement to stay or become more active and positively engaged with society, in particular those at risk of social isolation and loneliness in later life.

What was the role of the Community Agent?

A wide variety of individuals became Community Agents. However, a typical Community Agent who responded to the survey was female, retired, aged between 55 and 69 and already volunteering at their community group, but not usually in a leadership role. The Community Agent role provided

an opportunity to extend their responsibilities. They generally focused on letting older people know what was available at their community group, as well as organising and running activities, encouraging older people to take part in these and identifying the sort of activities that older people would be interested in.

As most Community Agents who responded to the survey expected to continue in the role, it is apparent that the role was perceived as valuable by groups and, indeed by the Community Agents themselves. Community Agents interviewed had generally enjoyed the role and gained a sense of satisfaction and purpose from making a contribution and seeing the outcomes of this which often contributed to their wellbeing.

The main lessons learned were that **there was value in someone taking a lead role to engage with and encourage older people to participate**, to be proactive in seeking out older people and keeping them motivated to attend. The experience of Community Agents and older people confirmed that, to fulfil their role, a Community Agent needed to have particular skills and qualities. They had to be able to understand and respect older people, to have good communication and listening skills, and to be positive and enthusiastic.

How did they reach and engage older people and what worked well?

The community groups who responded to the survey successfully recruited new older people to their groups. The majority had engaged new members, typically ten, since the programme began. They had targeted and successfully recruited the groups who were the focus for the programme. **There was a need to overcome older people's apprehension and nervousness to encourage them to join the group in addition to providing practical support, such as with transport, to gain their participation.**

Word of mouth was widely used by Community Agents who responded to the survey to raise awareness of activities and support on offer at their community group, and was considered most effective. This was reflected in word of mouth being the most commonly reported way older people had become aware of the group and its activities, but it was not the only method. There was also value in using more than one approach, including taster sessions that two-fifths of responding Community Agents considered effective.

What did groups do with the funding?

Groups who participated in the programme and responded to the first funded groups' survey typically offered physical or healthy living activities and social activities. To encourage more participation by older people, half of the groups responding to the final funded groups' survey had extended the number and range of activities they offered and had tailored their activities to older people's needs. It is evident that **they had either diversified slightly from the activities they usually offered, or had added something entirely new.** Some had tailored what they usually offered to be accessible for older people. Where they had adopted new activities, these tended to be innovative for their group, rather than completely novel.

The groups had extended the responsibilities of their existing volunteers and introduced a new role of Community Agent that will continue in the future. It was evident that respondents to the final funded groups' survey extended their networks, making links with three other organisations on average that would be sustained in future.

What difference did the programme make?

Overall, groups funded through the Programme who responded to the final funded groups' survey increased the number of older people taking part in activities as the majority of groups had increased the number of new people who participated. **Through participating in these groups, older people had a reason to leave their house and a new opportunity to meet new people and develop friendships which were the two most commonly identified benefits.** These social benefits were commonly experienced and, for some older people at risk of depression or loneliness, involvement also helped improve their mental wellbeing. The majority of the groups responding to the final funded groups' survey said the programme had improved the mental wellbeing of older people and that they had improved self-esteem and confidence as a result of the programme. In addition to the mental health benefits, older people benefited in their physical health; particularly where the group focused on exercise, sport or physical activity.

The evidence shows the value of new friendships beyond the group as older people interviewed met up independently, formally and informally. The shared experience from the group helped social interactions by providing a focus for conversation. In addition, by focusing on promoting participation by older people in community groups, **the programme enhanced the community by raising awareness among older people of opportunities on offer locally and increasing availability of activities.**

What is the legacy of the programme?

There is evidence that the programme has a legacy beyond the lifetime of the programme. The groups will continue to meet the programme aims through continuing the Community Agent role and ongoing activities. **The majority of groups responding to the final funded groups' survey will continue their work, with some groups expanding and building on their achievements.** Evidence also suggests that positive outcomes for participants will be sustained as their involvement with community groups continues.

Conclusion

The programme met its aims as funding for activities and practicalities, alongside the voluntary Community Agent role, provided an impetus for groups to extend their reach to new older people, adapting their activities and offer as required. Consequently, more older people engaged in community groups and benefited from increased social interaction. This helped improve their wellbeing and confidence and mental activity. The Community Agent role gave an opportunity, valued by group leaders and volunteers, for volunteers to extend their responsibilities.

The programme was helping older people to have a more active role in their communities by increasing their social networks, which extended beyond group meetings, and increasing the number and range of activities available within their community. Groups generally intended to continue the Community Agent role and activities and were seeking more than one source of funding to achieve this including grants, membership fees and fundraising.

The targeted funding approach was a catalyst for establishing new, and refocusing existing, work with older people, which has been sustained after funding ceased. The increased social networks and impact on older people's wellbeing illustrates the valuable service small community groups can provide to support health and social services.

Research methods

Conducted between 2011 and 2012, the methodology comprised surveys and interviews with local funders, funded group leaders, Community Agents and older people.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The population in England is ageing and people aged over 50 will represent 40 per cent of the population by 2026, rising from 34 per cent in 2009.¹ For many people, older age is a positive experience where they have more time to pursue their interests, participate in social and family activities and make a contribution to their communities. Nearly two out of three volunteers (65 per cent) are aged 50 or over.² The European Year of Active Ageing³ in 2012 seeks to recognise this contribution to society made by older people both as volunteers and in the unpaid caring role many often undertake. In addition, the Year of Active Ageing highlights the need to ensure appropriate labour market opportunities are available for older people who will be increasingly continuing to work for longer as pension ages rise.

The third focus of Active Ageing is on empowering those older people with declining health and increasing disabilities to maintain an independent life for as long as possible. There is evidence that older people can be susceptible to social isolation and loneliness.⁴ Recent research has found that older people in the UK ranked third in their wellbeing and social participation of the four countries studied (Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden). They had the lowest scores of the four countries for loneliness indicating that they felt lonely more often than their peers in other countries.⁵ Older people's susceptibility to loneliness is related to, for example, losing the social networks that result from being in employment or from losing a partner through bereavement. It is evident that social networks are important to minimising the likelihood of older people experiencing loneliness.⁶ The habits that people gain and the activities that people get involved with as they approach the end of their working life and commence their retirement can be carried through to later life. Thus, people who are very active tend to remain so, while those who are more isolated and inactive at this stage are at risk of becoming more so as they get older.

In response to this risk of older people becoming socially isolated, the Active at 60 Community Agents programme ('the programme') was launched in March 2011 and ran until 31 December 2011. It was a £1 million Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) fund that was administered nationally by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). Figure 7.1 in Chapter 7 presents an overview of the programme and a summary can be found in Appendix A.

¹ Audit Commission (2010). *Under Pressure: Tackling the Financial Challenge for Councils of an Ageing Population*. Available: <http://www.auditcommission.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/AuditCommissionReports/NationalStudies/20100218-underpressure-nationalstudy.pdf>

² *ibid.*

³ <http://europa.eu/ey2012/ey2012main.jsp?catId=971&langId=en> Accessed 28 May 2012.

⁴ Clifton, J. (2009). *Ageing and Well-being in an International Context. Politics of Ageing Working Paper no 3*: Institute for Public Policy Research. IPPR. Available: http://www.ippr.org/images/media/files/publication/2011/05/ageing_international_context_1732.pdf Accessed 28 May 2012.

⁵ Demos (2012) *Ageing Across Europe*. Cardiff: WRVS. Available: http://www.wrvs.org.uk/Uploads/Documents/Reports%20and%20Reviews/ageing_across_europe_may24_2012.pdf Accessed 28 May 2012.

⁶ Clifton, J. (2009) *op cit.*

The overarching aim of the Active at 60 Community Agents programme was to help people approaching and post retirement to stay or become more active and positively engaged with society, in particular those most at risk of social isolation and loneliness in later life, thereby aiming to prevent isolation and the associated decline in health and quality of life. It formed part of a range of DWP-led initiatives responding to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society,⁷ which aimed to redefine retirement as an active phase of later life.

To achieve this aim, the programme gave small grants of between £250 and £3,000 to around 460 volunteer-led community groups with an average annual income of £50,000 or less. CDF administered the fund via a network of 21 independent local funding bodies, with a local funder being appointed to administer the programme in each of the 30 selected areas in England (see Appendix A and Appendix C for more details of the model and approach adopted). These areas were selected taking account of levels of deprivation⁸ and the proportion of the population over State Pension age, while seeking to ensure a balance across the regions and of urban and rural areas.

Local funders are independent civil society organisations, including Community Foundations, Councils and Voluntary Services and Rural Community Councils, with a proven track record in delivering grant funding to small, volunteer led groups. They led on promoting the fund in their local areas to potential grant recipients, using their local knowledge of the sector. Local funders were required to offer pre-application guidance and support to potential applicants by phone and email, thus enabling them to submit the strongest possible applications for funding and thereby ensuring the highest possible quality of funded projects, within the constraints of the available funding.

Local funders assessed the applications using panels comprising staff and volunteers who had extensive experience of successfully administering small grants funds at a local level. They also had responsibility for distributing the funds to the successful groups and carrying out 'light touch' monitoring of the grant recipients.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The programme aimed to:

- empower individuals, at the local level, to provide leadership roles for older people in their community;
- help improve people's later life, encouraging them to play an active role in their communities;
- reduce the risk of older people becoming socially isolated and lonely; and
- achieve the sustainability of the 'Active at 60 Community Agent' role beyond the life of the programme.

Central to the programme was the peer-volunteer element in the form of Active at 60 Community Agents. The programme model aimed to test the approach of using such volunteers based in local community groups, preferably nearing or at retirement age, who offered their time to help improve the quality of life for people in their community. Guidance provided for local funders by DWP and CDF described Community Agents as follows:

⁷ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/ageing-society/>

⁸ Areas were selected where they scored highly on the Office for National Statistics index of multiple deprivation data 2007.

'... there are a few basic qualities that volunteers would need to make a good [Community Agent] volunteer. Active at 60 Community Agents will need to be older people themselves. They will be friendly and approachable, and ideally live and/or work in the community they are helping. Agents should understand the type of person they are helping, and identify ways in which to target and encourage active participation. They will need to be someone that the older person can identify with.'

The Active at 60 Community Agent role aimed to empower and support the target audience for the programme to become and/or stay active in their later life, and in particular to:

- help them take the first step, through encouragement and accompaniment;
- show them the 'value' they can gain from undertaking an activity, whether this is personal benefit (e.g. improved health outcomes) or 'giving something back' to their community; and
- build 'social' contacts, to make activities habit forming.

DWP and CDF guidance also stressed flexibility in interpreting the role at a local level:

*'Local groups will have the flexibility to come up with their own name for the role, if they feel it would be more appropriate for their community ... Each local organisation is free to recruit Agents on their own terms, based on knowledge of their local area and community.'*⁹

The Community Agent role was a voluntary, unpaid role. The funding provided through the programme could be used for activities for older people, including equipment, materials, venue costs and travel costs and refreshments and for office costs such as telephone and stationery costs.

1.3 Methodology

The evaluation of the programme was conducted by CDF's research team, on behalf of DWP, to research the extent to which the programme achieved its original aims and objectives. The evaluation was reviewed by an external peer reviewer to provide an independent assessment of the methods, research materials and outputs, including reports. A mixed method evaluation design was used and this report draws on qualitative and quantitative data collected through the following research methods.

- Telephone interviews with **ten local funders**¹⁰ (August – September 2011) selected to provide a spread of funders across the different regions and to cover rural/urban areas. Local funders were generally community foundations whose role was to manage the process for groups to apply for funding and to distribute the funds to successful applicants.
- A survey (online and postal) of **461 leaders of groups** who had received funding of which **220 responded** (September – October 2011) representing a response rate of 48 per cent.
- **Review of programme management information (MI)** collated by CDF's Programme Delivery team from information about funded community groups received from local funders and end of programme monitoring data. This provided details of the number of groups funded, the amount of funding provided to each group¹¹ and feedback at the end on local funders' experience of the programme.
- A survey (online and postal) of **252 Community Agents** (October – December 2011).

⁹ Community Agents programme Q&A guidance document distributed by CDF to local funders.

¹⁰ Ten local funders were sampled from the total of 21 local funders.

¹¹ See Appendix D.

- Telephone interviews with **35 leaders of groups** who had received funding through the programme (November – December 2011).
- Telephone interviews with **60 Community Agents** (December 2011 – February 2012).
- Face-to-face interviews with 60 older people who are involved in the activities funded by the programme (February – April 2012).
- A final follow-up survey (online and postal) of **159 funded groups** (February – March 2012).

Further details of the research methods are provided in Appendix B.

2 The role of Community Agents

Key lessons learned

- A variety of people became Community Agents, however, among those who responded to the survey, a typical Community Agent was female, retired, aged between 55 and 69 and was an existing member of the community group. They typically spent three hours a week fulfilling the role.
- Volunteers are willing to take on more responsibilities and become Community Agents – most of the Community Agents responding to the survey were already volunteers in their community group, but not usually in formal roles such as leading the group, treasurer or trustee.
- The most common tasks undertaken by Community Agent respondents were letting older people know what was on offer, gathering ideas for activities from older people, organising activities and encouraging older people to take part in activities, some of whom for the first time.
- Community Agent respondents used more than one technique to reach out to older people and engage them in the group. Word of mouth and putting information in public places were the most common methods used among respondents.
- Among Community Agent survey respondents, community groups had supported them with awareness raising and publicity, practical and logistical support, financial and in kind support, and support with developing activities.
- Community Agent respondents had received support from local funders with funding advice, sharing information and advice on activities.
- There was value in engaging with other community groups to promote activities for older people, share events and activities, and to signpost older people to other groups' relevant activities, Community Agent interviewees reported.
- The Community Agent role is beneficial to those who fulfil it as well as those they help. Those who were interviewed benefited socially, enjoyed their role, and gained a sense of satisfaction from making a contribution and having a sense of purpose.
- The value of the Community Agent role lay in providing a lead, proactively seeking older people to participate, keeping older people motivated and encouraging them to do small things.
- Funded groups leaders and older people interviewed considered that Community Agents need to have understanding and respect, good communication skills, including listening, and to be positive and enthusiastic to fulfil the role.

2.1 Introduction

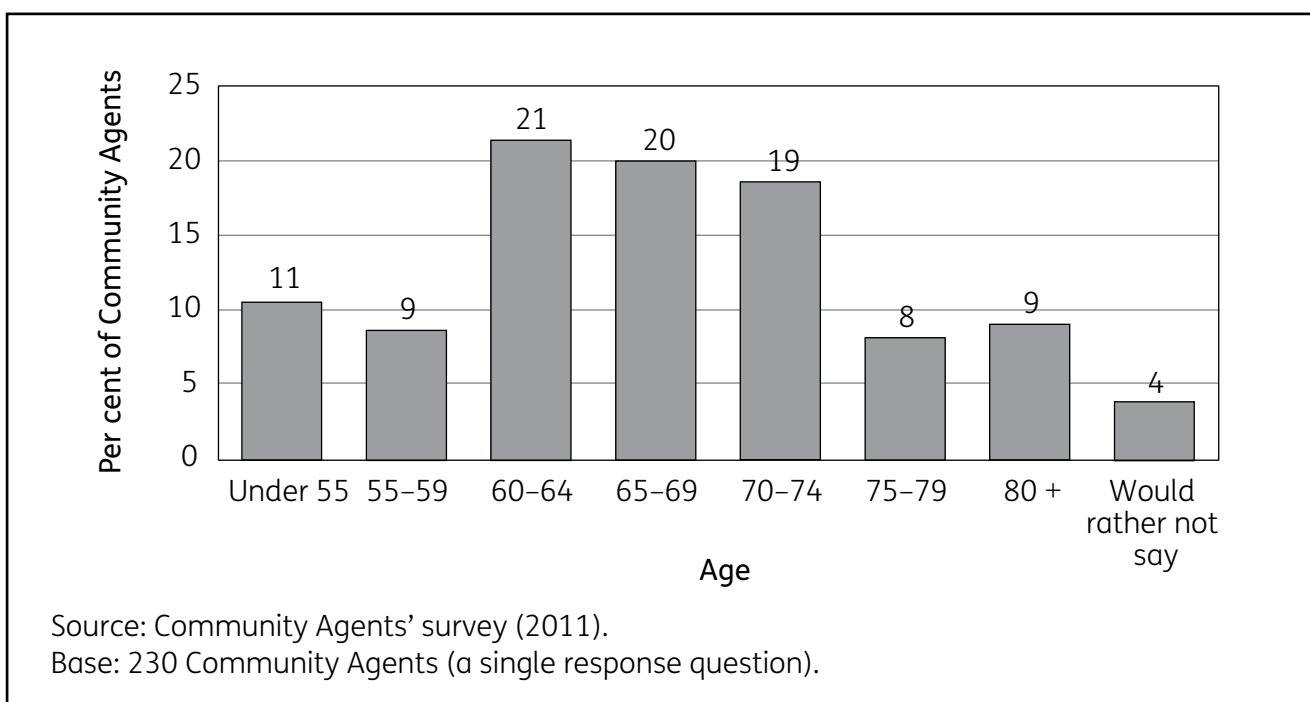
This chapter will explore the central role of the Community Agents. It will characterise the types of people who fulfilled the role and why they did so. It will outline the variation in the way the role was performed on the ground and its role in empowering local people and developing leadership. It will identify the main challenges experienced in undertaking the Community Agent role, the lessons learned and the outcomes they achieved.

2.2 Who became Community Agents and what type of role did they fulfil?

The Community Agents who responded to the survey were more likely to be female (71 per cent) than male (29 per cent).¹² The majority of these Community Agents were retired (79 per cent) which suggests that most were indeed peers of the target group for the programme, which was those who are recently retired or reaching retirement. Nevertheless, some were in part-time employment (eight per cent) and self-employed (five per cent), and a minority of Community Agent respondents described themselves as being in full-time employment, or were unemployed (four per cent in both cases).¹³

There is further evidence that the Community Agents could be described as peers of the target group in the age groups of the Community Agents, shown in Figure 2.1. Half of the Community Agents who responded to the survey stated that they were aged between 55 and 69 (50 per cent) and a further 19 per cent were aged 70 to 74.

Figure 2.1 Age bracket of Community Agents



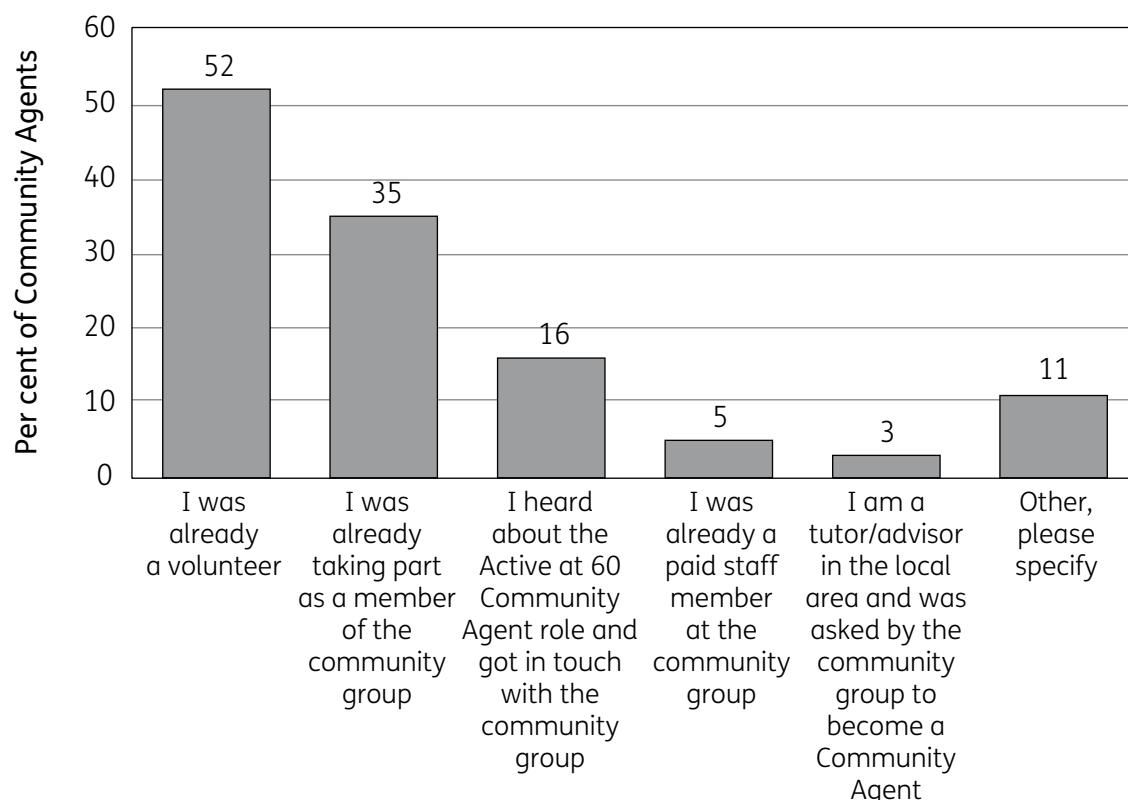
As can be seen in Figure 2.2, in the majority of cases Community Agents who responded to the survey had some pre-existing relationship with the group they worked with, often as a volunteer (52 per cent), or as a group participant (35 per cent). This was reflected in the interviews with Community Agents who were generally already part of the group, rather than being distinct from it. However, 16 per cent of survey respondents said that they had contacted the group when they heard about the role. Most of these (34 out of the 38 survey respondents who contacted the group and three out of the seven respondents who were tutors and were invited) were not already volunteering at the group or a paid staff member. Therefore, these individuals were completely new volunteers in the group. Those who gave 'other' responses in the survey tended to have become a Community Agent as a result of their personal connections to the group or individuals, their

¹² Base = 220.

¹³ Base = 220.

experience of working with the target groups such as wardens of sheltered housing and through their involvement in University for the Third Age (U3As). In general, therefore, Community Agents responding to the survey were drawn from existing group members and volunteers, and were less likely to have been brought in from outside the group or to have been a paid staff member, suggesting that groups were extending the volunteering responsibilities of their members.

Figure 2.2 How people became Community Agent volunteers

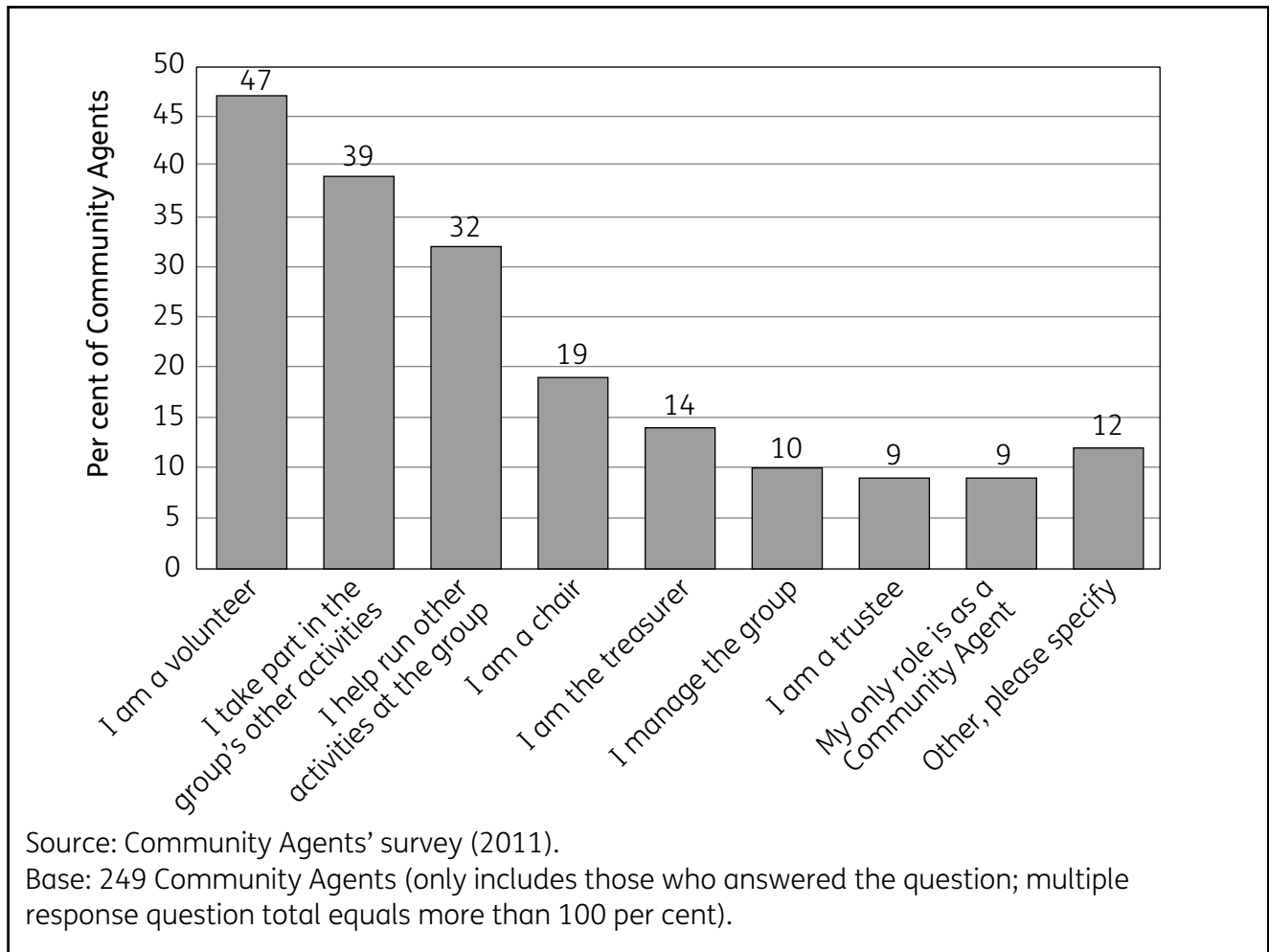


Source: Community Agents' survey (2011).

Base: 244 Community Agents (only includes those who answered the question; multiple response question total equals more than 100 per cent).

