

Tackling Loneliness with Transport Evaluation Appendix E

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Appendix E

Case study summaries

This appendix provides a summary of each case study conducted. The summaries provide an overview of some of the funded activities and the impacts these had on a range of beneficiaries, as well as any secondary impacts on staff and volunteers. The summaries showcase the activities and highlight the key messages that emerged from the interviews.

A theory-based evaluation was designed, to assess whether specific pilot activities had made a positive contribution to any of the short-term and medium-term outcomes set out in the logic map. Contribution analysis was applied to achieve this and drew on a range of quantitative (Common Minimum Dataset and survey) data and qualitative data (case studies). The full impact