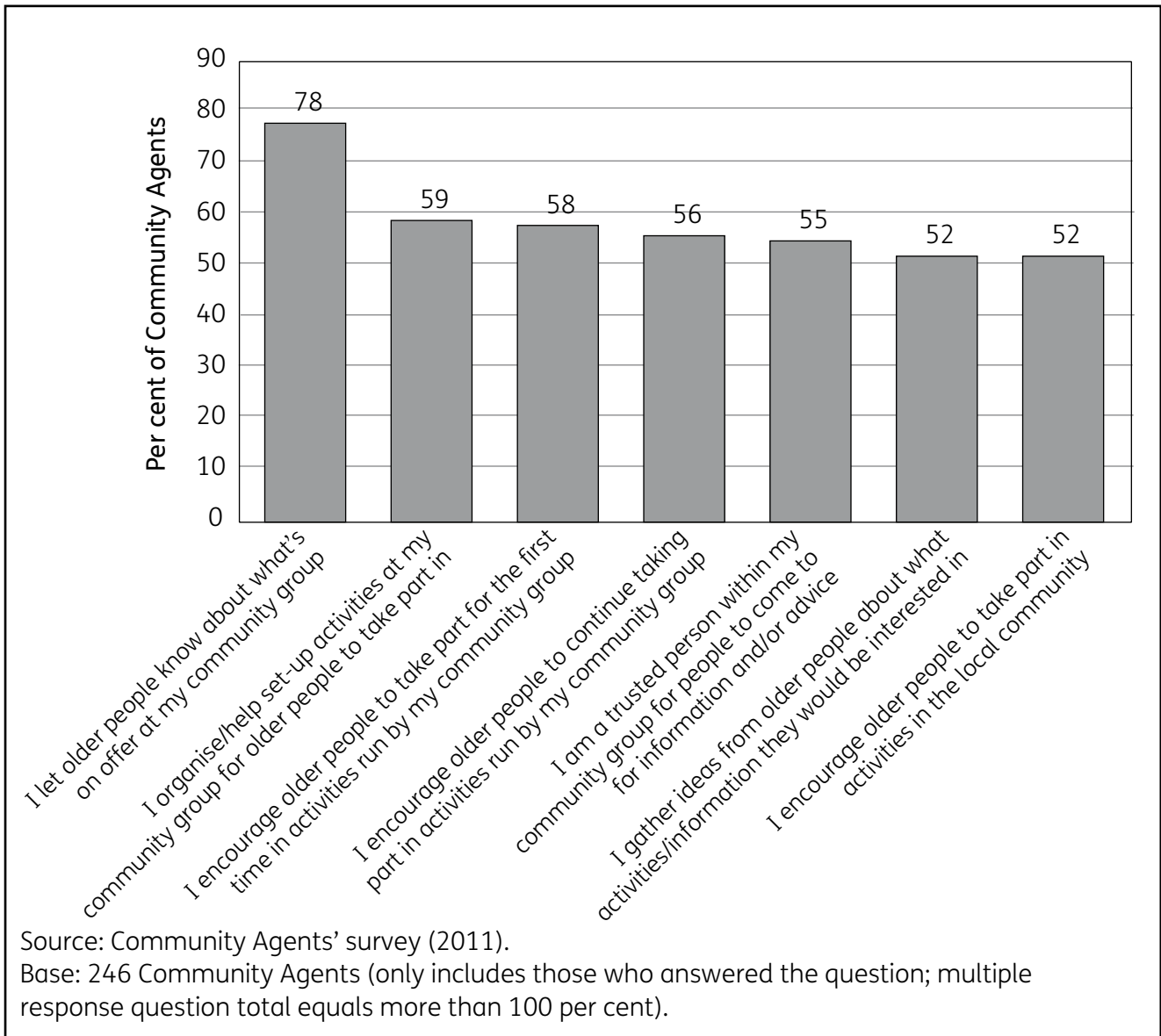
This is further illustrated in the other roles that responding Community Agents reported that they fulfilled in their groups. While a minority (nine per cent) said that their only role was as a Community Agent, as can be seen in Figure 2.3, they were typically also volunteers, and ran or participated in activities. They were in more formal roles, such as treasurer, chair or trustee to a lesser extent.

Figure 2.3 Other role Community Agents took in their community group



Community Agents who responded to the survey and provided details on the time they gave to the role reported that they spent on average three hours¹⁴ in a typical week on their Community Agent role. This ranged from one hour to 50 hours, so it is evident that there was much variation in the nature of the CA role.

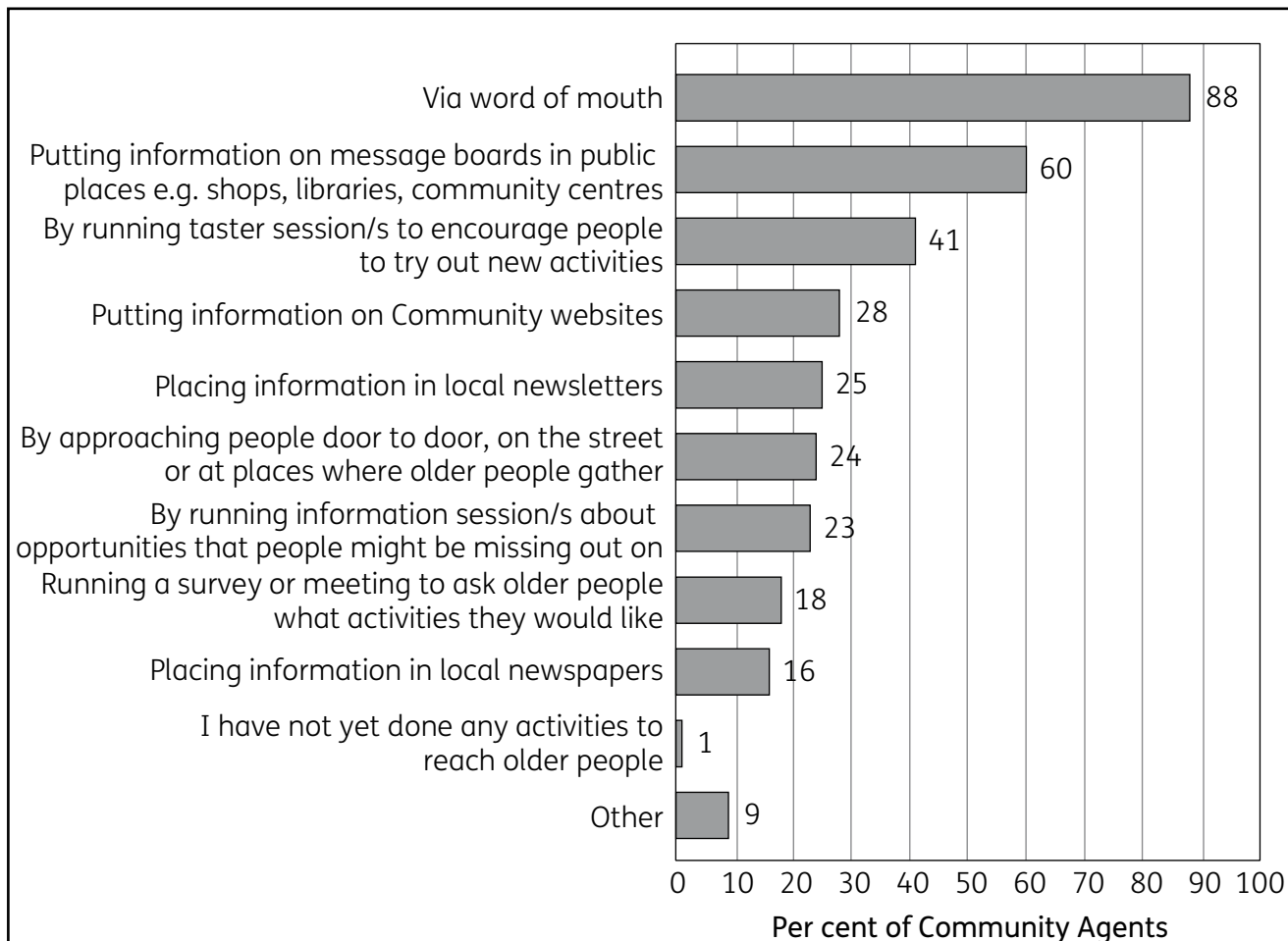
¹⁴ Mode average reflecting the most commonly reported amount of time spent by 215 Community Agents.

Figure 2.4 What Community Agents did within their group

As illustrated in Figure 2.4, it was most common for Community Agents who responded to the survey to have a role in promoting the group and raising awareness of what it could offer (78 per cent). Interviews with Community Agents revealed that many were well networked individuals who knew people and groups in the area that could help with promotion and awareness of the groups and its activities. In addition, more than half of Community Agents who responded to the survey fulfilled roles in organising activities, encouraging older people to start and continue participating, and to participate in activities in their wider community. Similarly, more than half of respondents reported that they had a role in finding out what activities older people would like to do and providing ad hoc support as a trusted individual. Fewer Community Agent respondents considered that they were involved in thinking of new ideas for activities (39 per cent) or running activities (33 per cent) or finding out what is happening in the local community and letting older people know (35 per cent).

Nearly two-fifths (38 per cent) of Community Agents who responded to the survey reported that they helped to find older people who are not part of their community group. In order to fulfil this role in reaching out to older people and engaging them in the groups' activities, Community Agents had adopted a range of methods, as shown in Figure 2.5.

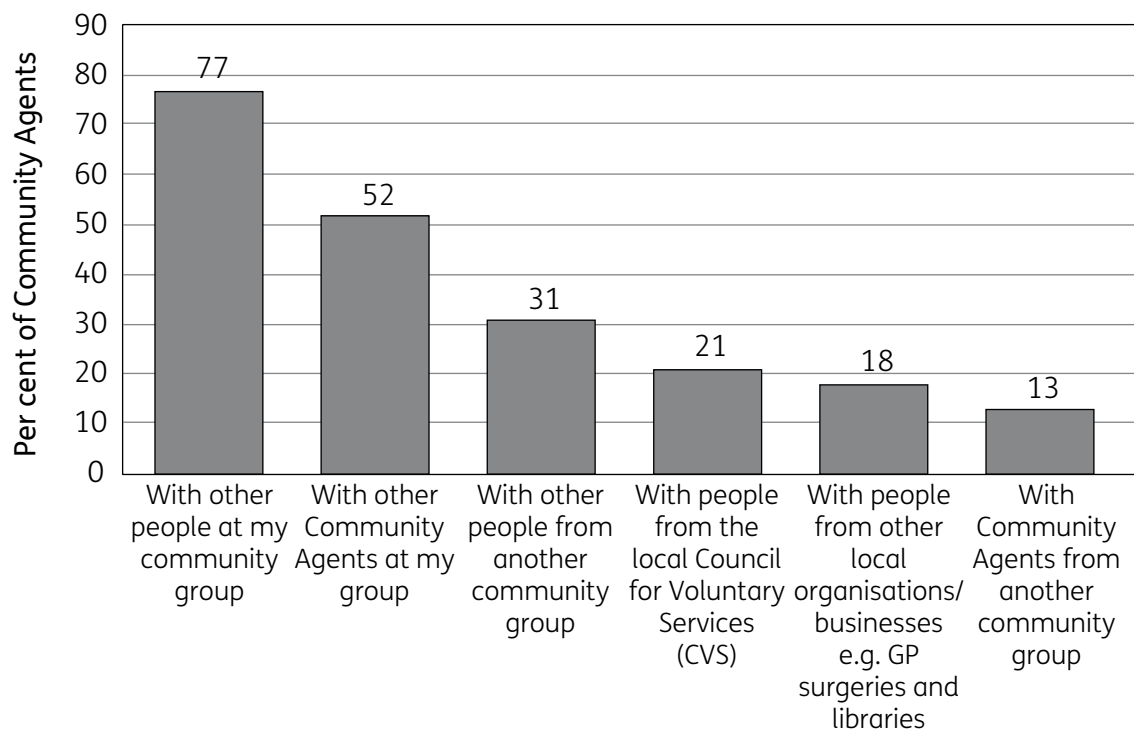
Figure 2.5 How Community Agents have reached older people



Source: Community Agents' survey (2011).

Base: 220 Community Agents (only includes those who answered the question; multiple response question total equals more than 100 per cent).

Some approaches adopted were relatively resource intensive, such as word of mouth, taster sessions and approaching people in the street, and some less so, such as putting information in a range of locations, in newsletters and on websites. While personal interaction through word of mouth was the most commonly used among survey respondents (88 per cent), publicity in places that would be seen by older people was also widely used by Community Agents (60 per cent). This was more widely used than community websites perhaps reflecting the lower use of the internet among older people. Taster sessions, where older people could sample the type of activities that would be on offer, were more commonly used than simple information sharing sessions. Their reflections on the effectiveness of the different approaches adopted are discussed in Chapter 3.

Figure 2.6 Other people Community Agents worked with

Source: Community Agents' survey (2011).

Base: 221 Community Agents (only includes those who answered the question; multiple response question total equals more than 100 per cent).

Community Agents had, to some extent, connected to other individuals and organisations that could help them fulfil their role. Most of the people that Community Agents who responded to the survey worked with were within their community group (see Figure 2.6). This included other people at their group (77 per cent) or other Community Agents at their group (52 per cent). Clearly some Community Agents also made links externally in their Community Agent role, with other people from different community groups (31 per cent), with other local organisations such as CVSs (21 per cent), and with local businesses, surgeries, libraries and other community organisations (18 per cent). The interviews with Community Agents showed that they had used their links with other groups to raise awareness of the activities on offer for older people at their group, to share activities, events and speakers, and to signpost their group members to relevant activities or events at other community groups. They reflected that being part of one community group helps you to learn about what other community groups are doing and potentially make links to create further benefits from their activities as well:

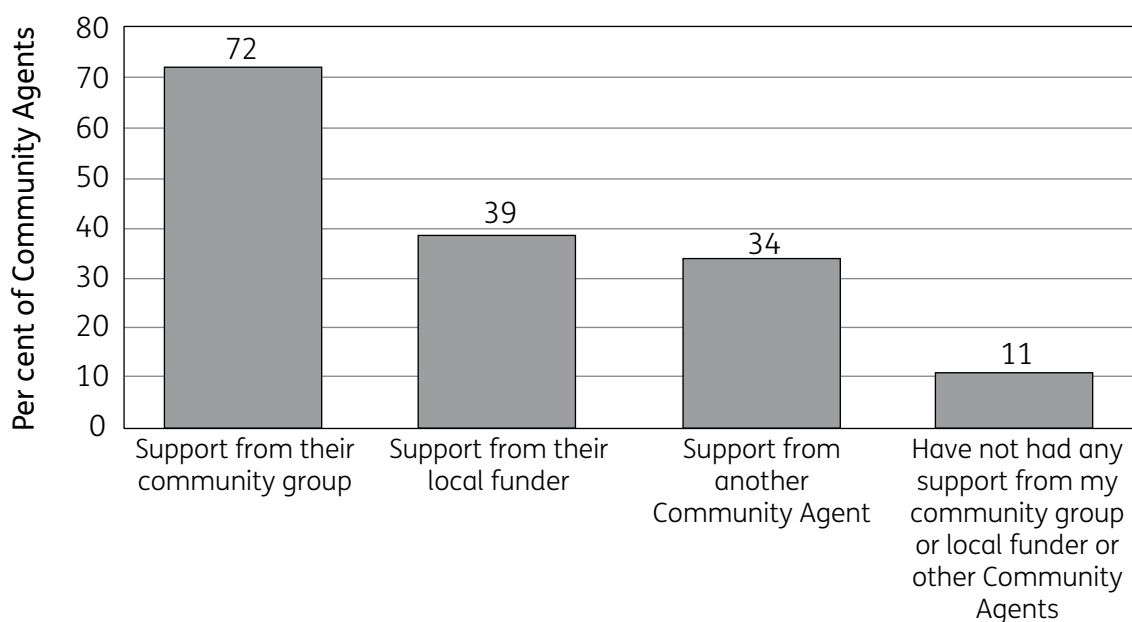
'Well I know a lot of, and of course you learn more about other groups as well, by getting involved with one group you learn about other groups as well.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

2.3 What support was provided for Community Agents and what was the impact of this support?

Although 11 per cent of Community Agent respondents said that they had not received support, the majority of Community Agents did not fulfil their role alone, but were evidently supported by their community group and, to a lesser extent, their local funder and other Community Agents, as shown in Figure 2.7.

Figure 2.7 Types of support Community Agents have accessed



Source: Community Agents' survey (2011).

Base: 228 Community Agents (only includes those who answered the question; multiple response question total equals more than 100 per cent).

Interviews with Community Agents revealed that, in addition to moral support, the nature of the support they received from their community group and other volunteers at the group took various forms including:

- **Awareness raising and publicity:** Community Agents had been supported with help encouraging others to join in and taking a team approach to group recruitment and with publicity, such as putting information in newsletters.
- **Practical and logistical support:** Community Agents said that they had received assistance with administration of the group, translation of group materials into other languages where appropriate for the local area, secretarial support and help with transport.
- **Financial and in-kind support:** Community Agents had received funding and in-kind support, such as the use of premises and refreshments.
- **Support developing activities:** They had support with organising taster sessions, videoing or surveying group members to find out what activities they wanted and advice and guidance in developing ideas.
- **Training:** They had been offered the opportunity to extend activities and develop new skills by receiving formal training.

Some Community Agents who responded to the survey (39 per cent) had received support from their local funder. Seventy-two per cent found this 'very useful', 27 per cent found it 'useful' and just one per cent found this 'neither useful nor not useful'.¹⁵ As might be expected, much of the support they reported in interviews that they had received from the local funders related to accessing funding. In total, interviewees in 15 groups emphasised how crucial financial support and small grants were to their survival and ability to continue existing and providing opportunities for older people:

'We as a community have had financial help which really got us going; without which we would not be.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

Support from local funders included:

- **Funding and advice in funding:** Community Agents had received advice and guidance on activities that could be funded, support with applications and paperwork, and funding training courses for volunteers. They had also sometimes received additional funds, for example for gardening tools.
- **Information exchange:** they had opportunities for sharing ideas and information with the local funder and other groups, for example through drop-in sessions.
- **Advice on activities:** local funders had also provided advice on the development of activities including offering ideas to bring the community together and the subsequent organisation and promotion of this.

Over a third (34 per cent) of Community Agent respondents to the survey indicated that they had received support from other Community Agents. Seventy-six per cent found this 'very useful', 23 per cent found it 'useful' and one per cent found this 'neither useful or not useful'. Often, interviewees indicated that this form of support was perceived as other people in the group helping with aspects of the work but there were also references to links with Community Agents from different groups. Examples of Community Agent support included:

- **Engaging older people:** Community Agents reported support with locating older people, particularly those that might be isolated and passing on information about the Active at 60 Community Agents group and encouraging other older people to join.
- **Developing and delivering activities:** Community Agents had been supported by other Community Agents with delivering activities and exchanging ideas to gain inspiration and provide more varied activities.
- **Sharing experience:** attending sessions run by other Community Agents to learn about what they were doing and informing the older people there about their own activities and sharing previous experiences of working with older people.

¹⁵ Base = 89, all those who had received support from a local funder.

2.4 What was the impact on Community Agents including empowerment and leadership?

The prevailing view among the Community Agents interviewed was that undertaking their role as a Community Agent had made a difference to them. While a small number (three interviewees) commented that they were more tired and two noted that it had taken up a lot of their time, most identified some positive differences the role had made for them:

‘So, for me, that is really, really rewarding. Creating something out of nothing and seeing that it’s had a really positive impact on people’s lives and well being.’

(Community Agent volunteer)

As noted earlier in the chapter, the majority of Community Agents were themselves retired older people and the benefits they identified, to some extent, reflect those experienced by the older people who participated in their activities, outlined in Chapter 5.

- **Social benefits** – similarly to the older people who participated, the most widely mentioned difference that being a Community Agent had made was that they had gained socially, made new friends or enhanced existing relationships. As the following quotes illustrate, involvement in the Community Agent programme had provided a new forum that enabled people to meet and build friendships.

‘[I’ve] sort of made firm friendships with two or three of them who live quite close and I’ve known all our lives but because they was working, I was working and everything, we’d only see each other probably on the bus going to work ... we’ve become quite good friends and we do things together.’

(Community Agent volunteer)

‘I’m a widower ... and sometimes it is hard to make friends, especially when you have gone out [previously] with couples.’

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Enjoyment** – some Community Agents said that they simply enjoyed their role and engaging in the group.

‘To get up on a morning and to come and to know that I’m going to laugh, and I know that I’m going to enjoy it.’

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Making a contribution** – Community Agents highlighted the value to them of making a contribution in their volunteering role. They felt that they had benefited from feeling ‘I can help in my own way’ and ‘actually being involved a lot more in the community’. This was a benefit to their own wellbeing, for example where they had been in a caring role previously and this role provided a new focus.

‘... so like from where I used to help them [parents] out, it’s sort of given me something to keep me going.’

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Sense of purpose** – aligned to the feeling that they were making a contribution, six interviewees also said that they had a sense of purpose as a result of their participation in the programme.

'Giving you an aim and purpose once you've finished your working life type of thing and it's so hard sometimes to get up and get yourself going in the morning but if you've got somewhere to go you do feel better in yourself.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Sense of satisfaction** – Community Agents commonly felt that they found their role very rewarding; they gained a sense of satisfaction from seeing other older people benefit and from the positive feedback and appreciation they received. They reported that they found it 'humbling' and 'makes me feel good'.

'Everybody goes out the door and says "thanks very much" and "see you next week" and all this business and you think "my gosh, we really are making a difference to these people" you know and that's got to mean a hell of a lot hasn't it?'

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Making use of their skills and developing new skills** – interviewees valued the opportunity to make use of their skills, particularly where they no longer had the opportunity to do so through employment. As one explained 'so I thought, well if I've got some skills left in my head let's go and use them'. Community Agents had variously brought their accountancy, management, drawing and horticultural skills to the role. In addition, three interviewees felt they had gained new skills in computer use, jewellery making and DIY as a result of taking on the Community Agent role.

Overall, in their reflections on the impact of the role on them, Community Agents did not specify that they had developed leadership skills. However, they were motivated by having a sense of purpose and making a contribution to their community and felt rewarded by taking on a lead role as a Community Agent.

The impact of the programme on enhancing empowerment and leadership in communities is reflected in the finding that the majority (81 per cent) of Community Agents who responded to the survey indicated that they would continue with the Community Agent role and perform similar functions in the future, therefore, continuing to contribute a leadership role in their communities. Another 15 per cent of respondents were unsure about this and only five per cent were sure they would not.¹⁶ The future development of the role is discussed further in Chapter 6.

2.5 What were the lessons learned about fulfilling the Community Agent role?

Community Agents who were interviewed identified what they had learned in their role about engaging older people in activities as outlined below.

- **Providing a lead:** Having the Community Agent as a focal point to provide a social lead and apply gentle pressure to encourage people to engage in activities, expand ideas and participate in things they might not normally, made a difference to older people's willingness to engage. Taking older people beyond their initial comfort zone and helping them to break routines or go to new places had encouraged them to become more active and gel together as a group.

¹⁶ Base = 219.

'Getting people 'out and about' is really important, to take them away from their homes, which they may not have left in a long time and help them to form bonds as a group.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Being part of a group:** Some Community Agents referred to the importance of group activity as part of successfully engaging older people in activities, which they may not naturally pursue themselves.

'The group is growing and people are enjoying the walking as a group. Without the group they would not be getting out and walking on their own.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Keeping older people motivated:** this is a key skill in performing the role of Community Agent, but can require some special attention. Community Agents felt that finding activities that older people want to do is a key part of this.
- **Proactively seeking older people out in the community:** being a visible presence is important to the success of the Community Agent role and a key part of these community projects.

'The most important part about the whole programme is meeting people and you cannot do it sat in front of a word processor, you've got to get off your backside and get into where people come together. Find out where the age group of people you're talking about actually meet, whether it's coffee mornings or whatever ... you've got to go out and meet people.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

- **Making use of the specialist skills and experience of older people:** older people bring skills and expertise to leading a group, in addition to an implicit peer understanding of older people's needs.
- **Encouraging older people to do small things:** older people do not necessarily have to engage in complex or formal activities. For example getting out for walks and habitually talking to people were described by Community Agents as having long-term benefits.

2.6 Skills, attributes and qualities of Community Agents

Reflecting on their experience as Community Agents, interviewees identified a number of key skills, qualities and attributes that they felt were helpful in fulfilling the role.

2.6.1 Understanding and respect

Community Agent interviewees emphasised the importance of not being judgemental, or to make assumptions about older people together with fundamental respect. This could be helpful both in supporting older people to participate and in benefiting from the potential development of their skills in the group:

'You've got to treat them with respect, you've got to relate to old people and you've got to listen to what they're saying, you know you might be thinking to yourself, "Oh come on [name] we've got to move on," but you can't say that to them, you've got to let them say what they want to say.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

Community Agents had learned that a very positive and compassionate approach could be helpful in successfully engaging with older people:

'You just need to be caring, absolutely have to have caring at the basis of everything.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

2.6.2 Communication skills

Community Agents who were interviewed felt that both talking and listening were considered to be valuable skills in successfully approaching the Community Agent role. On the one hand talking is an important part of engaging people's interest and successfully communicating what the group has to offer, but listening to what people's needs are was felt to be equally important in helping them to feel welcomed and part of the group. Encouragement was felt to be needed at all times. Community Agents felt that having an outgoing approach was important:

'Someone who's willing to get out there and talk to people, someone who's prepared to do a bit of PR really and you know have perseverance, good communication skills.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

'Open the door to everybody. Listen to what people has to say and you'll find that there's lots of things bubbling under the surface with a lot of people.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

2.6.3 Positive and enthusiastic

Community Agents alluded to some innate characteristics that they felt were beneficial. They felt that being positive and encouraging were important attributes:

'I would suspect the first thing you need to do is, you've got to have a lot of positive vibes and good charisma ... you've got to have a certain way with people and you've got to be able to interact before you actually start creating a group.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

These Community Agents felt that a natural interest in people was helpful in underpinning the role, but that it also required energy and enthusiasm to translate this into successful engagement:

'[Being a good Community Agent requires] empathy, a good listening ear and a determination that, no, you're not going to sit in your living room anymore.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

Several Community Agents talked about skills they had used and had the opportunity to develop further within the project funded through the programme. Broadly, the way that Community Agents defined the positive capabilities they had developed as comprising a blend of the qualities, attributes and skills:

'I can inspire people I know that, I can motivate people, I am gregarious. I mean it's (the Active at 60 project) just made me a very rounded person.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

Community Agent interviewees' reflections on the skills and attributes they had found valuable to perform well in the role were supported by the views of older people interviewed. Interviewees identified the following skills and qualities that they considered it was good for a Community Agent to possess:

- being approachable, welcoming and inclusive;
- being a 'people person', friendly and personable;
- enthusiasm, energy and passion;

- working as effective organisers and coordinators, including finance and having the capacity to ‘get things done’;
- patience and understanding;
- being talkative and good communicators; and
- calmness and ability to deal with any challenging inter-personal situations.

The case study below demonstrates the role a Community Agent plays within a group and provides an example of the best ways to work with older people and the attributes that are important in fulfilling the role.

Case study – a Community Agent’s role

A Community Agent volunteer took on the role for the first time due to the programme funding their group received. She helped coordinate activities for around 20 older people in the group she worked with, aged 60 – 87.

Involving and listening to older people

The Community Agent consulted with the older people at the group about what activities they would like and to give them ‘something to look forward to’. She encouraged the members to share their ideas about what they would like to do and the activities were developed from the older people’s suggestions. She felt this helped people to participate in the group and feel valued.

The Community Agent felt it was important that activities were as inclusive as possible and that it was important to find the right level that would match the ability and needs of the group, such as yoga and Pilates.

Skills and attributes

The Community Agent said that being flexible was an important attribute to have when working with the group in order ‘to be aware of what they’re capable of and what they’re not’. Her recommendation was to gain a sense of the group’s needs and limitations, and adapt your activities to fit them:

‘We’ve had to adapt to different things, whereas you know you could do a lot more active things, we’ve had to find things which everybody can do and they can do together ... we try to find the middle ground, but we don’t want to leave anybody out because they’re getting old.’

Benefits to older people and the wider community

The programme activities also helped people to develop friendships and a social network outside of the group:

‘I think this is why it’s so important to have these little get togethers ... we do make friendships and through that we do other things as well, so it’s like snowball effect.’

The Community Agent had also helped group members to take on volunteer roles by gently encouraging them and supporting them to take up a new role. For example, one group member had gone on to become the Chair of the group despite not having done anything similar previously.

2.6.4 Community Agents as peers

Although the majority of the Community Agents who responded to the survey were peers of the target group of older people, there was no consensus among interviewees about whether being a peer was an important attribute of a Community Agent. The value of empathy in successfully engaging with older people meant that some Community Agents indicated being a peer was beneficial because it supported this dynamic more naturally. For example, there was a perception that older people might be more open with another older person than they would be with a younger person, possibly due to a perception of differing levels of life experience. However, several Community Agent interviewees did not feel the peer relationship was an important aspect and concentrated more on individuals' qualities and attributes. Indeed, it was felt that sometimes having slightly younger Community Agents could help older group members because of their skill in using technology and associated ability to gather information and make links with other groups and services in the area.

2.7 Helping other people to become Community Agents

Two-fifths of Community Agents who responded to the survey felt that they had also helped other people become Community Agent volunteers (40 per cent).¹⁷ Forty per cent indicated they had not helped others to become Community Agents, while 15 per cent were not sure. On average those who felt they had helped others adopt the role said they had done so for four people. As the quote below illustrates, the term Community Agent was broadly interpreted as any person volunteering within the community.

'As a direct result of my participation on this programme, one of the seniors has managed to organise community activities at her housing estate. She has become actively involved in community projects aimed at improving the lives of people where she lives.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

'We have successfully integrated residents from a local residential care home in one of our groups. One of our members has set up a painting group in sheltered accommodation and another has set up an armchair exercise group in hers. Members advertise our groups amongst friends.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

Reflecting on encouraging others to become Community Agent volunteers, interviewees considered the skills and attributes that Community Agents required (as outlined earlier). They particularly emphasised the importance of creating a positive experience for the group and that this was to some extent dependent on Community Agent's enthusiasm to generate the enthusiasm of others to be willing to engage in similar activity:

'I think you've just got to be that type of person, you've either got to want to do it or you haven't ... I don't think it makes any difference whether you're clever or intelligent or whatever, I think it's whether or not you've got the enthusiasm I think. That's all that matters really.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

¹⁷ Base = 216.

2.8 Summary

The research shows that a wide variety of individuals became Community Agents. However, a typical Community Agent who responded to the survey was female, retired, aged between 55 and 69, and already volunteering at their community group. The Community Agent role provided respondents with an opportunity to extend their responsibilities and focus their efforts on letting older people know what was available at their community group, as well as organise and run activities, encourage older people to take part in these and identify the sort of activities that older people would be interested in.

As most Community Agents who responded to the survey expected to continue in the role, it is apparent that the role was perceived as valuable by groups and, indeed, by the Community Agents themselves. Community Agent interviewees had generally enjoyed the role and gained a sense of satisfaction and purpose for making a contribution and seeing the outcomes of their contribution. It is evident that the Community Agents did not fulfil this role alone. Those who responded to the survey had often been supported by others in their community group providing assistance with awareness raising and publicity, practical and logistical support, and financial and in-kind support, as well as in developing activities. In addition, where they had been supported by a local funder this had been with funding advice, an opportunity to exchange information with others and with advice on activities. Other Community Agents had provided support with engaging older people, developing activities and sharing their experience.

The main lessons learned by funded group leaders who were interviewed were that there was value in someone taking a lead role to engage with and encourage older people to participate, and being proactive in seeking out older people and keeping them motivated to attend. As it was a group activity, the group itself was of value too in supporting and encouraging older people to be more active than they were said to be on their own.

The experience of the Community Agent programme leaders and participants interviewed confirmed that to fulfil their role, a Community Agent needed to be able to understand and respect older people, to have good communication and listening skills and to be positive and enthusiastic.

3 Reaching and engaging older people

Key lessons learned

- There is a need for the type of support and activities that the groups funded by the programme provided for older people – nearly all groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey attracted new members who were older people and most attracted those who were living alone.
- It is possible to reach those who are at risk of becoming socially isolated and lonely and having an individual with that focus can assist in this.
- To engage older people it is necessary to overcome their apprehension, encourage them and sometimes provide practical support, such as transport.
- Offer a wider range of activities across an area, working with other groups if necessary, to ensure that what groups offer appeals to a wide range of people, including older men.
- Build on the motivations of older people to participate, such as the wish to develop or maintain social networks and to remain physically and mentally active.
- Groups reached older people through using word of mouth, including using existing group members, accessing other networks and a range of new promotional methods.
- Word of mouth is the most widely used, and considered by Community Agents who responded to the survey as most effective, mechanism for engaging older people in local community groups. However, using a range of means to contact older people is valuable as they heard about the groups in different ways.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how funded groups and the Community Agents reached out to older people, particularly those at risk of social isolation, and engaged new people with their activities and groups. The chapter will explore the outcome of their efforts by exploring who was successfully reached, the key challenges and barriers of engaging older people, and the lessons learned about the most effective approach.

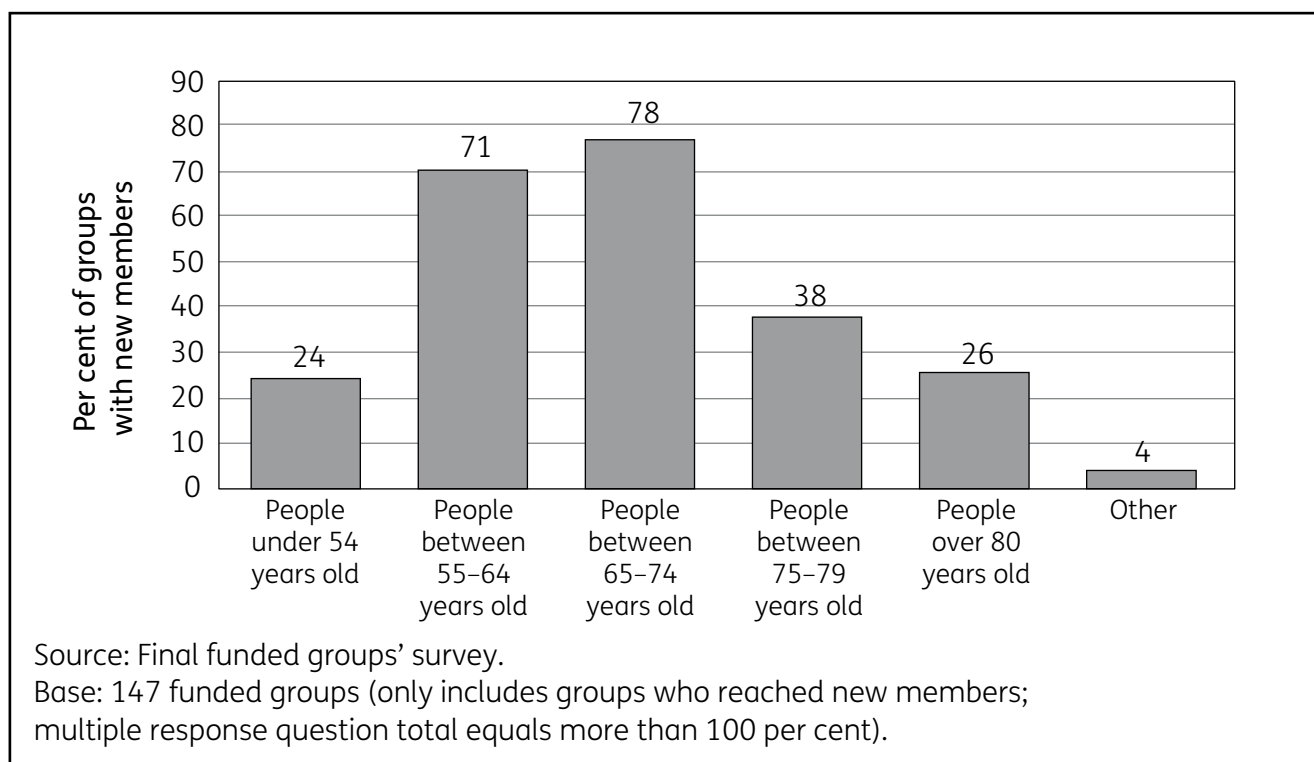
3.2 Who did the programme help to reach?

The majority of groups had been successful in attracting new older people to their group, with 92 per cent of groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey reporting new members by the end of the programme funding. In addition, 31 per cent of the Community Agents who responded to the survey said that increased membership was one of the two biggest changes to their group resulting from the programme.

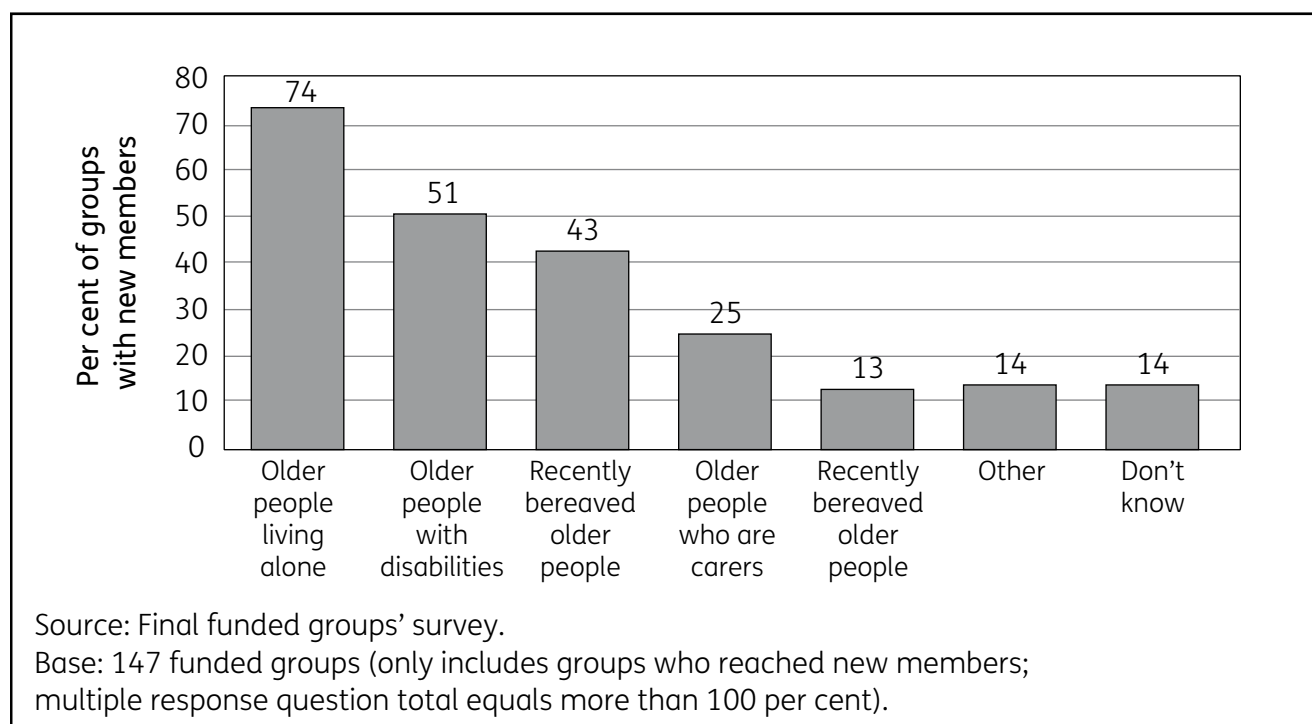
Across the 143 funded groups who responded to this question in the final funded groups' survey, a total of approximately 3,197 older people had joined in activities who had not previously been involved. It was most common for those who responded to the survey to have gained ten new members.

The funded groups reached a wide age range of older people as Figure 3.1 shows, the majority of groups engaged older people nearing retirement or relatively recently retired. This was the target audience and age group for this programme. Seventy-one per cent of groups with new members attracted new people aged between 55 and 64, and 78 per cent attracted new people between 65 and 74 years old. The majority of local funders felt that most groups had specifically tried to involve people nearing or post retirement rather than people who were older than this. Nevertheless, seven funders felt that the age range that groups were recruiting was older than the target age range and they had found targeting newly retired people challenging. This was particularly said to be the case for groups who already targeted the older age groups who had not necessarily retired recently.

Figure 3.1 Age groups reached by groups with new members



Funded groups had also reached people at risk of social isolation, particularly older people living on their own. As shown in Figure 3.2, almost three-quarters of the groups (74 per cent) who responded to the final funded groups' survey and who had managed to engage older people who were not already involved with other community activities had reached people who were living on their own. In addition to this over half (51 per cent) reached older people with disabilities. Forty-three per cent of groups reached people who were recently bereaved. Other responses included people who were new to the area or who had specific illnesses such as heart conditions. Interviews with funded groups found groups particularly aimed their activities to reach people who were socially isolated and/or were not already active in their community in some way. This included people living on their own and people who had recently experienced bereavement, and was again in line with the aims of the programme.

Figure 3.2 Characteristics of older people reached by groups with new members

Almost one-third (31 per cent) of the groups responding to the final funded groups' survey felt one of the most important differences the funding had made to their own group was that it had led to more older people who were at risk of being lonely getting involved. Over half of the groups (52 per cent) also felt that one of the most important differences the programme had made in the wider community was that it had raised awareness among older people of what was available in the local community.

Groups doing something new or different to engage older people were effective in attracting new members. Groups who said they had done something new were more likely to have attracted new members compared to groups who did not attract new members (93 per cent compared with 88 per cent).

Among those who had done something new, finding and applying new ways of reaching socially isolated people was particularly valuable. Around two-fifths (42 per cent) of the funded groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey, and had adopted new or different approaches to getting older people involved in their group, said that they had found new ways of reaching socially isolated older people. The success of having a focus on socially isolated older people and thinking of new ways to engage with them is reflected in the finding that groups that did so were more likely to have gained new members (98 per cent did so compared with 90 per cent of those who did not adopt this focus). Such groups were also more likely to have gained a higher than average number of new members (69 per cent gained more than ten new members compared with 44 per cent of those who did not find new ways of targeting socially isolated people).

They were not only more successful in reaching more people, but also more of the target group than those who had not adopted new ways of targeting socially isolated people. Around nine out of ten (92 per cent) of these groups said they had reached older people living alone, (compared with 57 per cent who did not adopt this focus) and those who were recently bereaved (53 per cent compared with 33 per cent). Reflecting on the outcomes of the programme, these groups were also more likely to report that their involvement in the programme had led to more older people who were at risk of being lonely becoming involved in their group (77 per cent compared with 57 per cent).

3.3 What were the main barriers and challenges to reaching older people?

Interviewees identified a range of barriers and challenges that they had encountered in engaging older people in their groups and activities, as well as some key motivations, as detailed below.

3.3.1 Barriers

Nervousness and apprehension: The main barrier to reaching and engaging older people that the funded groups identified was overcoming older people's anxiety to try out new groups or activities. Interviews with funded groups found that overcoming the nervousness that many older people feel about meeting new people or trying a new hobby, sport or skill had been particularly challenging.

The interviews with older people supported this assertion. Older people felt that overcoming their anxiety about first going to the groups was the main challenge to joining a group. As one respondent put it *'just getting the courage to come in when you're by yourself'* was difficult. Those who felt this was a challenge felt anxious about meeting new people, about how they would be received by the group and about trying new things. An older person stated the challenge was *'just meeting strangers for first time, you wonder if you're going to fit in.'* Once the first step was taken, most of the older people who were worried about joining the group, did not find coming back to the group a challenge and realised that their concerns were unfounded.

'There was a little bit when you come in and think everyone's in their little cliques but it turned out there weren't any little cliques at all.'

(Older person interviewee)

Personal characteristics: Interviews with older people also found that there were many examples where people could recognise friends and neighbours that were at risk of becoming more socially isolated who they encouraged to come to the group. The people who did not come along, despite their friends or neighbour's encouragement, tended not to participate because of ill health, commitments to caring for family and because they were not yet retired. However, interviewees also mentioned people they knew who would not join the group, even with the support of a friend because they felt some people were 'set in their ways' and like to 'keep themselves to themselves'. While this may reflect an active choice for some individuals who choose not to participate, it may also highlight the potential importance of establishing active habits as early as possible to prevent social isolation in later life.

The Community Agents' survey responses support this finding. It revealed that the older people with certain characteristics that were hardest to reach as follows:

- People who did not usually take part in the local community – 33 per cent of respondents.
- People who did not usually take part in their community group – 29 per cent of respondents.
- People who may be leading unhealthy lives – 20 per cent of respondents.
- People who were recently bereaved – 19 per cent of respondents.

Twenty-two per cent of Community Agents also felt that older people living alone or at risk of being socially isolated were hard to reach. However, they had mixed experiences about the ease of including this group as an even higher proportion (26 per cent) felt this group were quite or very easy to involve. Those Community Agents who said it had been very or quite easy to involve socially isolated people were more likely to have approached people door to door, on the street or where older people gather (35 per cent) and consulted with older people through surveys and meetings (31 per cent) than those who had found it very or quite difficult (20 per cent approached older people and 24 per cent consulted older people). Moreover, those who found it difficult were more likely to have used less direct approaches, such as placing information on a community website (33 per cent) and in a local newspaper (36 per cent) than those who had found it easy (23 per cent used a website and 22 per cent used the local newspaper). Overall, this indicates that it was easier to engage older people who were socially isolated through proactive, direct contact methods.

Community Agents who responded to the survey had found those who had been retired for some time and those who were recently retired easier to engage with. Forty-three per cent of respondents said that people who had been retired for some time were 'very' or 'quite' easy to involve and 37 per cent of respondents said that people who were recently retired were 'very' or 'quite' easy to involve. In contrast, people who were approaching retirement were slightly more difficult to reach as 23 per cent of Community Agent survey respondents said that people approaching retirement were 'very' or 'quite' easy to involve.

Gender: As noted in Chapter 4, a notable proportion of groups said they had experienced difficulty attracting male members to the group. Groups felt this was for a number of reasons, including not wanting to join a group that had mostly female members or preferring groups that were focused on a specific activity rather than mostly social.

Transport: Interviews with funded groups found that transport was a major barrier for older people in some areas. This was both because it prevented some people from coming to the group and also because it was costly, either to individuals and/or the group. This was particularly the case when transport needed to be accessible for less physically able older people.

'Well, they pick you up at the door and they drop you off at the door. People on the bus help you on and off. I think a lot wouldn't come if they didn't have the bus.'

(Older person interviewee)

Over a quarter (27 per cent) of groups used at least some of their funding to pay for transport. Many groups also encouraged members to either link up with a community bus service or provide lifts to other members to overcome the problem. Older people appreciated that groups were relatively local and/or older people were able to get there more easily because either they could walk or drive there or were assisted by the group or its members. However, it is worth noting that although transport was an issue for some older people, others felt it was not the main barrier to participation and that providing transport would not necessarily be sufficient to encourage an older person to participate in a group.

3.3.2 Motivations

Existing relationships: One of the most common reasons older people gave for first coming to the group was being invited by a friend or neighbour. Knowing someone at the group, including the Community Agent, helped most older people feel more comfortable about giving it a try.

‘Well, my friend said it was interesting because they had days out and they had various different projects going and it wasn’t too much for me so I thought I’d give it a go.’

(Older person interviewee)

Self-motivation: Older people were also motivated by their own desire to keep themselves physically or socially active. A significant number of older people and Community Agents recognised that they were at risk of becoming more isolated and unfit if they did not busy themselves with activities. For others they had recognised that they needed to keep themselves active and busy so they did not become isolated by increasingly staying at home and watching TV.

Interest: Older people, both male and female, were motivated to come along to the group because they had an interest in the activity. Groups aimed mostly at men, or that successfully recruited men, tended to focus on one activity with social elements included, rather than a range of activities. For example, a tennis group, a model railway club and an all male choir did not have an issue recruiting male members.

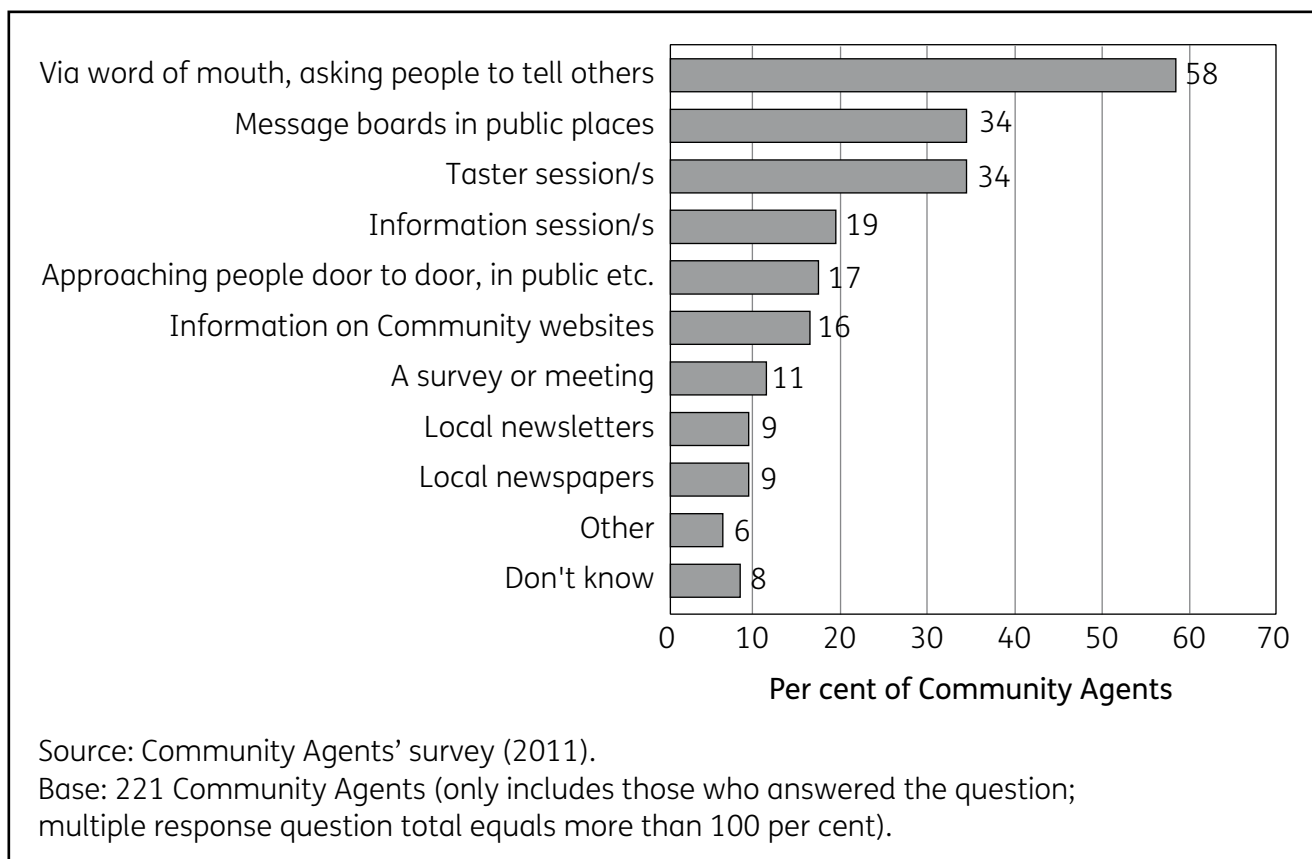
‘I heard it was starting. I was interested to come. Leading on from my interest in family history.’

(Older person interviewee)

A number of older people, particularly those attracted by the activity itself, felt that they had been aware of some other local activities for older people but had not felt that existing activities or groups were right for them. This highlights the importance of areas offering a wide variety of activities to appeal to different people.

3.4 How did groups approach reaching and engaging older people and what was new and different about their approaches?

The final survey of funded groups found around a third (32 per cent) of responding groups had used new ways of reaching socially isolated older people as a result of their involvement in the programme and a quarter (25 per cent) used new ways to raise awareness of/promote activities and services on offer to older people. The survey of Community Agents revealed that just over half of Community Agents who responded said that using word of mouth to attract older people to the group was a new method. This reflected groups’ having a new emphasis on using volunteers such as Community Agents to actively tell people and encourage others to tell older people about the groups’ activities and what it could offer older people (see Figure 3.3). Community Agents were less likely to have made use of local media or web-based promotion and more likely to have used targeted methods such as relevant message boards, information sessions and tasters.

Figure 3.3 New methods used by Community Agents to reach older people

Interviews with funded groups provided more detail on the nature of the new approaches they had adopted as outlined below.

3.4.1 Using existing group members

Many funded groups used their existing membership, especially Community Agents, to promote the group, encouraging them to tell other people outside of their group.

3.4.2 Accessing other networks

Funded groups considered a wide range of types of organisations and individuals who could assist them in raising awareness of their group with older people. For example they contacted local outreach workers, health visitors, Sure Start centres, police officers, social services, doctors, churches and local businesses. Some of these people or organisations had a history of helping to promote the group and others were new since the programme started.

3.4.3 New promotional methods

Groups also adopted a range of new methods to reach out and engage with older people, particularly new ways to identify older people who could benefit from their group. For example:

- one community group used a local Royal Wedding party as an opportunity to identify and approach people over 60 to join their newly established group;
- a U3A group consulted with a national older persons' charity to identify the local areas most in need of the organisation's activity; and
- a sports club contacted local employers and left leaflets to give to employees that were nearing retirement.

'We came up with the idea of advertising at the council office where newly retired people have to pick up their bus pass, so we knew our target group would see the posters.'

(Funded group)

Offering incentives

Groups also came up with new ways to attract members to their group by using an incentive. For example:

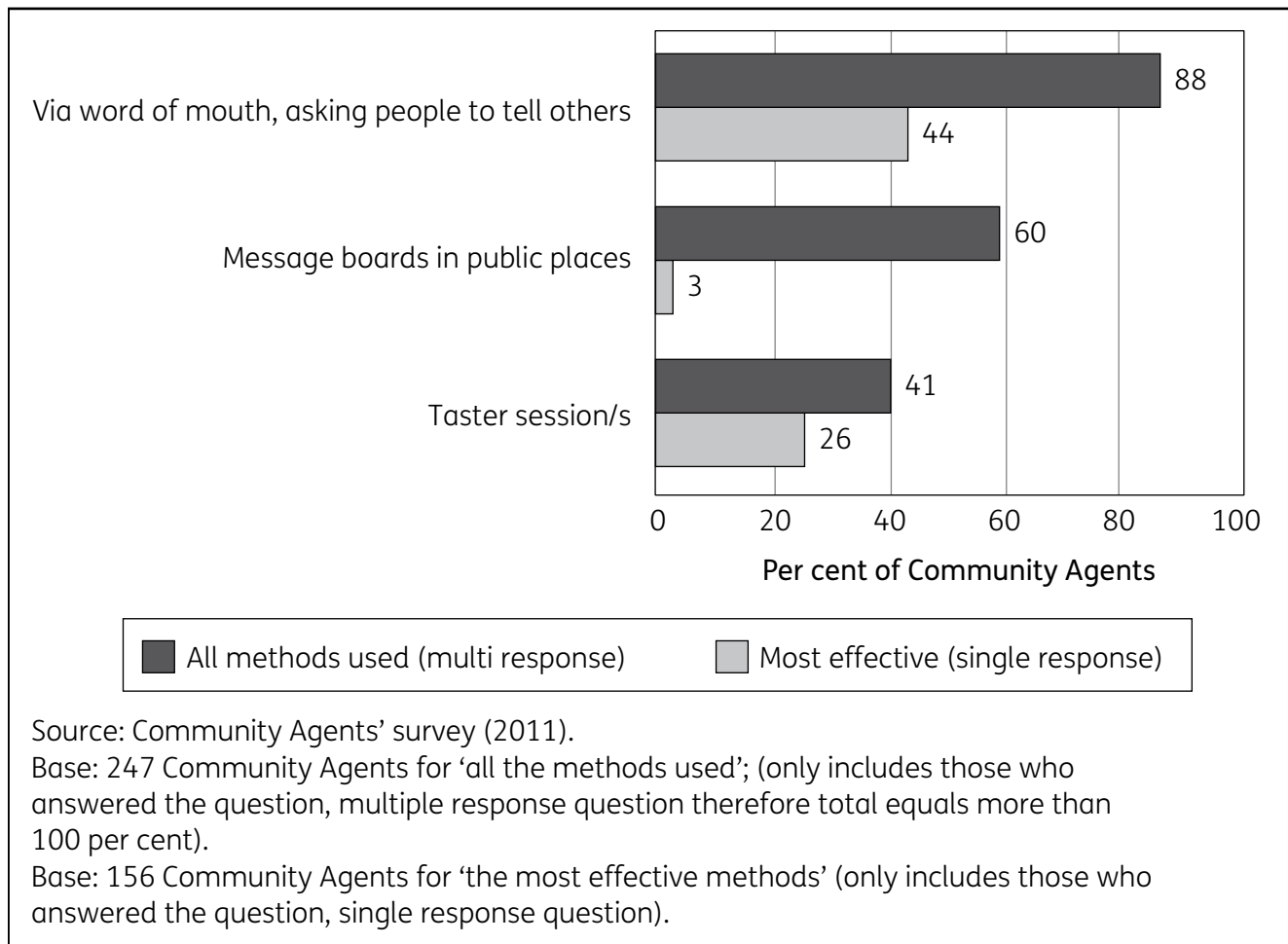
- an allotment and gardening group invited people to bring along their fruit and vegetable peelings to the allotment site as a way of getting older people to come and see the group first hand and then told them about their gardening activity;
- an organisation focusing on supporting people with mental health problems gave a phone line for people to call if they needed to talk and then invited them along to the group to take part in activities; and
- a community group offered help to older people in filling in a range of forms and then told the older people they were helping, particularly those who were widowed, about the other activities the group offered.

The evidence suggests that groups funded through the programme had responded to the challenge of attracting older people to their groups. They had reflected on how to reach older people and devised and developed new and different ways in which to reach them.

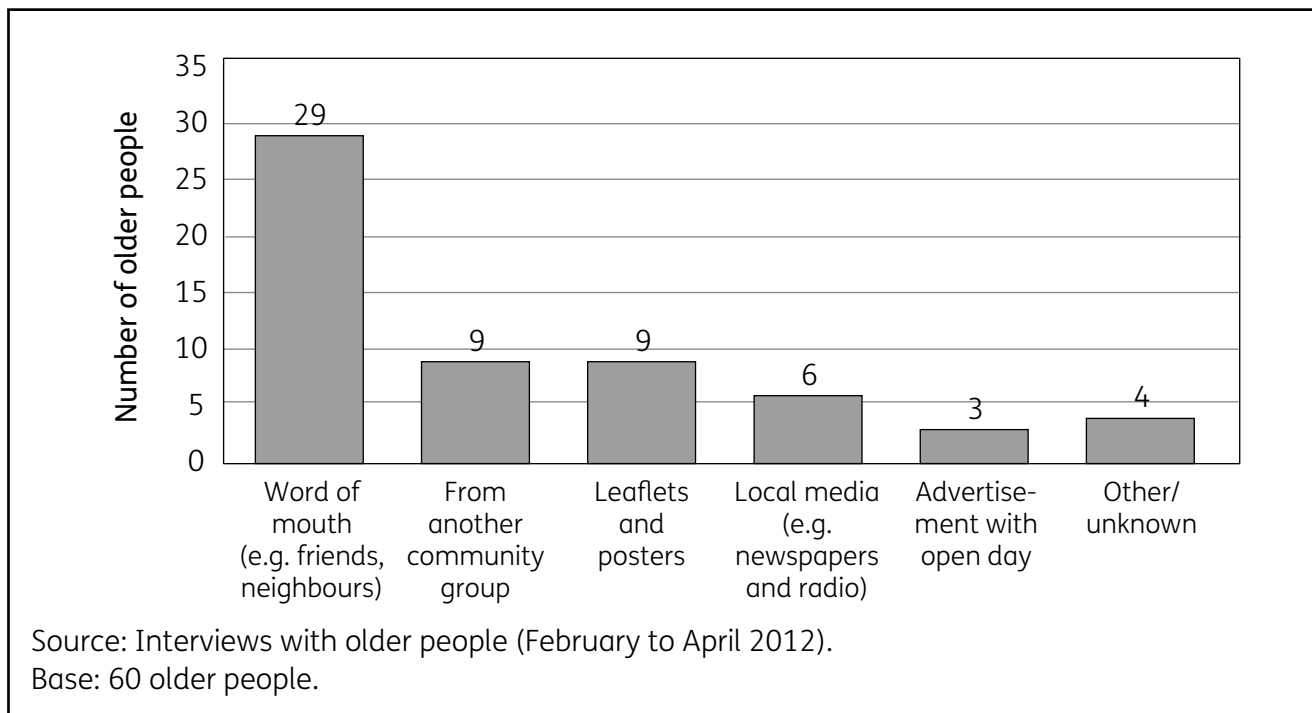
3.5 What were the lessons learned about the most effective ways of reaching older people?

The most effective method of reaching people was through word of mouth. Interviews with funded groups, Community Agents and older people all identified that this was the best method of encouraging people to come to the group.

The Community Agents' survey supports these findings. The three most common ways Community Agents who responded to the survey tried to reach older people were via word of mouth, putting information up in public places and running taster sessions, and these were also the most common new methods used to target those relevant to the programme. Although Community Agents had used a range of approaches, they generally felt that word of mouth was the most effective (44 per cent) followed by taster sessions (26 per cent) as shown in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Methods used to reach older people

The effectiveness of this approach is reflected in the findings from interviews with 60 older people which revealed that this was the most commonly reported way in which older people had heard about the group and was also the approach that they recommended (Figure 3.5). Almost half (29 people) heard about the group through a friend, partner, neighbour or Community Agent at the group and, in one instance, through the local Safer Neighbourhood Police Officer. People also heard about the group from other community groups they were involved with. This demonstrates the value of linking with other groups (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Figure 3.5 How older people heard about the programme funded group

A further nine older people heard about it through leaflets or posters but most of these (six people) still said that they needed to be encouraged by someone else to go to the group. Another nine people heard about it through the local paper or radio. Three older people said they heard about the groups and activities through local papers and posters, but felt that the taster session or open day helped them to try it out and decide to join the group. Marketing can, therefore, play a role in reaching older people who may not hear about it through friends or networks; still, word of mouth is more effective as it can help people overcome any anxiety about joining a new group.

While only a small number of older people who were interviewed decided to join as a result of taster sessions, interviews and the surveys with funded groups and Community Agents suggests that open days or taster sessions can be a good way of allowing people to try out an activity and see if the group is something they enjoy and this approach was recommended by some older people who were interviewed. As can be seen in Figure 3.4, just over a quarter of Community Agents felt that taster sessions were most effective. Interviews revealed that such sessions allow older people to try out the group and activity before making a decision to join.

Other methods included information on community websites, local newsletters and information sessions. Local newspapers were only used by 16 per cent of the groups and were not considered to be one of the most effective ways of reaching older people. However, findings from the older people suggest a small, but notable, number of older people were reached this way and some older people interviewed recommended this as the best approach.

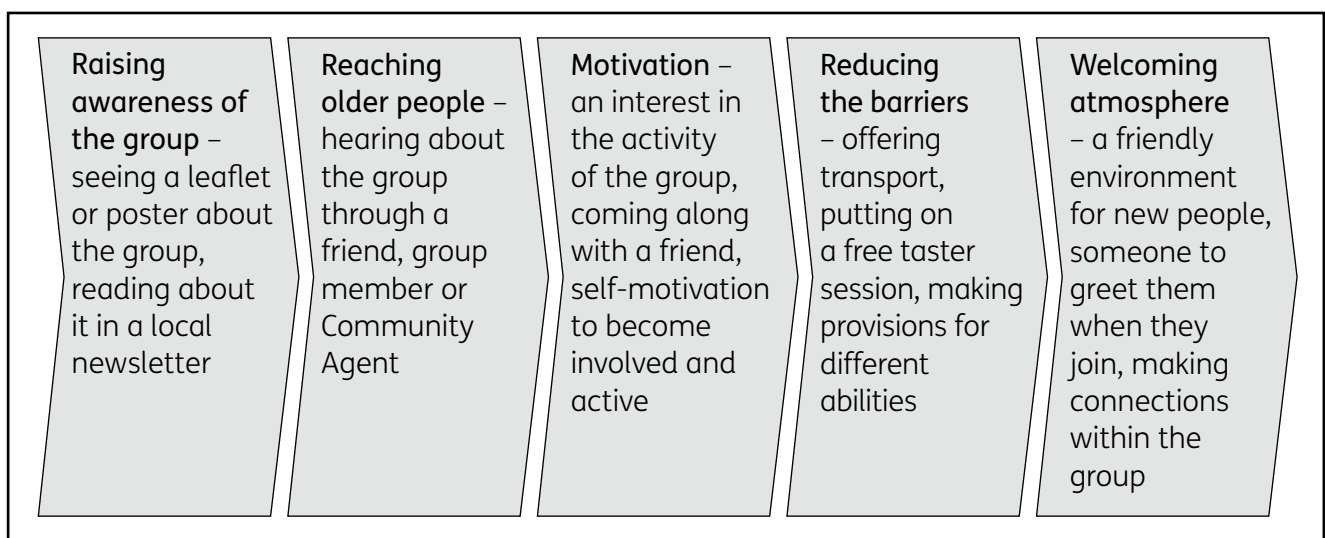
The evidence suggests that word of mouth is the most effective approach, and taster sessions are also valuable approaches to reaching and engaging with older people. It appears that a combination of approaches and efforts to overcome barriers may be required, as the following quote from an older person who started to participate in a sporting group illustrates.

‘The leaflet was so welcoming and it emphasised returners or complete beginners, didn’t matter how fit you are, transport if you need it ... you could come to a taster session before the course so I thought nothing to lose really so we came down to the taster session together, [a friend] and I, and that was it really it was just such a friendly bunch of coaches who made it fun from the word off and we couldn’t wait to get started really.’

(Older person interviewee)

Figure 3.6 illustrates the journey an older person can take to get further involved in a local community group and identifies the ways in which the local community can aid their participation in an activity.

Figure 3.6 How older people get involved in local groups



3.6 Summary

Overall, the community groups were successful in recruiting new older people to their groups. They had targeted the key groups who were the focus for the programme and the majority said that they had successfully recruited these. However, it was evident that some individuals, such as those who were not engaged in their community, those who were leading unhealthy lives and recently bereaved people were harder to engage in activities than others. It was apparent that there was a need to overcome older people’s apprehension and nervousness to encourage them to join the group in addition to providing practical support, such as with transport, to gain their participation.

Word of mouth was widely used by Community Agents to raise awareness and understanding of the activities and support on offer at their community group and was also considered effective. This was reflected in word of mouth being the most commonly reported way in which older people had become aware of the group and its activities. Nevertheless, this was not the only method and using a combination of approaches is valuable.

4 What groups did with the funding

Key lessons learned

- Groups were motivated to develop new groups or activities in order to offer more variety and attract new members. This included activities to keep older people mentally and physically active, respond to a need, and to try new things.
- Groups enhanced their understanding of older people including the extent of the issue of social isolation and loneliness, their financial concerns and the loss of confidence some experience after retirement. However, it is important to recognise the variety and range of skills and abilities among those who are older.
- Groups had actively sought to find out what activities older people, would like – mainly informally through conversations but also more formally through surveys.
- Around two-fifths (41 per cent) of the groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey had extended the range and number of activities they offered, and around half (47 per cent) tailored their activities more to the needs of older people.
- Where volunteers have an opportunity to take on greater volunteering, organising or community leadership responsibilities, most do so.
- Groups found there is value in someone fulfilling a role like the Community Agent role – nine out of ten groups had a volunteer fulfilling this role after the end of the funding.
- Groups linked up with other organisations to raise awareness of their group, share ideas about activities and share activities and fundraising opportunities.
- The main challenges encountered included engaging older people, particularly men. This was overcome by providing reassurance and actively seeking to develop relevant activities to appeal to men. Groups also found variations in attendance, sometimes due to the weather, made planning activities a challenge. They also often found the effort and time required to organise and run activities was challenging.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on what the groups used the programme funding for and what the outcomes of the programme were for the groups.¹⁸ It will explore the extent to which the programme helped encourage groups to take new or different approaches to activities they delivered and how they reached older people. It will also consider the challenges experienced and lessons learned by the groups as a result of the funding.

¹⁸ Outcomes for older people are explored in Chapter 5.

4.2 What did groups offer and how far were these activities new and different?

Funded groups that responded to the first funded groups survey offered a range of activities to older people. The survey found that almost two-thirds of groups (64 per cent) were offering physical or healthy living activities and 60 per cent of responding groups were offering social activities. Interviews with funded groups found that 11 of the 35 groups interviewed were general older people groups that included physical activities alongside other activities, while three of the groups specifically offered physical activities such as bowling or curling. Almost half of the group leaders responding to the first funded groups' survey (49 per cent) delivered activities that developed skills and knowledge. Ten of the 35 funded groups interviewed delivered activities that helped develop very specific skills and learning such as setting up local University of the Third Age groups and introduction to IT. As can be seen from Table 4.1, many of the funded programmes included a range of activities.

Table 4.1 Types of activity offered by groups

Type of activity	% of groups
Physical activities and healthy living, e.g. sports or other recreational activities, healthy eating workshops, tai chi, Wii Fit, dances, walks, running	64
Social activities, e.g. coffee mornings, lunch clubs, bingo, quizzes, knitting circles, Christmas meals, fetes, choirs, day trips	60
Activities to develop skills and knowledge, e.g. life-long learning activities, IT training, arts and crafts	49
Volunteering and local community activities, e.g. befriending, peer mentoring, allotment work, older peoples' forums	31
Advice and information giving, e.g. about how to access services like the Citizens' Advice Bureau and health and social care services	20
Health and social care support, e.g. carers' support group, diabetes support group	13
Campaigning on an issue, e.g. women's rights	2
Other	15

Source: First funded groups' survey (2011).

Base: 220 funded groups (multiple response question total equals more than 100 per cent).

The programme aimed to encourage groups and Community Agents to think about new or different ways to get other people involved in their activities. One means of encouraging more participation by older people in groups was found to be by increasing the range and/or frequency of activities on offer to ensure that they appealed to older people in both content and timing.

Half of the groups (50 per cent) who responded to the final funded groups' survey felt the programme had led to an increase in the number of activities that were being offered to older people and 56 per cent of responding groups felt that the programme had led to an increase in the variety of activities. Forty-one per cent of respondents said that it had led to an increase in both the number and range of activities. Community Agents supported this finding with 28 per cent of those who responded to the survey reporting that a greater choice of new activities was one of the main benefits of the programme for their community group. In developing the new activities, groups had been mindful of older people's needs. About half (47 per cent) of the groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey indicated that they had developed new activities specifically for older people with the aim of getting older people involved.

'We just looked round and thought well, what can we offer people that we don't currently have in the way of specific activities.'

(older person)

The interviews with funded groups provided more insights into the nature of the new activities they had developed. These included:

- **offering a greater diversity of activities** – older people's groups that offered a number of activities were able to further expand and diversify their range of activities. For example, many older people groups expanded their offer to include tai chi, Zumba classes, chair exercises and, in the case of one group, abseiling.
- **offering a completely new activity** – older people's groups also developed and offered an activity that was entirely different to their core activity. For example, an allotment group offered free art lessons on their site and a walking group offered a new fitness class.
- **tailoring an existing activity to a new audience** – groups that were focused on a particular activity also developed new activities. For example, a community interest company that normally offered reminiscence work in care homes set up two local reminiscence groups in local villages; a local tennis club set up a new free over 60's tennis class.

Groups also used the funding to subsidise or pay for day trips which previously may not have been possible due to the cost for each older person.

The groups who had introduced new activities considered these activities to be 'different' or 'innovative' in the context of their group. It was acknowledged by funded group leaders who were interviewed that the activities that were new to them may already have been offered elsewhere in the community; however, these were not necessarily aimed at the older people. For example, Zumba classes have become popular among many age groups, but by making the costs lower, holding them in the day and ensuring that the sessions accommodated different physical abilities, it was a new and innovative activity for older people.

The interviews with funded groups indicated that they were motivated to develop new groups or activities in order to:

- offer a more interesting variety of activities and therefore attract more members;
- include activities that kept older people physically and mentally active as well as socially active or vice versa;
- try out new activities that they had not had the opportunity to offer previously; and
- respond to an identified need, for example, computing skills for older people.

While the funded groups had aimed to develop activities that were relevant and tailored to the needs and interests of older people, some were mindful that, for some, there is a risk of a stigma in joining 'older people' groups, as many people do not like to label themselves as old. Consequently, by promoting a specific activity, they found people were more likely to join in as they were taking part in a 'tai chi' class rather than an 'older persons' club. On the whole, funded group leaders and older people who were interviewed enjoyed the new activities the groups offered and enjoyed the opportunity to do new and different activities. However, there were a few instances where funded groups felt that not all new activities had worked and used feedback to amend what they offered. This was seen as part of the process to finding out what older people needed and enjoyed. For example, feedback from older people in one group found that they would like to do some physical exercise. The group experimented with a number of different activities, including some physical, aerobic activity, but found this was too strenuous for the group. They decided to move towards doing more gentle exercises such as yoga.

4.3 How did groups develop their understanding of older people's needs and how far was this new and different?

The programme led to groups increasing their understanding of older people. Of the respondents to the final funded groups' survey, 85 per cent felt they had improved their understanding of older people (46 per cent felt their understanding had increased a lot and 39 per cent by a little). Seven per cent of Community Agents who responded to the survey identified greater understanding of older people's needs as one of the two most important changes the programme had on their community group. Interviews with funded group leaders found that groups had particularly improved or reinforced their understanding of the following issues for older people.

- Funded group leaders were generally aware that some older people were socially isolated and suffered from loneliness, but many groups remarked that the programme helped them to understand the extent of the problem of isolation among older people, particularly among the newly retired age group.
- A significant number of older people are on fixed incomes and are therefore concerned with their spending. Even a small membership fee can prevent older people attending a group.

'The trouble is if you start saying 'It's going to cost you money' they start 'Ooh' they don't want to go, but when you say 'It's going to be free or near enough free' then they're interested.'

(Funded group)

- 'Older people' are a varied group of individuals and there is a range of abilities within the over 55 age group. Activities needed to reflect this. For example, an indoor curling group bought equipment to allow people with a range of abilities to join in.
- Some older people lose confidence as they retire and grow older. They can start to feel they are, or are perceived as, not valuable or useful anymore. Many funded group organisers spent time reassuring older people to build up their confidence and used new activities to demonstrate what they were still capable of.

As well as understanding older people more, groups were also keen to understand what older people needed from the groups in order to tailor their activities accordingly, as discussed above. A quarter of respondents to the final funded groups' survey (25 per cent) stated they had adopted new approaches to finding out what older people might want. Interviews with funded group leaders found that most groups sought feedback from older people over the activities they wanted, mostly through relatively informal means, such as chatting with the group members, asking them to feedback on activities they had undertaken previously or would like to undertake in the future. They then were able to make suggestions at the beginning of group meetings. However, a small proportion of groups used more formal methods such as surveys or learning from previous projects. Two-thirds of respondents to the final funded groups' survey (67 per cent) felt the programme had led to activities that met older people's needs and interests better.

Where groups applied this enhanced understanding of older people to the activities they offered they did so by ensuring they contained a social element and that they supported new participants when they joined to overcome any shyness or apprehension. Some included activities that helped improve confidence and adapted activities to accommodate different abilities. Mindful of the financial constraints for many older people, they sought to keep any costs to a minimum or provide activities free.

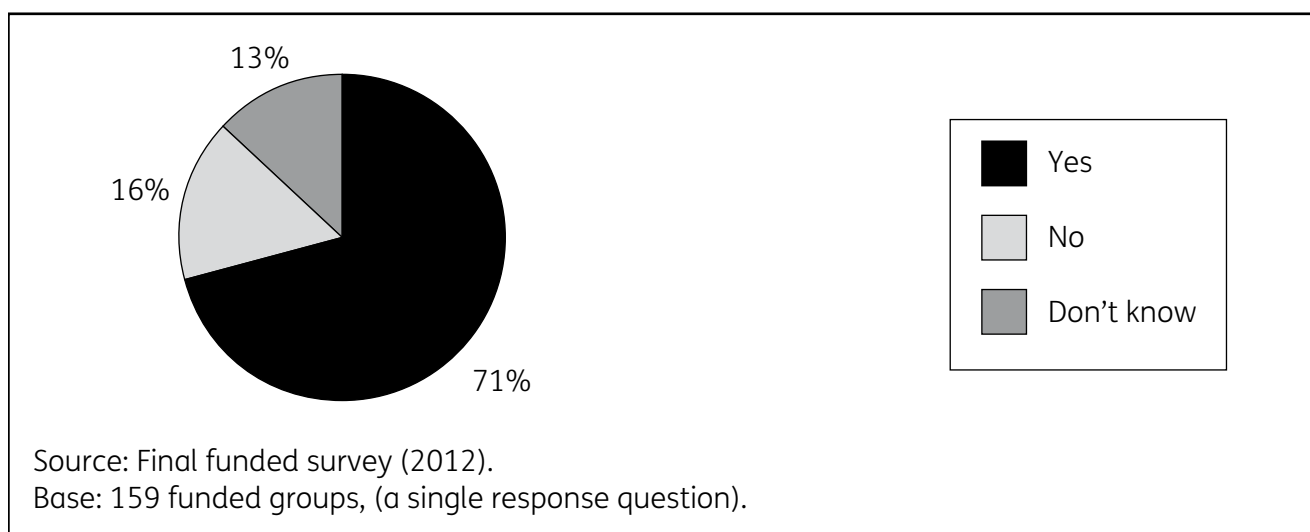
4.4 What has been the impact of the programme on volunteering in the group?

The programme aimed to empower individuals, at the local level, to provide leadership roles for older people in their community. Groups were encouraged to support members and others to give their time to become Active at 60 Community Agents or volunteer within the group.

As discussed in Chapter 7 and Appendix C, most groups did not use the term Community Agent. The large majority of groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey (89 per cent) felt they had at least one designated volunteer who was nearing or at retirement age and undertook at least one of the one of the following functions that were expected of Community Agents:

- Found people around 60 or over who were retired or due to retire and who were at risk of being socially isolated or lonely, and helped them find out about, and join in with, groups in their community.
- Encouraged older people to try new things.
- Came up with ideas and organised things for their community.

Figure 4.1 Has the Active at 60 grant enabled these volunteers to take on new responsibilities



The first funded groups' survey found 77 per cent of responding groups recruited and identified existing volunteers to become Community Agents. However, most were not already in a lead role. Just over a third (35 per cent) of funded organisation leaders responding to the first funded groups' survey said that they were Community Agents and ten per cent of Community Agents who responded to the survey said that they managed the group. Therefore, although the Community Agents in many groups were already an existing volunteer the survey suggests that the programme also encouraged groups to increase the level of volunteering. A total of 89 per cent of respondents to the final funded groups' survey said that they had a designated volunteer as part of their Active at 60 Community Agent grant. As Figure 4.1 shows, 71 per cent of 159 groups in the final funded survey felt that the programme had enabled the volunteers to take on new volunteering, organising or community leadership responsibilities, such as helping to set up activities, encouraging people to take part and gathering ideas about what people would like to do (see Chapter 2 for more detail).

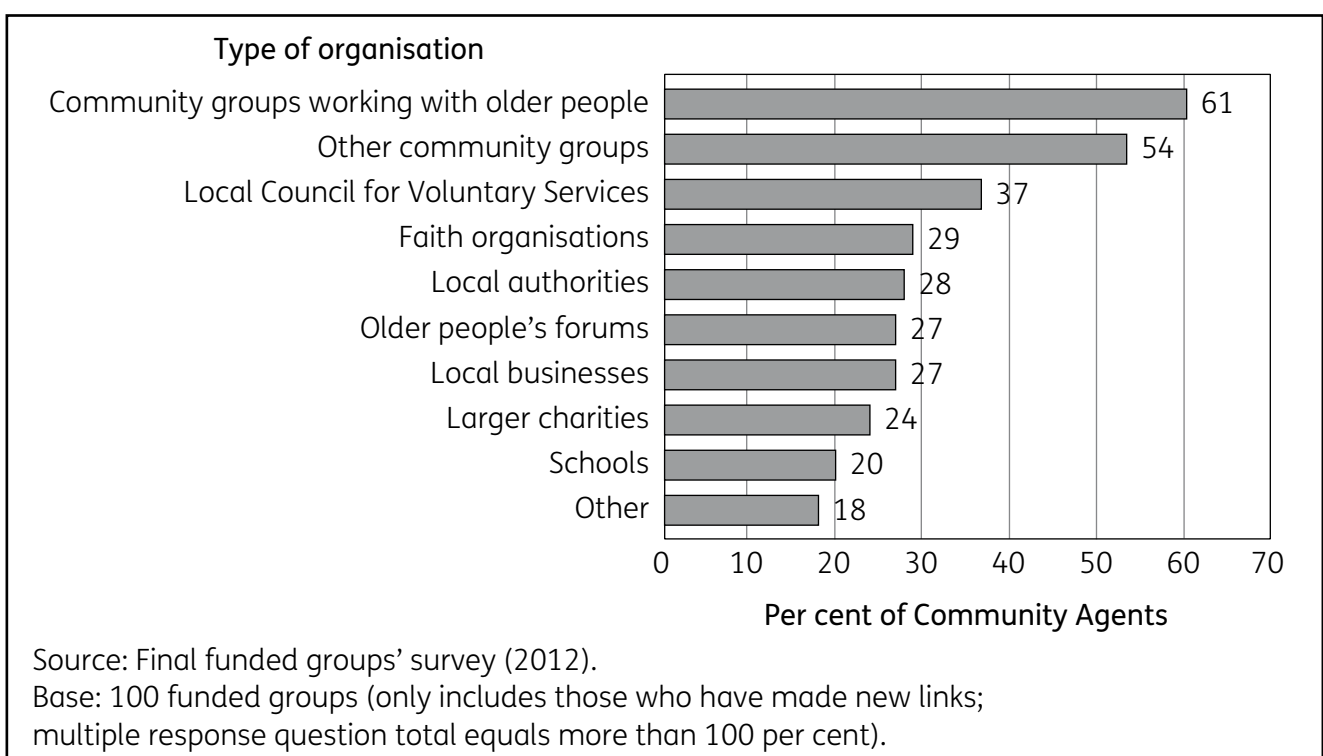
There is evidence that the role of the Community Agent that had been instituted through the programme will continue after the funding had ended. A notable majority (91 per cent) of the groups who responded to the final funded groups’ survey, and said that they had a designated volunteer, still had someone fulfilling this role after the end of the funding. The Community Agents aimed to increase the opportunity for older people to take on leadership roles and, overall, 38 per cent of all respondents to the final funded groups’ survey reported an increase in the volunteering opportunities for older people.

In summary, the evidence shows that, as a result of the programme, older people have become more involved in volunteering and leadership responsibilities within their communities as a result of taking on a Community Agent role. Moreover, most groups will continue to have a volunteer carrying out the Community Agent responsibilities in the future. The role of the Community Agent and its impact is discussed in Chapter 2.

4.5 What networks have the groups linked into, how far were these new?

The evidence suggests that groups had increased and enhanced their links with other organisations in the local area, following their involvement in the programme. The final funded groups’ survey found that 63 per cent of responding groups had made new links with other organisations as a result of the programme. As can be seen in Figure 4.2, the most common connection was with other local community groups working with older people (61 per cent of groups), followed by links with other community groups (54 per cent). However, they also linked with organisations such as local authorities and faith organisations who could be potential future funders. On average, the groups that made links with other organisations had connected with at least three different types of organisation. This suggests that involvement in the programme had contributed to groups building wider networks in their local area.

Figure 4.2 Links with other organisations



Interviews with funded group leaders found that groups linked up with other organisations to share ideas about activities, raise awareness of their activities and to share activities, such as days out, and fundraising opportunities. Groups also made links with wardens of sheltered and assisted accommodation to spread the word to the residents about their group and its activities. Groups accommodated within community centres and larger community groups used these connections to promote their groups and to identify older people who they felt would benefit from their activities.

The large majority of groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey (95 per cent) that made connections with new organisations felt these links would continue in the future. Through their involvement in the programme, most groups had increased their links with a range of organisations, particularly local groups and organisations, which are anticipated to continue in the future.

4.6 What were the main challenges encountered in delivering the programme?

Among the funded group leaders who were interviewed, some experienced challenges but overall many group leaders felt the challenges were manageable enough and most emphasised the rewarding experience the programme had been, with some group leaders reporting no challenges.

The main challenge experienced by funded group leaders who were interviewed was **engaging older people with the group and/or maintaining attendance**. Groups felt they had identified people who were in the target group, but convincing some of them to come along was a challenge as older people required a lot of reassurance to join. Funded groups recognised that while initially the number of new members could be small, contrary to expectations that there would be a good turnout at the start of the project, numbers gradually increased as word of mouth about the group spread.

'It's a bit too slow, you want it all to happen in a huge hurry and it doesn't and you have to be patient. Your first class, you're expecting twenty people and you get five, this sort of thing, but you get over this, word spreads and it builds up.'

(Funded group)

Groups overcame the challenge by providing reassurance to older people interested in joining.

Groups also felt **reaching and engaging men** was a challenge and there were a number of instances when men had come along to groups, but had not returned, either it was suspected, because 'they feel a bit silly doing stuff with women' or because they did not enjoy the activity. The below quote gives an example of how one group overcame this challenge. The barriers to reaching and engaging older people are expanded on in Chapter 3.

'We try to include male speakers and we try to think about the topic, for example we're having a gentleman in January and he builds [equipment] and he did one of the Bond films ... because we thought that would be a very male thing really. I think I would say that was successful that we have managed to include more men now than we did at the beginning.'

(Funded group)

A small number of groups found that **attendance could vary** from week to week and this could make it difficult to plan activities. Older people suffering from illnesses or having doctor or hospital appointments or going on holiday meant that group attendance could sometimes be low.

The **seasons** could also have an impact on groups' attendance, with some finding older people were less likely to come in summer for reasons such as looking after grandchildren and others finding winter having an impact because older people did not want to go out in cold weather.

'The weather, they don't turn up if the weather's not very nice.'

(Funded group)

It should also be noted that some groups only ran their activities in summer due to the nature of the activity, but this was seen as a practicality rather than a challenge, for example, gardening groups often stopped meeting during the winter.

A small number of group organisers felt that their role as the main coordinator of the project was challenging as it had required a lot of **effort and organisation**, such as arranging transport, speakers and transport for certain activities.

'It hasn't been easy, it's a lot of hard work, it really is a lot of hard work, I mean it's not just the couple of hours I do down there, it's the work behind it, you know literally going out and buying stuff and organising stuff and phone calls.'

(Funded group)

Although it was possible for them to draw on other sources of support within the organisations, this emphasises the importance of involving others in volunteering responsibility to ensure the effort is shared.

4.7 What were the outcomes for the groups from their use of the funds

The group leaders who were interviewed identified the following key differences that involvement in the programme had made to their groups. This legacy from the programme is discussed further in Chapter 6.

- They had reflected on the activities they were offering and had expanded their offer with the aim of better meeting a need for older people in the community.
- The majority of groups who had developed new activities for older people said they would continue to deliver the activities in future as far as possible.
- A small number of groups aimed to continue to develop new ideas and activities for older people beyond the end of the funding.

The variety of activities offered by funded groups and feedback from the interviews suggests the flexibility of the programme allowed groups to respond to local needs, to decide what activities would be best for their groups and its members, and deliver a range of activities that allowed older people to become involved in things that interested them.

Groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey and said they had specifically focused on developing new activities as a new approach to involving older people in their group, were more likely to report key outcomes for their group than was the case among those who responded to the same survey, but had not had this focus. More specifically, such groups were more likely to say that:

- the programme had led to activities in their group that met older peoples needs and interests better (76 per cent compared with 60 per cent);
- the programme enabled them to try new approaches to get older people involved in our group (76 per cent compared with 49 per cent);
- the programme led to an increase in the variety of activities for older people our group runs (76 per cent compared with 39 per cent);

- the programme led to an increase in the number of members/users who are older people (81 per cent compared with 64 per cent); and
- the programme led to an increase in the number of activities for older people at their group (69 per cent compared with 33 per cent).

4.8 Summary

The outcomes for the group for their involvement in the Community Agent programme included that around half of the groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey had extended the number and range of activities they offered and had tailored their activities to older people's needs. It is evident that groups where the leader was interviewed had either diversified slightly from the activities they usually offered or had added something entirely new to the activities they offered. Some had tailored what they usually offered to be accessible for older people. Where they had adopted new activities these tended to be innovative for their group, rather than completely unique and novel. The groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey, and those interviewed, had extended the responsibilities of their existing volunteers and introduced a new role of Community Agent that will continue in future. It was also evident that respondents to the final funded groups' survey had extended their networks, with an average of three other groups and organisations, and anticipated that these would be sustained in future.

Most of the groups responding to the final funded groups' survey and those interviewed had also benefited from enhancing their understanding of older people and the issues they encounter, and this had informed the way in which they offered activities to include a social element and to be accessible. This understanding potentially places them in a position in future to continue to offer activities that are appropriate for older people.

The group leaders who were interviewed had found it challenging to reach and engage older people and, as outlined in Chapter 3, had adopted a wide range of techniques to do so. They also found it challenging to plan and manage their group with varied attendance due to the weather, illness and other commitments of older people. Finally, they were working to overcome the challenge of engaging men by actively seeking activities that appeal particularly to older men.

5 What difference did the programme make to older people who took part?

Key lessons learned

- Retirement and other transitions can indeed be challenging for some older people, especially the resulting loss of purpose, reduced social interaction and reduced income, so there is a need for support such as that offered by the Community Agent programme.
- There is value in local community groups offering support and activities for older people as the evidence shows that they can benefit from this.
- The main benefits of the programme for older people were the opportunity to socialise and get out of the house.
- By socialising and getting out of the house older people had benefited from building new friendships, some of which developed and extended beyond meeting at the group.
- Some older people who had felt that they were low or depressed, or considered that they were at risk of becoming so, improved in their mental wellbeing as a result of participating.
- Where activities included physical exercise or activity, many older people had seen an improvement in their physical health and movement.
- Older people valued the opportunity to have something to do and often felt that they had developed new skills as a result of their participation.
- With its focus on promoting participation by older people in local community groups, the Community Agent programme had enhanced the local community by raising awareness among older people of the opportunities on offer locally and increasing the availability of activities for this target group.
- The relationships established by those who participated in groups funded through the programme contributed to building a sense of community locally as more individuals formed connections and were able to provide support for each other.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the outcomes of the programme of older people – how far did it contribute to addressing the issue of social isolation and improving lives. The chapter outlines the key priorities and concerns for older people who are recently retired and the outcomes of the programme for older people who took part and the wider impact of the programme on the community.

5.2 Impact of retirement and ageing on older people

The impact of retirement on older people's outlook and lifestyle varied. The interviews with older people revealed a mixed experience. For some older people it was a positive experience, as they no longer had to deal with the pressures of work and it gave them time and freedom to enjoy themselves and to spend time with their grandchildren. For others, it was an adjustment period that they struggled with. Older people experienced a number of difficulties as a result of retirement, below are the most common issues:

- **Having less sense of purpose or routine** – going to work gave interviewees a sense of purpose to their days and, at the very least, a routine which meant they had to wake up and get dressed and go out. The absence of work created a void in their day and they struggled to know how to fill the day. There were instances where this led to people feeling low or depressed.

'It's strange after getting up early to go out to work and then you suddenly stop and then you think what am I going to do with my day, how am I going to fill the time in and when you first start to look around you don't see the opportunities.'

(Older person interviewee)

- **Loss of daily social interaction** – interviewees had previously had jobs that in some way allowed them to have interaction with people, either other colleagues, the general public or even with people on their journey to and from work. Some older people missed having access to the social networks work had provided.
- **Living on a smaller income** – by no longer having a working income interviewees felt they had to be more careful with their money and this limited their choice of what they were able to do. People who wanted to pursue certain interests sometimes felt they were unable to do this due to the cost.

'I've looked at some of the college ones but they're so expensive – £120 for 12 weeks – because once you're retired you haven't got a wage coming in so you've got to decide what to spend your money on.'

(Older person interviewee)

- **Enforced retirement** – for a small number of older people, retirement was not necessarily an active decision, but was a result of being made redundant or was due to medical conditions. In some cases this made it harder for people to deal with the adjustment, particularly due to the loss of confidence related to redundancy or poor health.

There were also examples where events, other than retirement, had had an equally significant impact on the lives of older people for example, the loss of a partner was also a period of adjustment that brought similar difficulties such as the diminishing of daily social interaction or purpose. This was particularly true for older people who had caring responsibilities. For a small number of older people moving somewhere new had also meant the loss of established social connections.

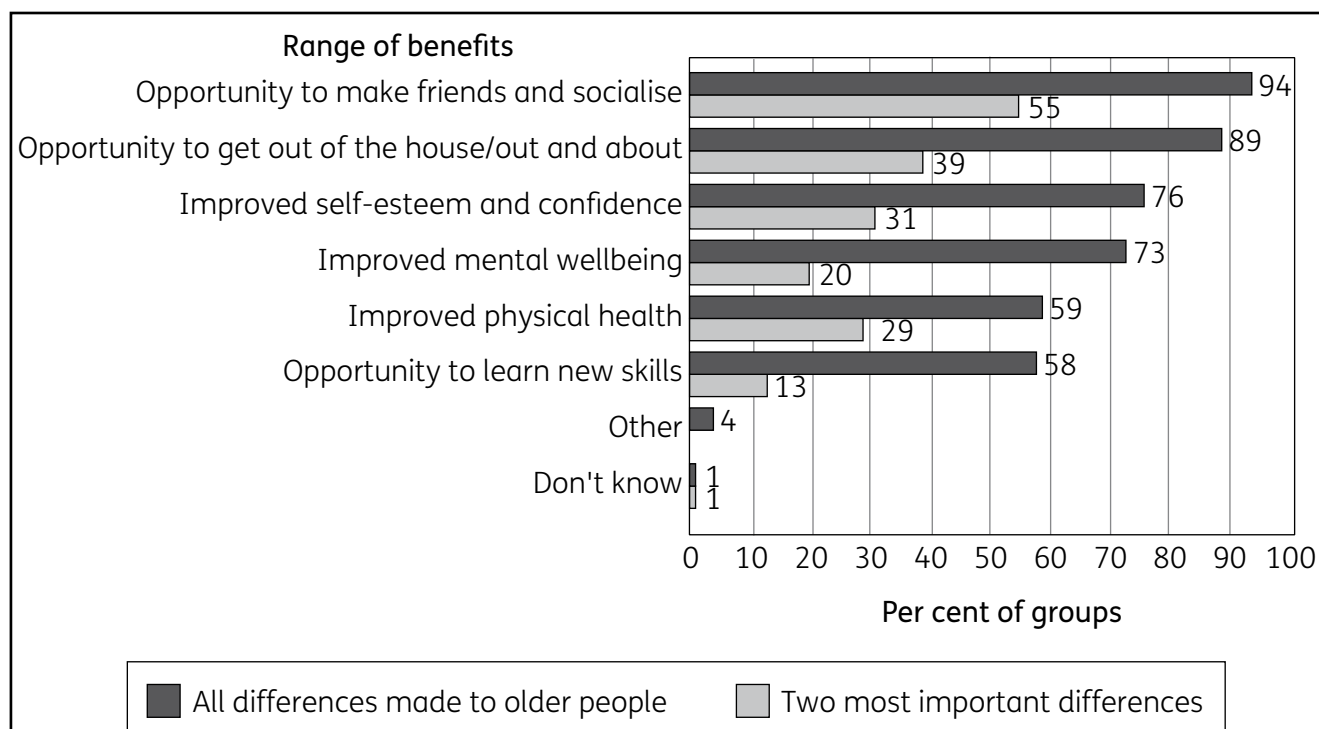
The experience of older people interviewed reveals that retirement, and other life changes, can indeed be a challenging time with the need for significant adjustment.

5.3 What difference did the programme make to older people who took part?

The programme aimed to reduce the risk of older people becoming socially isolated and lonely and to help improve people’s later life, encouraging them to play an active role in their communities. The programme focused on helping them overcome some of the issues experienced by older people after they retired or went through difficult transitions in their later life. As the aim of the programme was to help individuals in their lives, the evidence of the outcomes is largely drawn from the qualitative interviews with 60 older people who participated. Their self-reported journeys provide an insight into how they felt the programme had affected their lives while the perspectives of the Community Agents and funded group leaders provide a wider view of the difference made for participants.

The evaluation found that the programme did contribute to alleviating these problems for many of the older people who took part and who did benefit, to varying extents and in many different ways, from the funded groups and activities. Figure 5.1 outlines the benefits funded groups thought the programme had made to the older people. It also shows what they felt were the most important benefits to those who participated. As can be seen in Figure 5.1, the opportunity to make friends and socialise, and get out of the house, were the two most commonly identified benefits to older people. The final survey with funded groups found 94 per cent of responding groups felt the programme gave older people the opportunity to make friends and socialise, and 89 per cent of groups felt it gave older people the opportunity to get out of the house/out and about.

Figure 5.1 Benefits to older people by funded group



Source: Final funded groups’ survey.
 Base: 159 funded groups (respondents could identify more than one difference made, and then select the two most important from this, two people did not identify the most important differences).

The interviews with older people and Community Agents reinforced this finding as most mentioned that older people had met new friends and many reported that attending the groups gave them a reason to get out of the house. The extent of the impact of participating in a group funded through the programme on older people varied from those who simply enjoyed attending the group to others who felt that being part of the group had been life changing, as discussed in more detail below.

5.3.1 Developing friendships

The groups had provided an opportunity for older people to extend and develop their friendship groups. The older people interviewed frequently mentioned that they had made new friends as a result of participating in the group. Similarly, Community Agents stated that forming friendships and increasing their social network was a key benefit for many older people who attended who often *'don't see people all day'* and otherwise *'would be just sat lonely at home'*.

'I've made all new friends – entirely differently from what I had ...'

(Older person interviewee)

In addition, older people said that they had maintained and developed existing friendships.

'Funnily enough some of the ladies come from our church but I had never actually met them and now we socialise.'

(Older person interviewee)

These friendships had been key sources of support for some older people. For example those who had been recently bereaved (see case study below).

There was evidence that these friendships were extending beyond the group meetings. Community Agents cited instances where members of the group had met outside the groups and this was reflected in the interviews with older people who mentioned that they had met other group members outside. This was both formally, for example for a Christmas lunch, or organising going on a walk together, and informally such as meeting in the street or supermarket. In cases where mobility was a problem, they would call one another. The shared experience or common interest through the group helped these social interactions by providing a focus and topic for conversation.

'I've made a really good friend at the line dancing class but unfortunately we'd only gone twice and she had a really bad fall and broke her wrist badly so she can't come at the moment. She lives in the next area to us and I went and had a coffee with her yesterday.'

(Older person interviewee)

'There's a lady that comes here too who lives on my estate where I live and I didn't know; whereas now we greet each other in the street. You don't realise how close people are.'

(Older person interviewee)

5.3.2 Something to do

A key benefit of the Community Agents programme, identified by older people who were interviewed, was that it gave them a focus and routine within their day or week that they enjoyed and gave them a reason and opportunity to get out of the house. It provided a sense of purpose for some older people who felt they had lacked this since retiring.

'It's a good incentive for me, if I'm not feeling 100 per cent, to come out and participate.'

(Older person interviewee)

'I think if I'd been stuck in the house I think I would've been down in the dumps, suffered from my nerves or something but since I've come here I know I can pick the phone up and there's somebody on the other end.'

(Older person interviewee)

5.3.3 Improved mental wellbeing

Almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of group leaders who responded to the final funded groups' survey felt the programme had improved the mental wellbeing of older people at their group. This was supported by Community Agents who responded to an open question in the survey, 28 per cent of whom identified improved wellbeing of older people as one of the two main changes in their group as a result of the programme. Further insights from Community Agent interviewees revealed that improved wellbeing and 'getting out of the house' were key outcomes for older people. It was observed that, although the group often only met for a short time, it could have a significant effect for older people.

'because it's [only] an hour and a half, or two hours, once a month and it's extraordinary the difference it makes to people.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

Community Agents' reflections indicate that these improvements in wellbeing were a result of:

- the opportunity to meet other people: *'the majority of the group were living singly, their partners had died, so for them it's excellent'*;
- someone taking an interest: *'somebody is interested in what they have to say'*;
- the atmosphere at the group: *'we've created the ambience for it'*; and
- improved self-esteem through doing something new successfully: *'they didn't know that it was possible for them to do maybe an artistic event'*.

Indeed, older people who were depressed or felt that they were at risk of this said that attending the groups had helped alleviate feelings of depression by helping them to *'feel a lot better in myself, mentally'* and *'made me feel more cheerful about things'*. Interviews with both older people and funded groups found there were examples of people who would not see anyone socially in a week if they did not attend the group. Even for people who did have social interactions with people, and were less socially isolated, the role of the funded groups and activities was still very important. For some older people, it had been a lifeline to them during difficult periods of transition, as the following case study demonstrates.

Case study – finding support and experiencing health benefits

A lady had been caring for her husband for a number of years and when he died she felt quite lonely. She had also been unwell and had become increasingly breathless and had a number of falls. She was very worried about it and her doctor discussed referring her to a falls clinic.

Bereavement

As her husband was ill for some time before his death, he was unable to go out much and meet their friends and she felt this slowly led to them being more isolated: ‘when you keep refusing people then **they drift away** so when my husband died I only had two really good friends’. Although she has children they did not live locally so ‘**it’s not like they can drop in and have a cup of tea**’. She had also previously **joined a gym** to try and improve her health but she ‘realised it **wasn’t doing me any good**, [it was] more harmful if anything’.

What difference the group made

She then heard about a programme over 50s exercise group through a friend, and attended the group. She is now a regular member. The group has helped her in a number of ways:

‘I’ve made new friends and, as I told you, when my husband died I had two good friends and they both died within six months of my husband so **I felt friendless**. Now I’ve got all these people. **We meet up and do things** together and that’s been a great help and I think it’s **saved me from depression**. I was quite depressed ... it’s been a **new set of friends** for me.’

She also felt the exercise helped her to become **healthier** as she can now ‘**walk without being breathless** all the time’ and is not falling over anymore. She has improved so much the doctor did not have to refer her to the falls clinic ‘because I **coped** with helping myself through [this exercise group]’.

5.3.4 Gaining confidence

Over three-quarters (76 per cent) of respondents to the final funded groups’ survey felt that older people at their group had improved self-esteem and confidence as a result of the programme. Older people participating in programme activities said that they had gained confidence as a result of:

- gaining new skills or knowledge – ‘I’m learning new skills but I’ve got confidence, I’ll have a go; whereas before I used to think if I touch [a computer], I’ve broken it’;
- recognising what they were capable of – ‘I never thought I’d go abseiling down a building at 64 years of age’;
- Becoming more socially active – ‘It’s given me confidence to go out and look at other groups and meet other people’ and ‘I feel as though now I can stand up and say things whereas before I wouldn’t have done, I would have sat back. In fact, the first day I came I was nervous and shy’; and
- having support from people at the group – ‘I am quite a shy person and everyone here has made me so welcome’.

Community Agents who were interviewed also highlighted improved confidence as one of the outcomes for older people they had observed. They cited examples particularly of people who were ‘withdrawn’, who had mental health problems and who had lost confidence following a bereavement who had become increasingly confident generally in their interactions within the group. Community Agents had a role in supporting participants in the group by encouraging interaction between people who did not know each other.

‘They come along and the first two weeks they sit like little mice and then they begin to assert themselves and get involved ... we surreptitiously guide them to where they’re going to sit ... so that we get them all mixed up.’

(Community Agent volunteer)

The increase in confidence people experienced helped them improve their wellbeing and feel happier as the case study below demonstrates.

Case study – coping with retirement and regaining confidence

An older person interviewee who had participated in the programme had to give up her job after working most of her life due to an injury and her husband’s deteriorating health. Her job had a large social element to it and it allowed her to meet ‘lots and lots of interesting people’.

Retirement

She found the transition into retirement hard to cope with for a number of reasons.

‘it was quite difficult – not only the financial thing, which was a nightmare – but it was me myself because I felt I didn’t have a purpose and I no longer identified myself as being somebody because I’d always been a [job title] ... I was a bit depressed I think and it was a bit of a shock. Although I knew that I was going to retire it was still a very difficult time for me because it was an adjustment period and I was trying to think what am I going to do, who am I for a start?’

What difference the group made

She began going to a programme-funded group. She felt the group gave her ‘a sense of purpose’ and provided her with the company that she missed at work:

‘[the group] really filled a big gap in my life and gave me a sense of worth and then I’ve become more confident and because we do this dancing now and we go out and about, it’s made me feel a lot better and happier in myself ... I don’t know quite where I would have been because I didn’t want to take anti-depressants because I thought that’s not the answer and I had to deal with things.’

The Community Agent

The Community Agent was also important to her as they both worked in the same profession:

‘We just connected and I can say things to [the Community Agent] and she’s been very supportive because my husband [is very unwell] – and she’s been very good.’

The Community Agent has also gone around to her house to show her husband some calming techniques to help him cope with his illness.

5.3.5 Staying or becoming more physically active

The final survey of funded groups revealed that programme activities also helped to keep older people physically active with 59 per cent of groups thinking older people had improved their physical health. Sixteen per cent of Community Agents responding to the survey cited older people’s improved health and fitness and a more active lifestyle as one of the main changes in their group. This is reflected in the experience of many of the older people who had participated in physical activities such as exercise sessions, Tai Chi, and doing sports, including tennis and curling. Older people who were interviewed reported that they had experienced improvements to their physical health, for example, by helping them with aches and pains or losing weight (see the above case study ‘finding support and experiencing health benefits’).

Older people could also experience health benefits, even when the activities of the groups were not physical. Older people could benefit from going to the activities by being less sedentary than they would have been if the opportunity to get out and involved had not been made available to them.

'I do feel better for coming, physically stronger because I do have a problem with asthma so definitely to do dancing and keep fitter is better than just sitting there.'

(Older person interviewee)

'It's like going to the gymnasium – making you get up, walk across, stretch your arms, bend down, stand up – whether or not you like it you're doing it because you're enjoying the game.'

(Older person interviewee)

Similarly, Community Agents had seen participants benefit physically in terms of their health through for example, weight loss, improved flexibility and improved balance. Such physical benefits could be experienced even in groups where exercise was not the focus of the group, such as a gardening group.

'[participants] enjoy just looking at the plots, the vegetables and flowers and getting fresh air and a bit of exercise just walking around ... they have enjoyed going out in the fresh air and doing something physical.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

5.3.6 Developing new skills

Fifty-eight per cent of groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey said that the programme gave people an opportunity to learn new skills. Among the older people interviewed there were instances of interviewees who said that they had developed new skills in areas such as painting, family history, tennis and computers. Community Agent interviewees also considered that older people had gained a range of new skills, but particularly skills with computers where they had increased their familiarity and confidence using IT and, in one group, were now using email and Skype outside of the group as a result. Interest groups also allowed older people to pursue particular subjects such as local history or art, which they were able to pursue and enjoy outside the group, and fulfil a gap that may have been left by retirement. This helped keep them mentally stimulated, which older people felt was important as they grew older.

'I like the information we have from someone that speaks. I like the aspect of finding out about your own local history and I like the aspect of interacting with people and it just keeps the old grey matter working!'

(Older person interviewee)

5.4 What were the wider benefits of the programme?

The programme aimed to encourage older people to play an active role in their communities. A total of 29 per cent of Community Agents who responded to the survey said that one of the main changes for their group as a result of the programme was an improvement in the wider community such as increased interaction in the community, more awareness of what was on offer, improved community cohesion and increased use of community facilities. It was common for older people who were interviewed to mention that their participation in the group had helped them to increase their involvement in their local community. Of those older people who did feel they would or had become more active as a result of the programme they:

- felt they had become more active generally by joining or planning on joining more community groups;
- had built up greater social networks within their community; and
- had started volunteering in the community in some capacity.

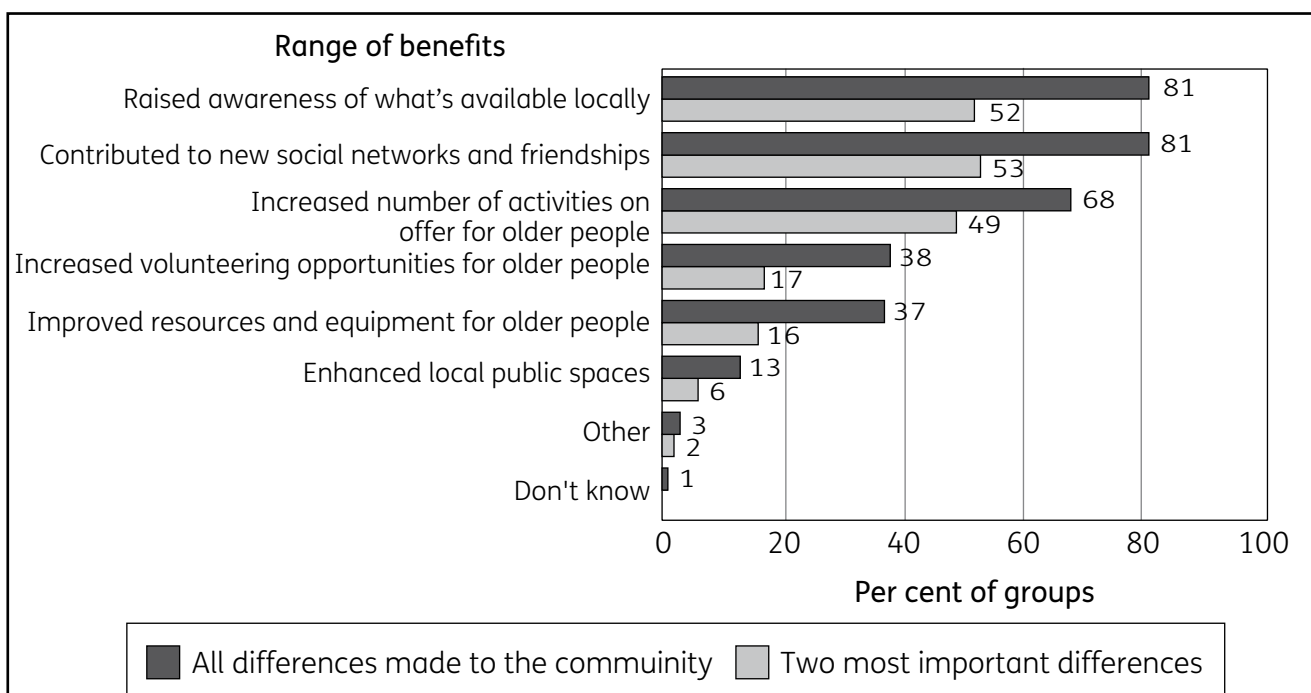
‘It’s made a big difference to my life. It’s given me some motivation to do other things like, it was after doing this group, that I joined Marie Curie and I’m doing a lot more and I’m feeling a lot better in myself, mentally.’

(Older person interviewee)

For the majority of people who took part but who did not think they would get more involved in the future, their main reason was that they felt they were already involved enough, through volunteering or through engaging with other community groups.

The final survey of funded groups found that the respondents identified that the two most important differences the programme made to the local community were contributing to new social networks and friendships (53 per cent of groups) and raising awareness of what is locally available for older people (52 per cent), as shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Benefits to the community



Source: Final funded groups’ survey.

Base: 159 funded groups (respondents could tick more than one difference made, and then select the two most important from these, three respondents did not identify the most important difference).

This was also cited as a benefit for older people by Community Agent interviewees who also mentioned the value of raising awareness among older people of activities on offer as well as the benefit of older people making new friends who could then attend a different group or activity with them.

'If they come in and they're interested in one of the other groups ... they can actually get involved if they want so that broadens their horizon and then it widens their awareness of what is going on.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

In addition to this almost half of the groups felt that an important impact on the community was increasing the number of activities on offer for older people. Local funders also identified this as a key difference the programme had made to the areas, along with increased awareness of activities. As well as the number of activities on offer, as a result of taking part in the programme, older people's awareness of what was available was felt to have increased, either by 'a lot' (21 per cent of the Community Agents who responded to the survey) or 'a little' (26 per cent of respondents). Additionally, Community Agent respondents perceived that the uptake of activities in the local community by older people had increased a little (26 per cent) or a lot (11 per cent).

Interviews with funded groups and older people found that joining a programme-funded group encouraged people to find out about and join other community groups. Some older people felt that being a member of one group was as much as they were able to fit in or manage in their week. Others felt that being part of the groups had allowed them to hear about other opportunities within the area.

'... so just this one little two hours has opened up a lot of roads for me, definitely.'

(Older person interviewee)

The groups funded through the programme contributed to their local communities through their involvement in community activities and events, such as getting involved in Christmas fete and putting on parties for the Royal wedding. Involvement in the group therefore provided participants with an opportunity to engage in other events and activities in their community. Groups also contributed to their communities in various other ways, for example, by fundraising for other groups, performing at local care homes and documenting and exhibiting local historical photographs.

5.5 Summary

Overall, these findings suggest that by engaging in groups funded through the programme, older people were able to become involved in additional activities. This provided them with a reason to leave their house and a valuable opportunity to meet new people and develop friendships. These social benefits were commonly experienced and for some older people who were at risk of depression or were lonely, also helped improve their mental wellbeing. In addition to the mental health benefits, older people also benefited in their physical health, particularly where the group focused on exercise, sport or physical activity. The evidence shows the value of these new friendships beyond the group as older people met up formally and informally outside the group. Such increased social networks can contribute to improving the sense of community as a whole in an area.

6 The legacy of the programme

Key lessons learned

- There is value in a Community Agent leadership role – most groups had continued the role after the funding ceased and most Community Agents planned to continue in the role.
- The main elements of the role that will continue, and therefore proved of value to the groups, were setting up and organising activities and reaching and engaging more people.
- Having someone in this leadership role can help recruit more volunteers to support the group – two-fifths of Community Agents had recruited new volunteers through identifying them and encouraging and supporting them to volunteer.
- Groups considering introducing a similar role to a Community Agent should consider the skills and attitudes of potential volunteers, provide them with support and be clear about what is expected and value their contribution.
- Groups need to have multiple sources of funding to be sustained. In addition to applying for grants, self-supporting funding sources such as membership fees and fundraising, including selling the group's own products or services are valuable.
- A programme such as the CA programme can leave a legacy. As well as the beneficial outcomes for older people who participated, the increase in membership and in the range and number of activities offered will continue beyond the end of the funding. In addition, the focus on older people approaching retirement or recently retired, and the enhanced understanding of older people will continue to influence groups after the end of the programme.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the legacy of the programme for the funded groups. It will present the impact of the programme on developing leadership and volunteering in these groups and the extent to which the Community Agents will continue to fulfil their volunteering roles. It will also provide an overview of how the funded groups plan to develop the activities and the range of ways in which groups plan to continue in the future.

6.2 Leadership and volunteering

The programme aimed to provide leadership roles for older people in their community, and to achieve sustainability of the Community Agent role beyond the life of the programme. The evidence reveals that the role of the Community Agent has continued beyond the life of the programme with volunteers fulfilling similar responsibilities as they did during the programme.

6.2.1 Established Community Agent roles

The final survey of funded groups was conducted after the programme had ended. Of the funded groups that had at least one designated volunteer fulfilling a Community Agent role, and responded to the survey, 91 per cent still had people fulfilling a Community Agent role after the funding had ended. The first survey of funded groups (conducted in September – October 2011) found that 73 per cent of respondents planned to support at least one Community Agent role. Interviews with funded groups and Community Agents revealed the role was valued by the groups and the Community Agent's role was integrated into the ongoing activities of the group.

'There's certainly a strong need for the kind of people who are our volunteers and whether you call them Community Agents or not, I think they do a fairly important job of work and we have in the course of a year ... those roles that I've described are built into the system now.'

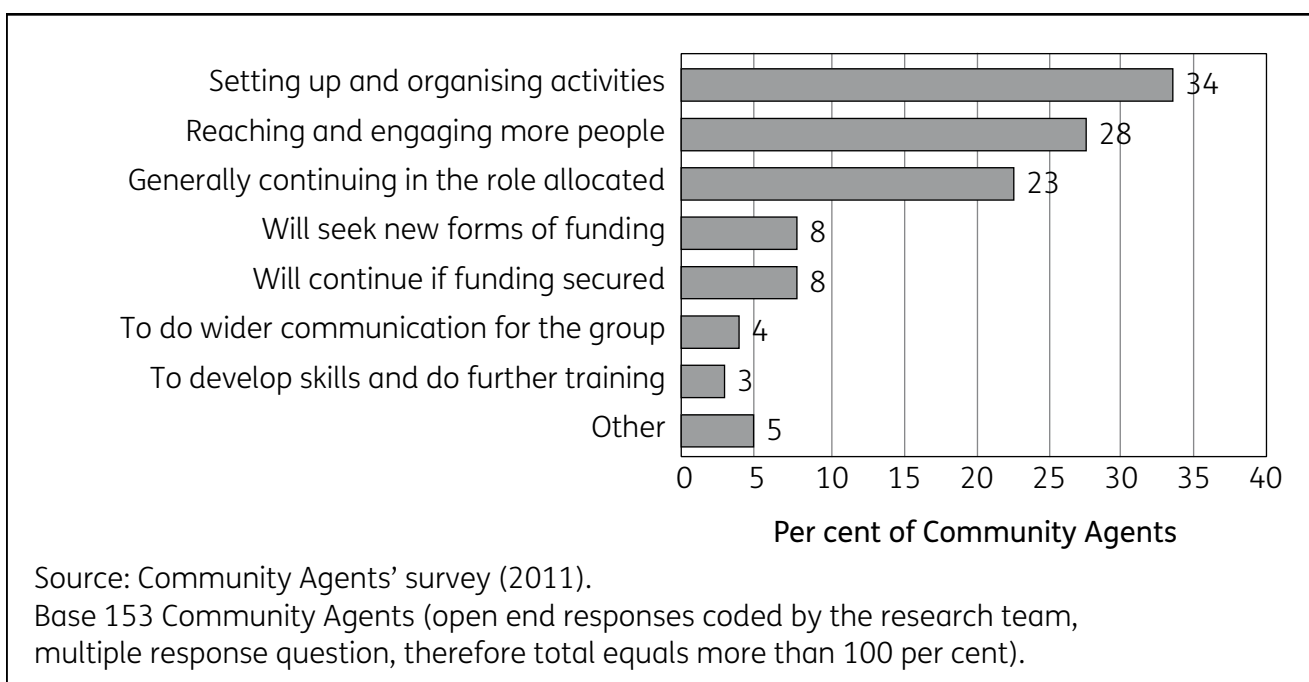
(Funded group)

Funded groups are continuing to use Community Agent roles beyond the programme, even if they are not necessarily labelled Community Agents.

6.2.2 The future of the Community Agent role

Reflecting the final survey of funded groups, the survey of Community Agents also found that 81 per cent of the respondents intended to carry on with the role after the funding ended. As illustrated in Figure 6.1, 30 per cent of Community Agents who gave details about their future plans said they would continue to help set up and provide activities for members of the group and 28 per cent said they would be encouraging new members to join the group. Interviews with Community Agents supported this finding; they typically planned to continue and expand activities, or arrange more activities and include a wider group of people, for example targeting greater involvement from men. Twenty-eight per cent said they would continue as before but did not specify in what way they would be doing this. Eight per cent of Community Agents said they would help the group to gain more funding, either through fundraising or by applying for new funding.

Figure 6.1 How Community Agents planned to continue their role



As well as these responsibilities, interviews with Community Agents also found that those who planned to continue their role would:

- continue to actively encourage people to keep mentally alert and interested in their community;
- continue to encourage them to be adventurous and *'to help people get out and about and live life to the full'*; and
- broaden their own knowledge base to expand their offer to the group, for example the variety of activities on offer.

'What I'm going to try and do is set some sessions up what they haven't [done] before, taking our Wii to them and doing some fitness with them. Again with the family history I'm definitely going to try and set that up for them this year.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

This suggests future roles will continue to fulfil similar responsibilities which the Active at 60 Community Agent's role included, while gradually taking on more responsibilities, such as seeking new forms of funding, which was not originally an explicit part of the Community Agent role.

The majority of Community Agents interviewed anticipated that they would continue in their role. Personal circumstances were the main reasons for not continuing as a Community Agent, for example getting a full-time job or wanting to volunteer more locally. Survey responses from Community Agents and interviews with funded groups suggest that a small number of groups may use the Community Agent to engage with new groups of people, such as younger people or people with learning difficulties. This suggests the value of the Community Agent approach is recognised by some as a useful tool when engaging with vulnerable groups.

6.2.3 Supporting new volunteering opportunities

Chapter 2 highlighted the role of Community Agents in helping other people become volunteers. Forty per cent of Community Agents reported helping other people to take on volunteering roles. Interviews with Community Agents found that they were helping people to take on new roles by informally doing one or more of the following:

- Identifying and asking people who would be able to take on new roles.
- Encouraging and developing people to take on new responsibilities.
- Offering support to new volunteers to take on new roles or responsibilities.

'One woman came along, she got involved and then sort of [said], "How can I help?". So I was sending her posters so she could let the people in her block of flats know, it's sort of over 55 block of flats, then she went out and saw other groups ... if we'd have asked her formally to do it, I think she might have shied away, but if you explain what you're doing and what other people are doing and you know drop the hint if you like, she just took up the baton and went with it.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

Interviews with Community Agents found that some Community Agents felt that an increase in volunteering was one of the benefits to the older people of the programme, who formally or informally helped the group.

By encouraging other people to get involved in volunteering at the group the Community Agents are helping to create more opportunities for older people to take a lead and adopt new responsibilities within their group, reflecting one of the aims of the CA programme.

'People don't realise that they are volunteers, but they are when they put stuff away, help to make the tea and stuff like that and before you know it they're doing more things and getting involved more and come on other days and so on.'

(Community Agent volunteer)

In summary, the continuation of the Community Agent role, which is occurring in most groups, is allowing groups to continue to provide activities and reach and engage older people, and also encourage other older people to take on more volunteering responsibilities. The Community Agents are playing an important role in sustaining the aims of the programme beyond the end of the funding.

6.2.4 Recommendations going forward

Interviews with funded groups and Community Agents revealed three key recommendations for groups considering introducing a Community Agent role to their group:

- Consider the **skills and attitude** of the potential Community Agents – funded groups and Community Agents felt that Community Agents needed certain skills and attributes to fulfil the role such as listening, communicating, being patient and committed and having a positive and friendly approach (see Chapter 2 for further detail).
- Provide them with **support** – this could be through a variety of means. Most funded groups and Community Agents that provided recommendations felt informal support such as time and advice was important, however, other examples included formal training through infrastructure organisations and mentoring.
- Be clear about what is **expected and value** their contribution – Community Agents need to understand what their role is to help provide them with clear direction to fulfil their role.

6.3 Keeping the group going and future plans

As reported in Chapter 4, the programme encouraged groups to develop new and different activities. The final funded groups' survey found that 91 per cent of responding groups were planning to continue these activities. This is an increase from the first funded groups' survey where 84 per cent of respondents reported that they planned to continue their activities.

6.3.1 Funding future activities

Interviews with funded groups (November to December 2011) found that groups were planning on finding opportunities for funding beyond the life of the programme. The final funded groups' survey revealed that this was an ongoing process, but that some groups had managed to secure further funding. This suggests that the increase in groups planning to continue activities (from 84 per cent to 91 per cent) could be as a result of more certainty with how the activity will be funded at the time of the second survey.

Overall, the majority of groups (63 per cent) are, or plan to be, funded by one or more sources. The final funded groups' survey found the most common source was grant funding with over half of the responding groups (57 per cent) having or applying for grants to fund their future activities (see Figure 6.2). However, only 15 per cent of all groups that are continuing expect to be or will be funded by grants alone. Monitoring data revealed that 15 per cent of all funded groups had managed to secure further funding from their local funder.

The majority of local funders did not feel that the organisation would be prioritising funded groups working with this age group, either because their grant funding was donor led or they did not prioritise one age group over the other. However, six local funders would be prioritising the age group in the future, as four of these funders said they would inform donors of the benefits of working with the groups and signpost groups to funds where possible.

The second most common source of funding (mentioned by 46 per cent of groups) was subscription/membership fees to fund their future activities. Interviews with funded groups and comments from the final funded groups' survey suggest that groups are looking to increase their subscription fees to cover more costs through this method, although they were looking to minimise the financial cost to older people as much as possible as this can have an impact on people's likelihood to stay or become involved in the group.

Nine of the 35 funded groups interviewed collected memberships fees and reported an increase in membership as a result of the programme. These groups were therefore able to increase their funding from this source. However, membership fees often did not fully cover the cost of the activities groups delivered and therefore they sought other sources of funding.

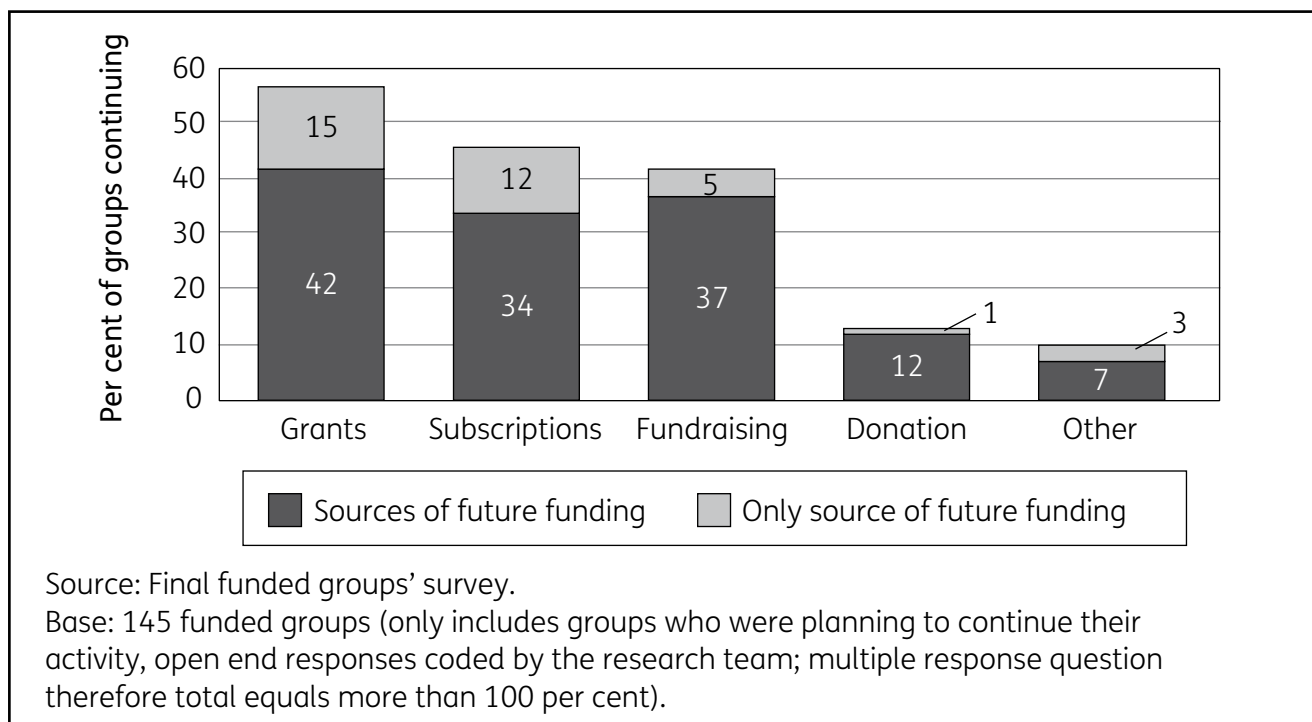
'We have moved two classes to a cheaper (and more suitable) venue. We are frantically applying for a range of very small grants to enable us to continue with all classes. We have had to ask members to pay slightly more for each class, £3 instead of £1. It is very difficult to persuade those who can't afford this increase they are welcome anyway. A few have dropped out despite our best efforts.'

(Funded group)

'[the group's venue is] available for hire, so we do get some money and income from that and we have actually extended that recently – I mean at one time we didn't do very much of it but we have extended it now and so we do get more money in ... We have been able to take advantage of that to get more income.'

(Funded group)

However, only 12 per cent of groups will use or are using subscription fees as their only source of funding. Only five per cent of all groups continuing with their programme activities will be using fundraising as their only means of funding and this is often used to supplement another source of funding.

Figure 6.2 How groups will support future activities

Interviews with the funded groups revealed groups recognised there was a reduction in the availability of funding through grants and were reflecting on new ways and attitudes to funding. Interviews and open survey responses with funded groups revealed further detail about the various ways in which the groups were planning to sustain their activities.

- **Fundraising within the group** – gaining additional funds from members most commonly by introducing or increasing subscription fees or holding raffles.
- **Fundraising outside the group** – ideas included selling products produced by the group such as plants or craft products or, for example for performance arts groups, asking for donations after performances.
- **Reducing costs** – examples of this included reducing the activities they offered, but also through renegotiating rent or tutor fees or, for example, one group was looking to work with other community groups to share costs.
- **Donations or in kind support from the community** – seeking out local businesses to provide small donations to the group or receiving in kind support such as free venues.

There were also examples of where groups, anticipating a reduction in available funding in the following year, used the period of the programme to save any subscriptions or money gathered through fundraising to pay for the funded activity beyond the life of the grant.

'They are now talking in terms of 'how can we get some money' and not 'how can I look around to find the money', so the attitudes have changed.'

(Funded group)

'The groups are self-sustaining. Members meet at a different location each month and have lunch together. Each is responsible for paying for their own lunch. Members who cannot drive are given contact details for those members who are drivers and are willing to provide transport. There are no subscriptions.'

(Funded group)

Funded groups were committed to continuing their activities and were used to operating on a short-term basis. Many groups and Community Agents had a ‘can do’ attitude and felt that they would find a means of funding while they delivered the activities. However, there were instances where groups and Community Agents felt that activities would have to be at a reduced level if further grant funding was not obtained.

‘We have a saying “We’ll do it and we’ll worry about that later”. I know it’s not a way to run a business but it works for us, honest.’

(Funded group)

‘Our members pay subscription each week and we hold regular raffles. At the moment our rent is due to increase and speakers need fees ... If we get no more grant funding we will obviously not be able to have the activities we would like but [we] will endeavour to do some.’

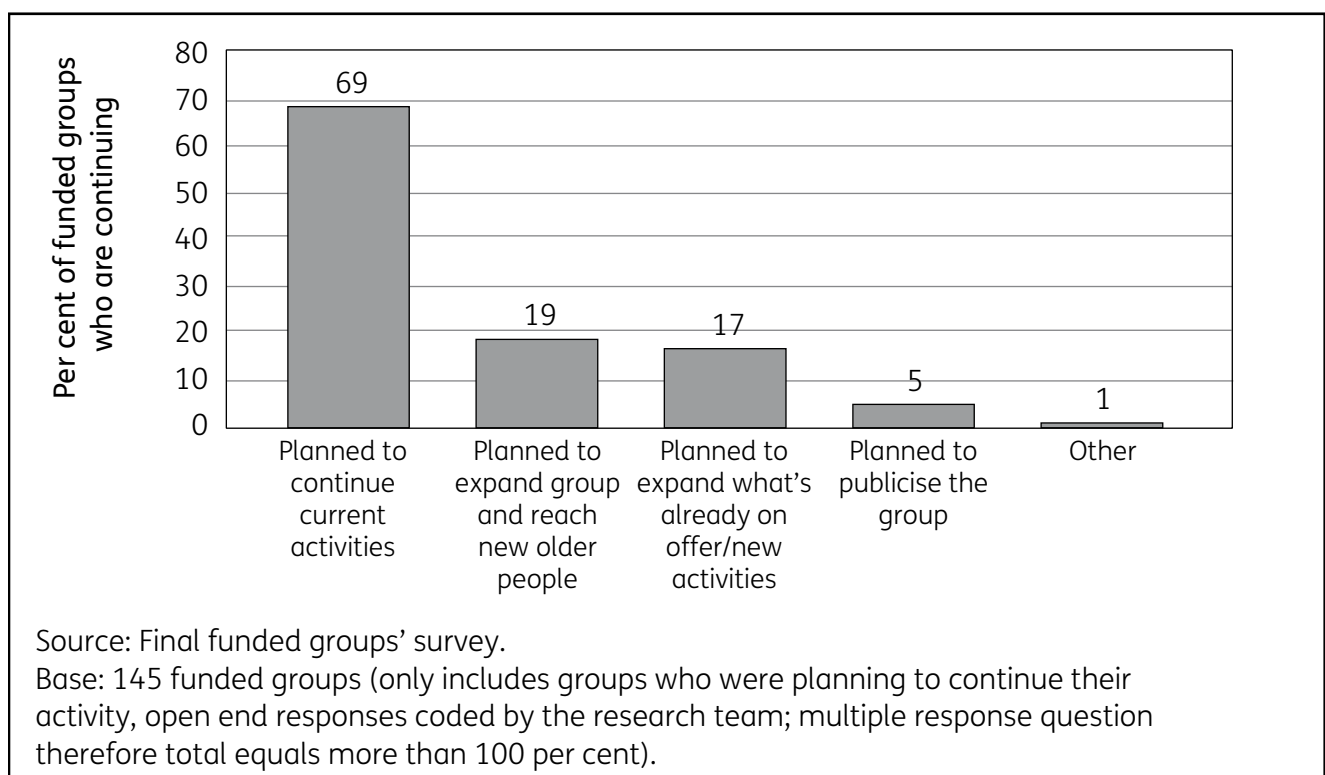
(Funded group)

6.3.2 Plans for future activities

Figure 6.3 shows the nature of how groups plan to continue their activities. To a great extent groups planned to maintain or sustain the activities they had been delivering. Over-two thirds (69 per cent) were planning on continuing their current activities. However, around one-fifth of groups were aiming to expand their group or extend their activities in the future. Nineteen per cent were planning to expand their group and continue to reach new older people and 17 per cent of groups planned to expand what is already on offer and/or introduce new activities and further expand the range of activities available.

All of the older people interviewed said they would continue to attend the activity or group in the future, as long as they were able to. People felt they would only stop coming if the activity ended, if their health prevented them from attending or if they were not able to get to the group’s venue.

Figure 6.3 Plans for future activities



'We hope to continue and expand our activities relating to gardening, healthy walking and art, based on lessons learned from the programme and previous activities.'

(Funded group)

'We are planning on a programme of outdoor recreational activities to improve our service users' health and fitness.'

(Funded group)

6.3.3 The legacy of the programme on groups and older people who participated

Funded groups felt the legacy of the programme varied, however, the most common legacy groups reported was the positive outcomes it had provided the older people who participated. Eighty-seven groups of the respondents from the final funded groups' survey provided greater detail about the main legacy of the programme for their group, these included:

- **individual benefits gained by the older people** involved, including reduced social isolation; greater social interaction; increased health and wellbeing among group members – 39 per cent (34 groups);
- **reaching and expanding the number of older people** involved in the group and maintaining this – 17 per cent (15 groups);
- **expanding the number and/or range of activities** they offered – 15 per cent (13 groups)¹⁹;
- **providing equipment** that will be used beyond the life of the grant – 14 per cent (12 groups);
- **allowing the group to continue** during the funding period and beyond – 13 per cent (11 groups); and
- **greater understanding** of the needs of older people, especially newly retired people – six per cent (five groups).

'We plan to build on everything that we've built up so far and carry it further really and hopefully people carry on enjoying things and we'll increase the number of people.'

(Funded group)

'I think it's opened my eyes really to see that [organisation name] is not just an art club it's an organisation that provides social activities and opportunities for people to do all sorts of other things ... our organisation before the grant, our idea was quite seriously curtailed by the fact that we were an art club and now I see us as much more than that.'

(Funded group)

¹⁹ Only one group was coded as reaching and expanding the number of older people and expanding the number and range of activities.

Interviews with funded groups support these findings. Some groups reflected that the programme had helped them to reflect on what they were delivering, particularly:

- about the target age group, of newly retired older people;
- how they met the needs of the older people and therefore expanding the activities they were offering;
- encouraged them to think of expanding their membership and using the Community Agent to achieve this; and
- to kick-start activities that could be maintained beyond the life of the funding.

Interviews with funded groups found that the most common idea or learning that they gained from the programme was how the grant had helped them to consider the programme target group and focused the group on delivering the aims of programme. The majority of local funders felt that the programme had helped increase the organisation's awareness about the pre and post retirement target age group, rather than more elderly.

'It is clear that some of the initiatives launched as part of Active at 60 have gone on to have a life of their own.'

(Local funder)

Small grants can act as a catalyst for community groups to consider the needs of older people, engage new people and deliver a wider range of activities to meet their needs. The programme also helped groups to think about engaging new people into their group and some felt it highlighted the need to raise awareness about newly retired older people as a key priority going forward. There were also individual lessons learned about how to best encourage people to take the first step to joining a new group.

Groups felt that applying for the funding has been worthwhile for their group and were mainly very positive about their experience of delivering the programme. A small number of funded groups felt that the learning was about trying to encourage older people to take the first step and how best to help motivate them to do that.

'It doesn't matter whether its £500 or £5,000 it concentrates your mind, it concentrates the minds of the organisers and what you call the agents as to what you're going to do with it. You've got to spend it, you've got to spend it properly, you've got to give proof that you're spending it properly, so what are we going to do with it and that's when you get the ideas coming out. If there isn't any money involved, it tends to be more wishy-washy.'

(Funded group)

'I think that it's quite nice to have relatively small pots of money available to people that they can use fairly creatively.'

(Funded group)

Funded groups are looking for multiple sources of funding to continue their activities. Grants are an important source of funding but the majority of groups were not solely reliant on this form of funding and groups were actively looking for other sources of funding. The majority of groups plan to continue their programme activities with some looking to extend their activities and expand their reach. Groups felt they had learned from the programme and allowed them to reflect on their delivery and target groups.

6.4 Summary

There is evidence that the programme has a legacy that reaches beyond the lifetime of the programme. Funded groups will continue to meet the aims of the programme through the continuation of the Community Agent role and their ongoing activities. The majority of groups will continue their work with some groups expanding and further building on their achievements. Evidence also suggests that the positive outcomes for the older people who took part will be sustained as their involvement with community groups continues.

7 Role of the local funder and programme management

Key lessons learned

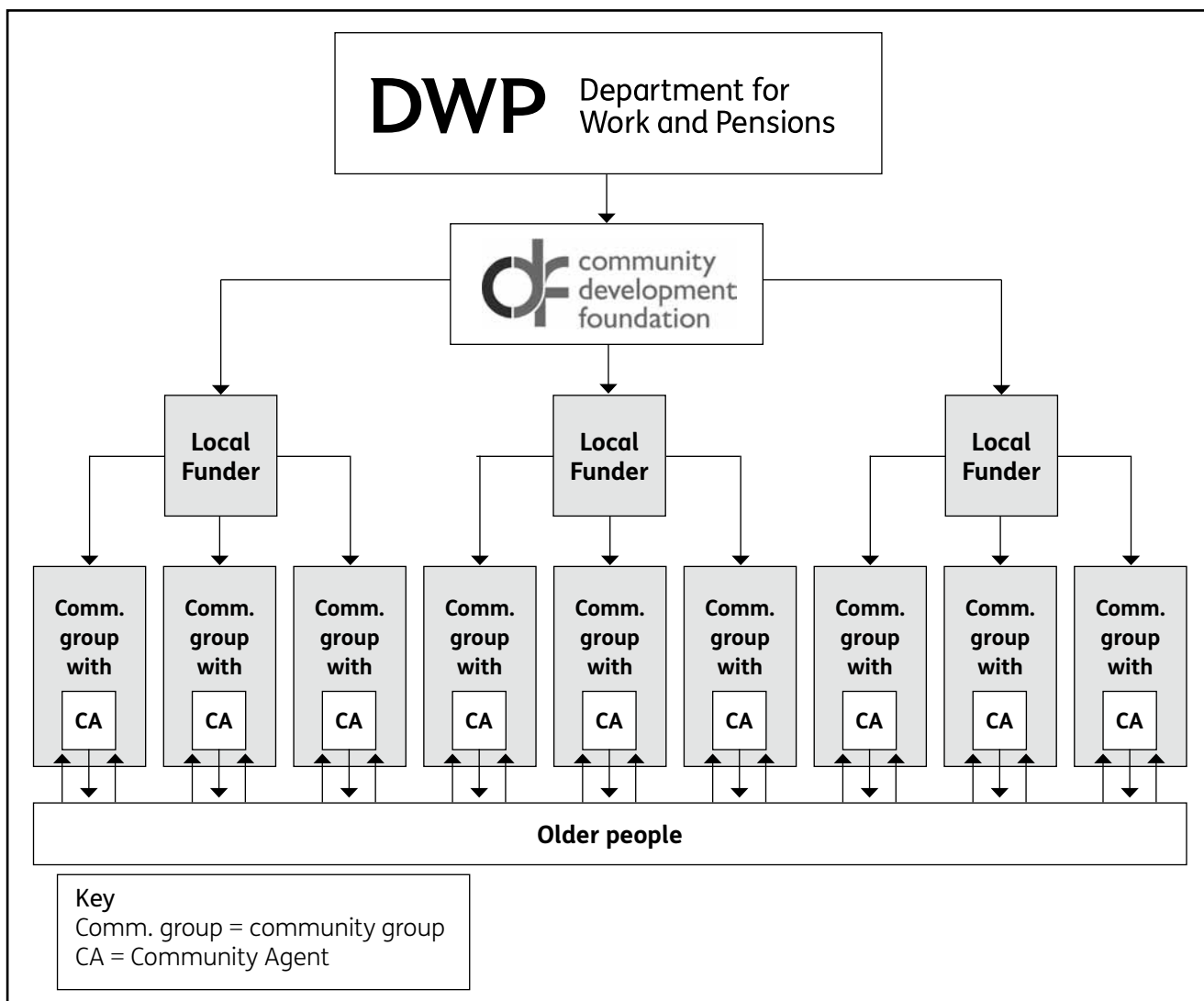
- It is important to be clear to local funders, and through them to community groups, about the aims of the funding and the target groups.
- Use language that is familiar and meaningful to people in communities – for example champion rather than agent.
- Use a wide range of methods to promote the programme – widespread marketing along with targeted approaches and using networks.
- The local funders had a valuable role in mediating and explaining the message from central government at a local level and helping to ensure that community groups interpreted that message correctly.
- Local funders need to strike a balance between ensuring that the appropriate groups are aware of the funding and yet also not raising the expectations among too many groups when funding is limited. They also need to be aware of the additional administration that significant numbers of applications can involve.
- Community groups need support in the early stages, but less so once they have received the funds and their project is established.

7.1 The programme model

This section will present the evidence of what worked well and less well in the methodology adopted for getting funding into small local groups. It draws out key learning that other funders will find useful. Figure 7.1 summarises the programme model.²⁰ It illustrates that the Community Development Foundation (CDF) managed the funding centrally on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

²⁰ See Appendix A for further details of the model.

Figure 7.1 The Active at 60 Community Agents programme



The funded groups designated at least one person as a Community Agent whose role it was to empower and support older people to become/stay active in their later life and make the most of their retirement, in particular by:

- helping them take the first step;
- helping them understand the ‘value’ they can gain from undertaking activity and the value they can bring to their community; and
- helping them build ‘social’ contacts to make activities habit forming.

Further details of the groups who were funded are provided in Appendix C.

7.2 Lessons learned about this approach

The evidence shows that there was value in adopting a model which included a local funder as a conduit between the national organisations – DWP and CDF – and the local level small community groups. Findings from the interviews with local funders, and the responses of group leaders to the first funded groups’ survey, indicated that while funders played a vital role during the application and assessment stage of the programme, they tended to play a scaled back role once the funding has been distributed.

7.2.1 Promotion of the programme

Local funders promoted the programme through a range of means including widespread promotion, through local networks and targeted promotion at specific groups and organisations. It is evident that there was value in adopting a range of mechanisms for promoting a programme such as the Community Agent programme as the leaders of funded groups who were interviewed had heard about the programme through a variety of means. By adopting a local funder approach, the programme was able to reach small community groups because of their local connections, in contrast to a national organisation.

7.2.2 Interpreting the Community Agent role and communicating the programme aims

A key role undertaken by the local funders was to communicate the programme's aims and assist community groups in interpreting the Community Agent role. As this role was not always immediately understood, local funders provided further explanation. In practice, most of the funded groups (58 per cent) who responded to the final funded groups' survey did not use the term 'Community Agents' for the volunteers who fulfilled this role while 35 per cent did adopt the term.

7.2.3 Assessing applications

The assessment of applications for funding was undertaken at a local level by local funder grant panels. The panels also generally took into consideration:

- whether applicants had identified who would fulfil the role of the Community Agent;
- whether they were the most appropriate person (that is they met the peer element of the programme);
- how they would carry out the role and related activities;
- how the proposed approach would try to reach the target age group;
- whether applicants had a clearly set out plan and had specified their intended outcomes that met the criteria for the programme;
- whether the proposed project fitted the programme criteria; and
- whether the project was innovative.

In total, following the application process, the local funders who provided end of programme Management Information (MI) data,²¹ successfully distributed £738,901 to small community groups. On the whole, groups spent all of their funding. The average grant amount for the 349 funded groups for whom data was available was £2,117.²²

7.2.4 Support for the application process

The majority (76 per cent) of respondents to the first funded groups' survey indicated that they had been offered support or advice by their local funder when they applied for funding from the programme. Most (57 per cent) of those who had received support from their local funder for their application for funding, said this had been valuable. All those who received support said it was very useful (75 per cent) or useful (25 per cent).

²¹ Data was provided by local funders in their end of grant monitoring report and was available for 26 of the 30 areas. See Appendix D for further details.

²² See Appendix D for details of the amounts awarded in each area.

7.2.5 Local funders' ongoing support for groups

Although 76 per cent of groups said that their local funder provided support with the application process (see above), 38 per cent of the respondents from the first funded groups' survey reported that their local funder was offering ongoing support. However, there did not appear to be a strong need for such support. Only 17 per cent of the groups, who reported that local funders provided support, had accessed it. All of these had found it useful.

The local funders provide a diverse range of support including:

- keeping in regular contact with community groups via associated outreach work and communications such as newsletters;
- ensuring groups were aware that they were able to contact them if and when support was needed; and
- signposting groups to other organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) where funders did not have the capacity or resources to provide high levels of support.

The funded groups were also able to access the Active at 60 Facebook page and wider training and support packages provided by funders, for example, one local funder offered free training to small groups. Local funders suggested other means to share information and learning such as newsletters mentioned above, as well as facilitating face-to-face opportunities to meet and share experiences and ideas as more appropriate for the target group. However, it was acknowledged that resource constraints limited the extent to which these could be provided.

In addition to support, local funders had responsibility for monitoring groups' use of the funds. In line with DWP guidance that monitoring of local groups would be light touch, most local funders interviewed used end of grant reports, required by CDF to record grant spend and any underspend, as their main source of monitoring.

7.2.6 Programme management

The application and assessment process was undertaken in a short timeframe. While the funds were distributed to groups within the agreed timeframe, it was felt by some local funders that the promotion and application process would have been more effective had there been a longer lead time.

7.3 Local funders' views on factors affecting successful delivery

Overall, local funders who were interviewed identified a number of key factors for the successful set up and delivery of the programme by community groups including:

- community groups' track record in receiving small grants for relatively short funding programmes;
- community groups' skills and knowledge;
- community groups having experience working with older people;
- existing local networks for sharing information and ideas, either provided by the funder or local voluntary and community sector; and
- community groups' existing relationship with a local funder that enabled efficient communication of the availability of funding.

Local funders also mentioned the knowledge that community groups had about their neighbourhoods as a key success factor, along with enthusiasm and passion for the work that they do and the needs that they meet.

'People made it work if there was something that they wanted to happen.'

(Local funder)

7.4 Summary

In summary, the model adopted for the programme, comprising local funders promoting the fund, providing support, assessing applications and distributing the funding to successful groups was an effective way of ensuring central funding reached the grassroots. A total of 461 small community groups received funding. Moreover, the funders had extended their reach into new groups as nearly two-fifths had not previously received funding from the local funder. The support provided by local funders at application stage, and the assessment process for applications, had assisted in ensuring that community groups' interpretation of the aims of the programme reflected the policy aims. After this initial support, the groups appeared to be largely self-supporting as only a minority accessed ongoing support offered by local funders.

The main lessons about administering this type of fund that local funders shared included the need to communicate about the programme through a range of means, but to consider whether online or social media mechanisms are appropriate for an older target group. They emphasised the importance of using language that is easily understood and accessible to a wide range of people – such as champion rather than agent. Finally, they noted the value in building on community groups' existing experience of delivering projects funded through small grants and of working with older people.

8 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the report by assessing, based on the evidence presented in the previous chapters, how far the programme met its stated aims which are to:

- reduce the risk of older people becoming socially isolated and lonely;
- empower individuals, at the local level, to provide leadership roles for older people in their community;
- help improve people's later life, encouraging them to play an active role in their communities; and
- achieve the sustainability of the 'Active at 60 Community Agent' role beyond the life of the programme.

It will also outline what appeared to contribute to meeting these aims and will explore what can be learned from the experience of delivering the programme through small community groups who are active at a local level. It will aim to outline how the key elements of the programme can be taken forward in the current climate and in different contexts.

8.1 How far did the programme achieve its aims?

8.1.1 **Aim to reduce the risk of older people becoming socially isolated and lonely, and help improve people's later life.**

Local funders interviewed in August and September 2011 anticipated a number of outcomes the programme should achieve if it was successful. This included the following outcomes:

- increased membership of groups;
- older people being more active, making new friends and developing wider networks;
- reduced isolation for older people and increased wellbeing and confidence; and
- improved health of older people.

Evidence reveals that the programme has helped to achieve all of these aims to some extent.

The programme successfully engaged new people and the evidence shows that nearly all groups funded through the programme who responded to the final funded groups survey (92 per cent) had attracted new members and that they had introduced, on average, ten new people to the group. Overall, most funded group survey respondents also reached the programme target age groups as the majority of groups involved older people from between 55 and 74 years old. In addition to this, three-quarters of responding groups that engaged new members reached older people who were living alone. By reaching older people in the target group of the programme the funded groups have helped increase the extent to which the target groups of older people are engaging in activities. There is also evidence to indicate that this increase in participation will continue after the end of the programme. Interviews with both the funded groups and the older people revealed the intention of those members of the older people's groups to continue with activities.

The programme revealed the importance of using a variety of modes to promote activities. The Community Agent positioned within the groups who responded to the survey found that word of mouth was the most effective means of promotion to help to engage older people in activities. Other effective means of promotion included the positioning of promotional materials on community message boards and providing taster sessions. The Community Agent survey

responses showed that individual interaction of word of mouth was felt to be the most effective in raising awareness and providing the opportunity for older people to participate, compared to more impersonal methods of promotion that are often utilised, such as leaflets.

The evidence in reaching older people suggests therefore that there is a pool of older people who do want to join groups but have not done so previously. The Community Agent plays an important role in promoting the activities and by doing this helps to encourage older people to engage. However, it should be acknowledged that evidence from the older people themselves shows that there are some older people may not want to join in new activities or who may simply not have the capacity.

Funded groups provided activities that gave older people the opportunity to come together, interact with others and meet new people. This enabled older people to have the opportunity of more social interaction that allowed them to meet new people and to extend their friendship groups. The majority of groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey (94 per cent) felt the programme had given older people in their group the opportunity to make new friends and socialise, and over half (55 per cent) identified this as one of the most important differences the programme had made to older people. Older people interviewed commented that they had made new friends as a result of participating in the group. For some older people these friendships were further developed outside of the group. By attending activities, older people also had the opportunity to get out of the house which gave some older people a sense of routine and purpose that some felt they had missed since retiring.

Improving and maintaining the sense of wellbeing among older people has long been recognised as an important aspect in assisting their quality of life. Evidence from the evaluation shows that the social contacts and friendships that were developed at the group were beneficial to people's wellbeing. For some older people it helped them overcome feelings of depression or difficult periods in their lives such as bereavement through loss of their partners. Some older people reported feeling happier and more confident as a result of getting involved in the groups. The groups provided them with an interest and older people recognised the importance of finding activities that kept them mentally active. Almost three-quarters of the funded group leaders who responded to the final funded groups' survey felt the programme had helped improve older people's mental wellbeing, and one in five groups felt this was one of the most important differences the programme made.

Two-thirds of groups that responded to the first funded groups' survey offered physical activities; as well as assisting with people's mental wellbeing, there is evidence that the programme helped improve some older people's physical health. Of the older people who were interviewed who had attended physical activities provided by the funded groups, some were likely to report health benefits from the activities such as better movement and improving fitness. Over half of the funded group leaders who responded to the final funded groups' survey (59 per cent) felt that the programme had helped to improve older people's physical health, and around three out of ten respondents cited this as one of the most important differences to older people.

The health benefits were not just relevant for those older people who took part in physical activities. Even when the activities of the groups were not physical, older people could also experience health benefits from going to the activities and thus being less sedentary than they would have been if the opportunity to get out and involved had not been made available to them. Eighty-nine per cent of respondents to the final funded groups' survey felt the funded activity had given older people the opportunity to get out of the house and to be out and about rather than being stuck at home and inactive. A total of 39 per cent of group leaders that responded to the final funded groups' survey identified this aspect of the funded programmes as one of the most important differences the programme made to older people.

Overall, there is evidence that the approach of using a small amount of funding provided to small grassroots community groups that are familiar with their local area can engage more older people into activities that are beneficial to both their health and their wellbeing. However, the approach needs to be appropriate and effective. It has already been demonstrated that effective promotion through word of mouth and use of notices can be far more effective than some of the other more traditional promotional material. Proactive approaches also help to engage socially isolated people more effectively than passive approaches. Having a Community Agent who can engage individually with a specific target group can enable these approaches. The Community Agents were able to be the contacts on the ground that targeted their reach to the older people, many of whom had not previously engaged in community activities. Through engaging with groups older people enhance their social networks and relationships within the community are formed and sustained. This and the impact on older people's wellbeing – both mental and physical – illustrates that small community groups can provide a valuable service at relatively low cost that can supplement and support statutory, health and social services. This support from community groups can also potentially reduce the likelihood of using these services.

8.1.2 Aim to empower individuals, at the local level, to provide leadership roles for older people in their community

The Community Agent role was the main mechanism through which projects empowered individuals at a local level. Local funders who were interviewed felt that an increase in the number of volunteers would be an important indicator of success for the programme. The majority of group leaders that responded to the final funded groups' survey (89 per cent) had one or more volunteers fulfilling the Community Agent role and, of these groups, 70 per cent felt that it had enabled volunteers to take on new responsibilities. Furthermore, the majority of Community Agents who responded to the survey were not the leader of their funded group and similarly, the majority of funded group organisers who responded to the first funded groups' survey were not Community Agents.

Among those who responded to the Community Agents survey, this leadership role was performed by the older people many of whom were aged 55 – 69 years old and were retired. Community Agents responding undertook a number of responsibilities, but primarily they let older people know what was on offer, gathered ideas for activities from older people, organised activities and encouraged older people to take part in activities, including, as has been indicated previously, those taking part in community activities for the first time. While many Community Agent respondents were already volunteers at the group, approximately one in seven became Community Agents as a result of hearing about the role and taking the initiative to contact the funded group.

Funded groups saw the value of having a person in a Community Agent role, even if the majority of groups responding to the first funded groups' survey did not use the Community Agent label. The purpose of the role focused on having a designated volunteer with a clear remit, to act as a focal point for older people within the group, to help gently encourage people to get involved, and provide a welcoming atmosphere when new people joined. Some funded groups representatives interviewed felt the role could be used in projects targeting other vulnerable groups in the future.

Community Agents who responded to the survey or were interviewed were mainly older people themselves. They indicated that they valued the opportunity to work in the role. They similarly benefited from the social interaction with the other people at the group and enjoyed fulfilling the role. They also gained a sense of satisfaction as the Community Agent role gave them the opportunity to give back and contribute to the community.

The programme gave new and existing volunteers the opportunity to take on new responsibilities to fulfil the Community Agent role and in doing this enabled older people to take a lead within community groups.

8.1.3 Aim to encourage older people to play an active role in their communities

The evidence from interviews revealed that older people attending funded groups were meeting and interacting with other members of the group outside of the funded activities. Some older people had developed strong friendships with other members of the groups and were meeting up outside of the groups or joining up to take part in other groups or, when they could not meet, phoning one another.

There were indications of an increase in older people's social networks. For example new friendships were formed or people got to know existing acquaintances better. The group gave older people a common interest which gave them a focus for their interactions. When seeing each other outside the group people found they had people to greet and talk to. Fifty-three per cent of respondents to the final funded groups' survey felt contributing to social networks and friendships was one of the most important differences the programme made to the wider local community. The extent to which people know each other and speak to each other in an area is often cited as an indication of whether there is a sense of community in an area.

The programme helped groups create new activities and widen the range of activities they were offering to provide a more diverse range of interests that older people could pursue. Furthermore, nine out of ten groups responding to the final funded groups' survey are planning on continuing the activities, and around one in five are planning to expand their membership or activities (19 per cent and 17 per cent respectively). By providing a wide range of activities the funded groups have created the opportunity for older people to play a more active part in their community and will continue to provide this opportunity. Along with the contribution of the programme to enhancing social networks (noted above), raising awareness of available activities was also cited as one of the greatest differences made to the wider local community by half of the groups.

The evidence shows that funded groups played an important role in fostering a sense of community in the areas in which they operated by helping to build greater links between people and with the wider community. The programme furthered the funded groups' role in their communities and, by increasing the number of older people involved in the group, they also helped older people to build greater connections with people in their local area and gave them the opportunity to play an active role in their community. Many groups also help to foster a greater sense of community further by getting involved in community events, such as village fairs, putting on community events for the Royal Wedding and for other events like the Diamond Jubilee and doing wider community work with other older people in the community, such as performances in care homes.

8.1.4 Aim to achieve the sustainability of the 'Active at 60 Community Agent' role beyond the life of the programme

The programme instigated a new volunteer role of the Community Agent, however, this role was not directly funded by the programme and, therefore, it can continue unfunded as many people are willing to continue to fulfil this role. The evidence shows that the volunteer Community Agents appreciated this new role and the majority of group leaders who responded to the final funded groups' survey (91 per cent) plan to continue with the Community Agent role beyond the life of the programme. They will be continuing to fulfil a similar role to the role they undertook for the programme by organising new activities and reaching and engaging new older people in their group. In addition to this a small proportion of Community Agents were helping to seek sources of funding to ensure the future of the group.

As a result of the programme people were taking a lead and undertaking new responsibilities at their community groups. Furthermore, Community Agents were also encouraging and supporting other older people to become volunteers. Forty per cent of Community Agents who responded to the survey said that they had helped other people become Community Agent volunteers and, on

average, those who felt they had helped others to take on the role had helped four other people to become Community Agents.

Funded groups aim to continue their activities and some intended to expand their activities further. The majority of groups plan to access a variety of funding sources to sustain and expand their activities. Community Agents will play a key role in enabling these groups to continue to deliver new activities and to fulfil the aims of the programme by engaging even more older people to continue with the aims of the programme. While the majority of those responding to the final funded groups' survey (57 per cent) will be seeking grant funding, other funding sources, such as membership fees or fundraising, and groups are looking at new ways to generate income.

Local funders who were interviewed felt another measurement of success for the programme would be for the programme-funded activities to continue. The majority of funded groups who responded to the final funded groups' survey (91 per cent) planned to continue to provide opportunities for older people in their communities to stay socially, mentally and physically active. By continuing to provide these activities, groups will help to maintain the positive outcomes of the programme for both the individuals and the community. This includes greater social interaction, improved mental and physical wellbeing and greater confidence for the individual older people who took part and their local communities.

There is also evidence from interviews and monitoring data from local funders that the programme has helped both groups and funders reflect and start to focus on the programme target groups. Six local funders will be prioritising the age group in the future, with four of these funders stating they will inform donors of the benefits of working with the groups and signposting groups to funds where possible.

The programme will leave a legacy both through the Community Agent role and through the activities that it will continue to deliver. The achievements they have realised through the programme, such as the benefits to older people and Community Agents, are likely to continue as their involvement in groups continues.

The programme, as has been demonstrated by the evidence, has not only managed to achieve benefits for the health and wellbeing of older people and their communities during the period of funding, it has also left an ongoing legacy. A number of the Community Agents have indicated that they will continue in their leadership role of engaging and interacting with older people. Furthermore, many of the funded groups aim to continue with current and new activities.

Overall, the programme has demonstrated the value of a model of delivery through which funding is routed to local community groups through local funders to support these groups with prioritising a specific target group. The funding for activities and practicalities, alongside the voluntary Community Agent role, provided the impetus for these groups to extend their reach to new older people and to adapt their activities and offer where required. Through doing so, a greater number of older people participated in local community groups and had the opportunity to benefit from the social interaction and widening friendship groups, and to be more connected to their community through this and their participation in the groups. The programme has provided a model that can be utilised by others who wish to maximise the effectiveness of their funding when looking to support older people.

8.2 What contributed to achieving these aims?

The evidence indicates that the following factors have played an important part in achieving the aims of the programme.

- **The Community Agent role:** identifying one or more individuals and asking them to have a specific focus on reaching a specific target group – in this case older people and particularly those who are at risk of being socially isolated – led to groups increasing their membership and working with older people who had not previously engaged in their group. It was important that Community Agents had a mix of qualities and skills to be able to encourage older people to join and continue to participate, including communication and listening skills, a positive and enthusiastic approach and had an understanding and respect for older people. Having such skills was more important than being of a similar age group.
- **Prioritising the target group:** where groups said they had found and applied new ways of reaching socially isolated older people, they had been successful in gaining new members' but also in gaining a larger number of new members and for these individuals to be living alone and/or bereaved. Ensuring that the target groups of older people were prioritised enabled older people who were perhaps isolated and who had not engaged in the community group previously were able to take part.
- **Reviewing and adapting activities on offer:** groups that had developed new activities specifically for older people were more likely to have gained new participants and to have gained more than the average number of participants. The adaptations they made included: diversifying to a variety of new activities, the nature of which varied across the groups, making their activities accessible and including a social element.
- **Funding support:** by providing a small amount of funding groups were able to overcome some of the common barriers to participation such as the cost of accessible transport. By diversifying the activities on offer, groups were also able to ensure a wider appeal.
- **Opportunities to socialise:** simply by providing a forum and opportunity for older people to socialise enabled many to make new friends and for these friendships to extend beyond the group meetings. These opportunities to socialise, provided through the Community Agent programme, were a catalyst through which older people extended their social networks and connections in their community.

8.3 Recommendations for policy

The evaluation has demonstrated the contribution that can be made by small community groups and their volunteers to meeting the government's commitment to Active Ageing and to the European Year for Active Ageing. Delivered by older volunteers in small community groups, the programme is aligned with the Ageing Well policy that aims to 'shift power from Westminster to local people in their communities'²³ and has demonstrated the value of using older people as volunteers to support other older people in their communities. The learning from the evaluation can usefully inform central and local government policy and practice as they seek to maximise the contribution of voluntary and community sector organisations at a local level. Key recommendations for policy are detailed below.

²³ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/ageing-society/ageing-well/>

- **Local brokers:** The use of local funders to promote the programme and reach into the community and provide support for groups to ensure high quality applications is an effective model of delivery. Through this model, the central policy message is mediated and made relevant to those implementing the aims on the ground. Local authorities seeking to ensure they make use of all the available resources in their area could usefully liaise with local funders to reach into the voluntary and community sector.
- **Appropriate communication tools:** Social media and web-based tools for communication are not widely used by the target group of older volunteers and such forms of media may not be the most effective mechanism for communicating with these individuals compared with using local networks and face-to-face contact. This presents an opportunity for programmes such as Race Online and Get Digital to promote the value of social media to this age group.
- **Build on the existing volunteer base:** It was most common for Community Agent volunteers to be existing volunteers whose role was extended or refocused on the aims of the programme. As the majority intended to remain fulfilling the role which they had found rewarding, these existing volunteers responded positively to the opportunity it presented. The experience in the 30 selected areas where the programme was implemented indicates that other areas will also have an existing volunteer base that can be encouraged and supported. These volunteers currently have an existing infrastructure of, for example community buildings and support networks, to enable them to fulfil this role. Assuming this remains, they can potentially continue, with small amounts of funding, to reach older people who are socially isolated, retired or approaching retirement, and increase the extent to which they engage in community groups.
- **Allow flexibility:** one of the strengths of the programme was that there was flexibility in what the groups could do to achieve the programmes aims. While the target groups were specified, the activities that could be offered were not prescribed, thereby enabling groups to respond to what older people wanted after consulting them.
- **Small amounts of funding:** The increase in numbers of older people who participated across the community groups demonstrates that there is a need for this type of provision for older people in local communities. However, some funds are required for community groups to be able to support older people in their communities. The research found that some older people have constrained finances and are generally on fixed incomes and cannot afford to fund participating in activities themselves, even where they are available in their local area. While the Community Agent role itself is voluntary, these individuals needed access to small amounts of funding (these groups received between £500 and £3,000 and typically around £2,000) to enable them to provide an offer to older people whether in terms of a venue to meet, equipment or subsidising activities and achieve the social benefits for older people these projects achieved.
- **Lead person:** there is value in having a nominated volunteer in a community group who can take the lead in achieving an aim of engaging more and different people who could benefit from participating in a community group. Having this nominated role is not time limited and, once a target group has been made a priority, this can continue after the end of the funding and helps to further the original aims of the programme. This model, adopted for the Active at 60 Community Agent programme, can be transferred to other target groups and some community groups were beginning to adopt this approach for others. It is worth sharing this model and its outcomes more widely with groups in other areas and with other priority target groups.

- **Proactive engagement:** to engage directly with older people, particularly those who are socially isolated, and consult them to ensure what is on offer is appealing to them, is resource intensive in terms of the time required to do so. However, this is the most effective means of reaching people who are not currently engaged in their community. Policy makers need to recognise that engaging people will take time and resources.
- **Build on motivation:** many older people understand the value and benefit of leaving their houses, being socially engaged and mentally and physically active. Promoting opportunities to them that build on this existing motivation and emphasises how barriers such as nervousness and transport will be overcome will assist in achieving the aim of Ageing Well.
- **Use community groups:** The research has shown that there can be positive outcomes for older people from participating in activities. This was achieved by having a hook to interest older people, the encouragement and support to overcome nervousness, and the forum to enable people to socialise and extend their friendships. Community groups are well placed to provide this support as they are rooted in their community, usually provide a meeting place known to the people and can use their networks to reach and engage people through word of mouth.

Appendix A

Summary of the Active at 60 CA programme

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Ageing Society: Redefining retirement

Active at 60 Community Agent Programme

The Community Development Foundation

Administering programme at national level on behalf of DWP

21 Local Funders covering 30 selected areas

- Birmingham Foundation
- Community Foundation for Greater Manchester
- Community Foundation for Merseyside
- Community Foundation serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland
- Herefordshire Community Foundation
- Cornwall Community Foundation
- Lincolnshire Community Foundation
- Norfolk Community Foundation
- Sandwell CVO
- Staffordshire Community Foundation
- Tees Valley Community Foundation
- Wolverhampton Network Consortium
- Doncaster Central Development Trust
- Enfield Voluntary Action
- Essex Community Foundation
- Hull CVS
- Liverpool CVS
- Nottinghamshire Community Foundation
- St Katherine & Shadwell Trust
- Sussex Community Foundation
- The Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole

460 community groups in 30 selected areas

**The majority of groups had at least one
Community Agent Volunteer**

Appendix B

Methodology

A mixed method evaluation design was used and the report draws on qualitative and quantitative data collected through the following research methods.

Interviews with local funders

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with ten local funders in August and September 2011. The interview lasted for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The ten funders were chosen from a sample of all 21 local funders that funded 30 selected areas for the programme. The local funders were selected at random ensuring a spread across nine regions and across rurality scores. Interviewees were the person at the organisation in charge of delivering the programme. The interviews for local funders were conducted to gain insight about the role of the local funder in delivering the programme, their perception of the set-up, management and delivery of the project, what support they provided, and what success and outcomes they were expecting from the programme. The interviews with local funders helped inform the design of other subsequent research materials.

Surveys with funded groups

The first survey of funded groups (offered online and postal) was conducted between September and October 2011. The sample of funded groups was compiled from monitoring data from the local funders and included all programme groups that were awarded grants.

Online surveys were sent to all groups who provided an email address, and postal surveys were sent to the remaining groups with postal addresses. Groups who were sent the online version of the survey were able to request a postal survey if they preferred. Email and postal reminders were sent at the midpoint of the survey period.

Overall, 220 funded groups completed the survey representing a response rate of 48 per cent of all 461 groups. Both online and postal groups were given a unique number referring to their group to enable comparative analysis with responses given by the same groups in the final survey. Eighteen per cent of the survey respondents completed the postal survey and the remaining groups responded online. The survey provided data about the groups' profile, what the funding was used for and further details about their activities and their plans for the future at that time. Analysis of the surveys was undertaken using SPSS, a statistical software programme.

The final survey of funded groups (offered online and postal) was conducted between February and March 2012. The sample of funded groups was compiled from monitoring data. Groups who responded to the survey could request to be excluded from all future research. Thirty-four groups were therefore not sent the final survey.

Online surveys were sent to all groups who provided an email address, and postal surveys were sent to the remaining groups with postal addresses. Groups who were sent the online version of the survey were able to request a postal survey if they preferred. A further 36 groups did not receive the final survey as the email or postal addresses provided were incorrect. Email reminders were sent at the midpoint of the survey period.

Overall, 159 funded groups completed the survey representing a response rate of 41 per cent (of 391 groups who were sent the survey). Fourteen per cent of the survey respondents completed the postal survey, the remainder responded online. Furthermore, 112 groups completed both surveys. This equates to 24 per cent of all groups. The final funded group survey provided data about new members and their characteristics, outcomes of the funding for older people, the groups and the wider community, the future of the Community Agent role and their plans for future activities. Analysis of the surveys was undertaken using SPSS.

Community Agents survey

The survey of Community Agents (a mixture of online and postal) was conducted between October and December 2011. The survey used a number of techniques to reach the Community Agents as the Community Development Foundation (CDF) did not have the direct contact details of these individuals. Groups who responded to the first funded group survey were able to opt out of passing on the Community Agent survey to the Community Agents in their group. One-hundred and seventy groups said they were willing to pass on the Community Agent survey. These groups were able to choose which type of survey, online or postal, they would prefer to distribute to their Community Agents. Funded groups who wished to distribute the online survey were sent a universal link to the survey and instructions to send the email on to all their Community Agents at their group. The funded groups that opted for postal surveys were provided with the number of postal surveys that corresponded with the number of Community Agents they stated they had in the first funded group survey.

For groups who did not complete the first funded groups' survey, monitoring data provided by the groups to local funders about the number of Community Agents each group was used. A universal link was sent to the funded groups who provided email addresses. For the remaining funded groups who did not complete the survey, postal surveys were sent to their contact address. The number corresponded to the number of Community Agents they stated in their monitoring information to local funders.²⁴ Email reminders were sent at the midpoint of the survey period.

Overall, 252 Community Agents responded to the survey. Sixty-six per cent of the survey respondents completed the postal survey and the remainder responded online. The Community Agent survey provided data about how they became a Community Agent (CA), what responsibilities they undertook as a CA, how they reached older people, the support they received and the difference the programme made. Analysis of the surveys was undertaken using SPSS.

Interviews with funded groups

Semi-structured telephone interviews with 35 funded group leaders were conducted between November and December 2011. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The 35 funded groups were chosen from all the funded groups who responded to the survey and said they were willing to be interviewed, 165 funded groups were willing to be interviewed. At least one funded group from each selected area was interviewed. The sample also ensured a spread of rural and urban areas, and smaller and larger grants. Where funded groups were not able to be interviewed they were replaced with groups with similar characteristics.

²⁴ Due to the broad definition of the role the data was checked to identify any discrepancies, such as a high number of Community Agents. This data was then verified by contacting the relevant groups where possible and checking the figure given.

Interviewees were the main leader or manager of the group who completed the survey. The interviews with funded groups complemented the survey data by exploring emerging issues in more depth and gaining further evidence on the sustainability of the funded activity and the Community Agent role. It also provided further detail about the extent to which social isolation and loneliness among older people had reduced and the impact of the programme.

Interviews with Community Agents

Semi-structured telephone interviews with 60 Community Agents were conducted between December 2011 and February 2012. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The 60 Community Agents were chosen from all the respondents of the Community Agents' survey who said they were willing to be interviewed, 127 Community Agents were willing to be interviewed. The sample excluded any groups that were interviewed as a funded group. The evaluation aimed to gain at least two Community Agent interviews per area included in the programme. Due to the low response rate of the survey in some areas and refusals to be included in further research, interviews with Community Agents from two areas were not possible. The sample also ensured a spread of the different characteristics of the Community Agents and the types of activities they provided. Where Community Agents were not able to be interviewed they were replaced with Community Agents from similar areas and groups.

The interviews with Community Agents complemented the survey data by exploring emerging issues in more depth and gaining further evidence on the Community Agent's role and the skills and attributes needed to be an effective Community Agent. It also provided further detail about their responsibility within the groups, what activities they had undertaken and the sustainability of the role.

Interviews with older people

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 60 older people across 20 groups (three in each group) who were involved in the activities funded by the programme were conducted between February and April 2012. The sample of groups to visit was compiled mostly from funded groups who were interviewed, said they were able to accommodate a visit from a CDF researcher and had three older people who would be willing to be interviewed. To ensure a spread of 20 different areas, this was occasionally supplemented by funded groups whose Community Agent had been interviewed and was similarly able to accommodate a visit. Groups were then chosen to ensure a spread of areas and activities. Funded group leaders were asked to identify three older people from their group who had joined since the Active at 60 CA funding was provided and who were willing to be interviewed. If this was not possible an older person who attended more regularly since the funding was identified. Where possible all three people were interviewed separately for 30 minutes. The interviews focused on the older people's experience of the group, how they became involved and what difference it had made to them.

Monitoring information

Programme management information (MI), collated by the CDF programme delivery team from information about funded community groups received from local funders and end of programme monitoring data, was reviewed. Additional questions were asked in the final monitoring request to gain further data about the local funders' perspective of the programme since its completion. The data provides financial information about the funding. The data was analysed using Excel. Data was cleaned and checked by CDF to ensure any discrepancies were resolved.

All research materials and outputs were reviewed by an independent peer reviewer to ensure the data collection materials and findings were robust, impartial and appropriate for the programme and its participants. Comments and amendments made by the peer reviewer were made available to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Appendix C

The Community Agent programme model and profile of the groups and group leaders

This Appendix provides further details of the model adopted for the programme and the processes for promoting and explaining the programme to community groups and for applying for funds. It provides details of the types of groups and individuals who responded to the first and final funded groups' surveys and the Community Agents survey and what they used the funding for.

The Community Agent model

CDF managed the Community Agent programme on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Community Development Foundation (CDF) distributed the funding to 21 local funders who administer funds in the 30 selected areas. The specified role of the 21 local funders was to manage, administer and promote the programme in their areas and to administer and assess applications for grants using local panels made up of community members. As specified in the programme guidance for local funders developed by CDF and DWP, the role of the local funder was to:

- manage, administer and promote the programme in their areas, proactively reaching out to voluntary community and community groups in their area;
- use local knowledge to encourage suitable applications;
- offer pre-application support to ensure bids are of the highest quality possible. This will include (at a minimum) dedicated telephone and email support to interested groups;
- attend a briefing event/workshop in November to discuss/fully understand the objectives and rationale of the programme; and

In addition, some local funders provided ongoing support to groups once they had received funding.

Promotion of the Community Agent programme

Promotion of the programme was through a range of means, typically:

- **widespread promotion** – through mail outs/emails, e-bulletins, newsletters, funders' own websites;
- **through local networks** – local Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), local newspapers, outreach workers and local authority contacts; and
- **targeted** – working with specific local groups and organisations relevant to the programme such as Age UK and groups representing black, Asian and minority ethnic groups locally.

Feedback from the local funders in the end of programme monitoring data revealed that nearly two-fifths (39 per cent or 153 groups)²⁵ had been funded for the first time by the local funder through the programme.

Interpreting the Community Agent role and communicating the programme aims

Providing support to ensure community groups understood what the programme was seeking to achieve was particularly important for this programme because all of the funders interviewed reported that some community group applicants, particularly smaller less established groups, did not immediately understand the name ‘Community Agent’ and they had to explain. They noted that the programme Handy Guide and Q&A materials were useful in outlining the aim of the programme and the Community Agent role, and the Q&A materials stated that community groups: ‘have the flexibility to come up with their own name for the role, if they feel it would be more appropriate for their community’. However, the word ‘agent’ was said to have been problematic – with some people at a local level associating the term with a ‘sales’ role. ‘Champion’ was suggested as an alternative, as was ‘volunteer’.

The application process

The assessment of applications for funding was undertaken at a local level by local funder grant panels. This meant that the process benefited from the panels’ knowledge of the groups’ previous work as an indication of their track record in delivering activities funded by small grants. The panels also generally took into consideration:

- whether applicants had identified who would fulfil the role of the Community Agent, whether they were the most appropriate person (that is they met the peer element of the programme) and how they would carry out the role and related activities;
- how the proposed approach would try to reach the target age group. Applications that were not able to show evidence of how this would be done had this reason cited as the reason for rejecting an application by some local funders;
- whether applicants had a clearly set out plan and had specified their intended outcomes that met the criteria for the programme; and
- whether the applicant was altering their existing project to take advantage of the programme criteria – even though the project did not clearly fit this criteria. Applications were not successful where this was the case.

While being innovative was not an explicit aim of the programme, local funders were encouraged by DWP and CDF to consider this criterion in deciding which projects to fund. The extent to which a project was innovative or not was said by some local funders interviewed to have been a more challenging element of assessing the applications.

²⁵ Based on information provided by local funders in their end of programme monitoring data return. This represented 390 of the 461 funded groups.

Programme management

The application and assessment process was undertaken in a short timeframe. While the funds were distributed to groups within the agreed timeframe, it was felt by some local funders that the promotion and application process would have been more effective had there been a longer lead time.

All local funders interviewed found the Active at 60 CA Handy guide and Q&A materials provided by DWP and CDF at a briefing meeting prior to the start of programme useful. The guidance helped local funders to develop information about the programme that was distributed to potential applicants and aided panel decision making. For example, it formed the basis for local funders':

- application forms;
- promotional materials for the programme;
- material for briefing events;
- briefings for grant assessment panels/criteria sheets; and
- guides for funded groups and to produce materials for groups to understand programme terminology.

Funders tended to take the materials and rework the language to make it more accessible to the context of their local community groups.

Profile of groups

The groups who successfully applied for funding and responded to the surveys were local, not for profit or community social enterprise groups (as can be seen in Figures C.1 to C.4 and Tables C.1 and C.2). Around two-thirds were not for profit organisations and around half were community and social enterprises. This was also the case for the groups represented by the Community Agents who responded to the survey where 62 per cent were not for profit organisations and 46 per cent were community/social enterprises (see Figure C.2). Around half of the groups generally drew users from a small area (between one and five miles see Tables C.1 and C.2).

Figure C.1 Types of community groups receiving Active at 60 Community Agent programme funding

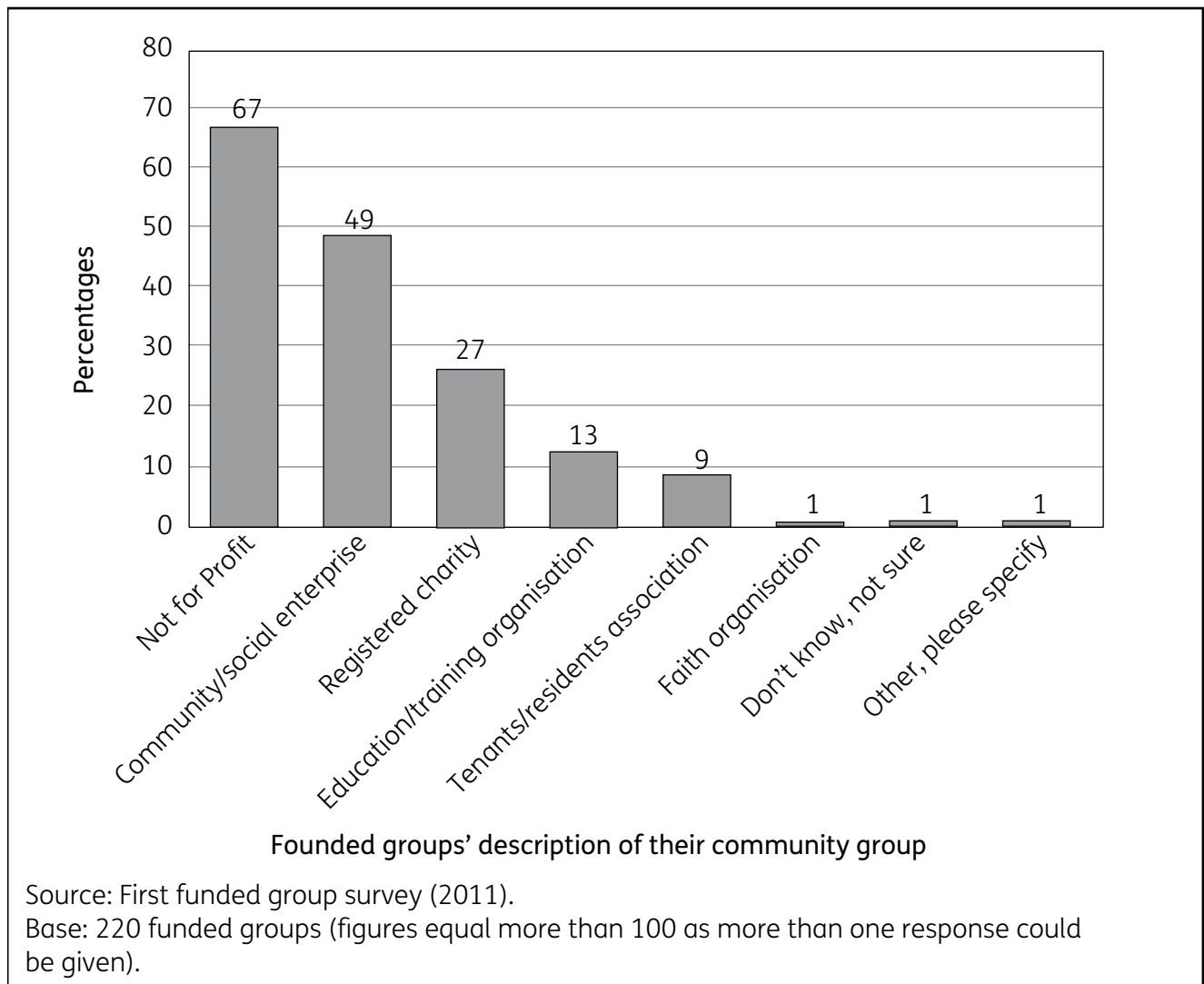


Figure C.2 Types of community groups that Community Agents volunteered in

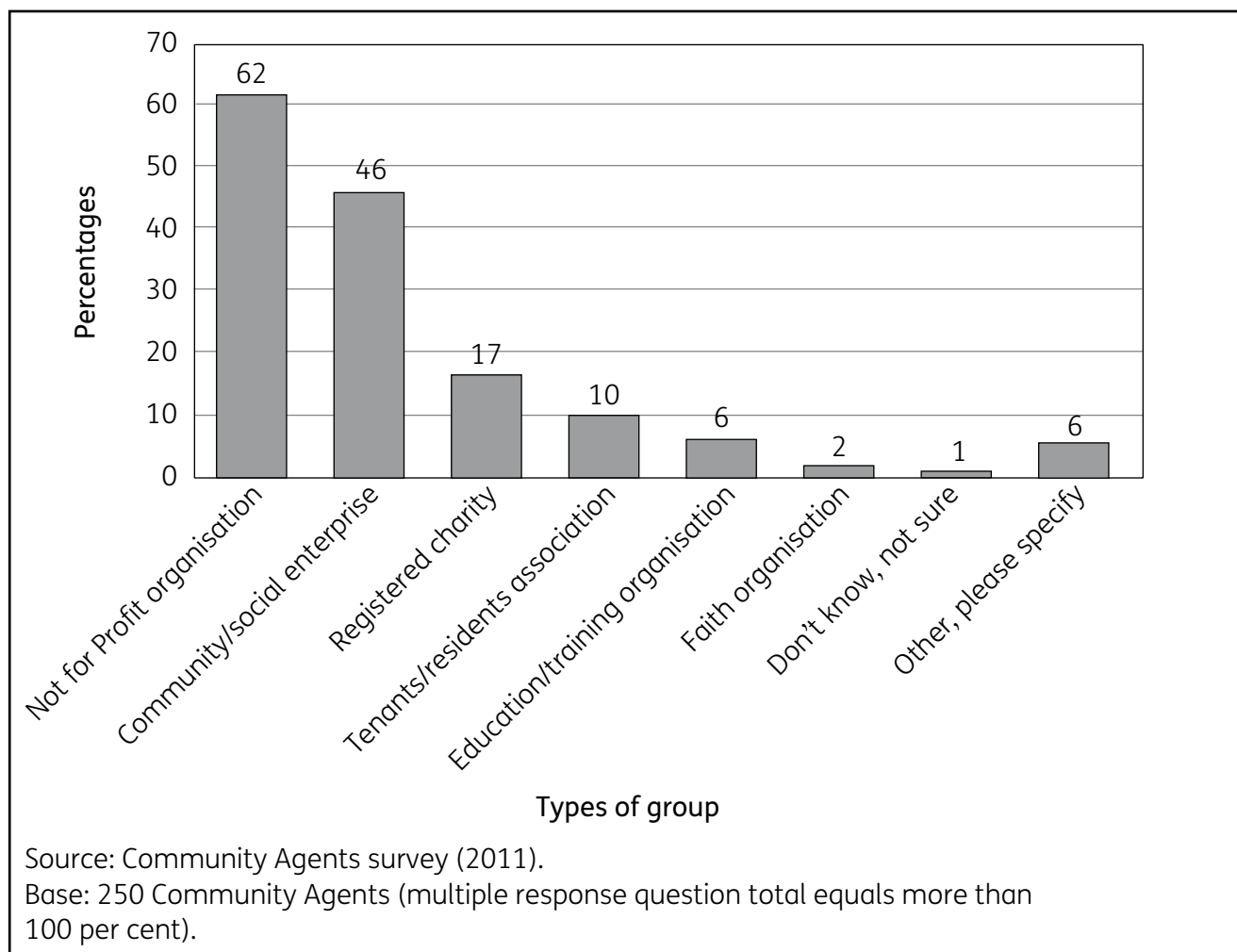


Table C.1 Size of area from which community groups draw the majority of users (first survey)

Distance	% of groups
From a 1 mile radius	11
Within a 5 mile radius	43
Within a 10 mile radius	27
Within a 20 mile radius	9
Over a 20 mile radius	9
Don't know	1

Source: First funded group survey (2011).
Base: 220 funded groups (single response question).

Table C.2 Size of area from which community groups draw the majority of users (final survey)

Distance	% of groups
From a 1 mile radius	11
Within a 5 mile radius	44
Within a 10 mile radius	29
Within a 20 mile radius	10
Over a 20 mile radius	5
Don't know	1

Source: Final funded group survey (2012).

Base: 159 funded groups (single response question).

Role of the funded group leader

Most of the group leaders who responded to the first funded group survey were volunteers. Eighty-four per cent of community group survey respondents (identified through Local Funders as the lead contact for community groups) reported that their role was voluntary. Eleven per cent were in a mix of both paid and voluntary roles and six per cent were in a paid role. As can be seen in Table C.3, they adopted a range of roles and 35 per cent were Community Agents. Group leaders typically gave up to one day to their role (Table C.4).

Table C.3 Role of group leaders

Role	% of groups
Help organise and run group activities	49
Member of the group	38
Community Agent	35
Manager/leader of the group	34
Coordinator	18
Trustee	16
Administrator	16
Community development worker	8
Advice worker	3
Other	23

Source: First funded group survey (2011).

Base: 219 community groups (multiple response question).

Table C.4 Number of days a week in the role

Number of days	% of groups
Up to 1 day	40
Up to 2 days	19
Up to 3 days	15
Up to 4 days	5
Up to 5 days	12
More than 5 days	9

Source: First funded group survey (2011).

Base: 220 funded groups (single response question).

Use of funding and duration of activities

The Active at 60 Community Agent funding was commonly used for rent, room hire and venue costs and for equipment and materials (see Figure C.3). The majority of groups had started their activities between April and July 2011 (see Table C.5). Just over a third (36 per cent) did not give an end date or reported that their activities would be ongoing. Of those who provided both start and end dates (126 groups), it was most common for the activities to be of eight months duration (35 per cent) (see Table C.6).

Figure C.3 What Community Agents programme funding is being used for

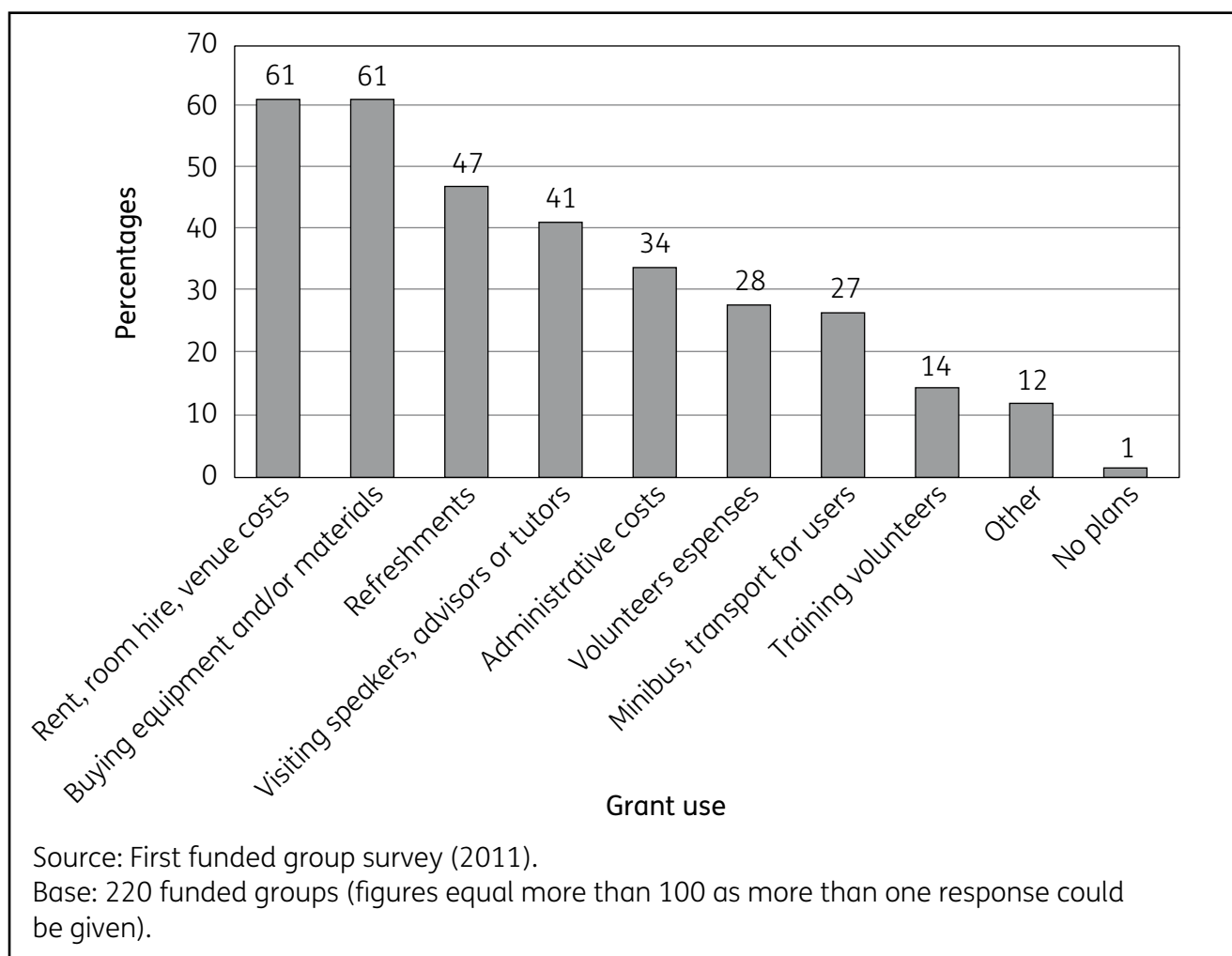


Table C.5 Start date of activities

Starting month	% of groups
April 2011	45
May 2011	18
June 2011	11
July 2011	10
August 2011	5
September 2011	6
October 2011	1
November 2011	*
December 2011	*
Unknown	3

Source: First funded group survey (2011).

Base: 220 funded groups (open-ended question).

*less than 0.5 per cent

Table C.6 Duration of activities

Number of months	% of groups
11 months	4
10 months	2
9 months	4
8 months	35
7 months	17
6 months	7
5 months	14
4 months	8
3 months	2
2 months	4
1 month	2

Source: First funded group survey (2011).

Base: 126 funded groups (open-ended question).

Appendix D

Monitoring data

Area ²⁶	Local Funder	Number of community groups funded	Final area allocation
Birmingham	Birmingham Foundation	25	£57,069
Blackpool	Community Foundation for Merseyside	14	£32,424
Bournemouth	The Community Foundation for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	9	£23,361
Brighton and Hove	Sussex Community Foundation	14	£29,207
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Cornwall Community Foundation	14	£27,090
Doncaster	Doncaster Central Development Trust CIC	12	£32,585
East Sussex	Sussex Community Foundation	16	£32,367
Enfield	Enfield Voluntary Action	14	£29,738
Hackney	St Katharine and Shadwell Trust	12	£30,650
Hartlepool	Tees Valley Community Foundation	11	£25,921
Herefordshire, County of	Herefordshire Community Foundation	13	£26,834
Kingston upon Hull, City of	Hull Community and Voluntary Services Ltd	18	£33,648
Knowsley	Community Foundation for Merseyside	19	£33,945
Lincolnshire	Lincolnshire Community Foundation	26	£41,210
Liverpool	Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services (LCVS)	20	£39,469
Manchester**	Community Foundation for Greater Manchester		
Middlesbrough*	Tees Valley Community Foundation	10	£25,204
Norfolk	Norfolk Community Foundation	32	£53,656
Nottingham**	Nottinghamshire Community Foundation		
Redcar and Cleveland	Tees Valley Community Foundation	10	£19,603
Rochdale**	Community Foundation for Greater Manchester		
Salford**	Community Foundation for Greater Manchester		
Sandwell	Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations	18	£45,004
Southend-on-Sea	Essex Community Foundation	7	£15,956
South Tyneside	Community Foundation serving Tyne and Wear and Northumberland	6	£17,475
Stoke-on-Trent	Staffordshire Community Foundation	12	£33,139
Sunderland	Community Foundation serving Tyne and Wear and Northumberland	7	£19,000
Tower Hamlets*	St Katharine and Shadwell Trust	12	£27,368
Wirral*	Community Foundation for Merseyside	15	£31,762
Wolverhampton	Wolverhampton Network Consortium	18	£41,454

*One group returned their funding in each of these areas.

**No data available.

Responses received for 23 out of 30 areas.

²⁶ These areas were selected taking account of levels of deprivation and the proportion of the population over state pension age, while seeking to ensure a balance across the regions and of urban and rural areas.

The Active at 60 Community Agents programme ran between March to December 2011. It was a £1million Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) fund that was administered nationally by the Community Development Foundation (CDF). The Programme aimed to encourage community groups and their volunteers to help people approaching and post retirement to stay or become more active and positively engaged with society, in particular those at risk of social isolation and loneliness in later life.

DWP commissioned CDF's research team to assess the extent to which the programme achieved its original aims and objectives. A mixed method research design was used and this report draws on qualitative in depth interviews and quantitative data (on line and postal surveys). Fieldwork took place between August 2011 and March 2012.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:
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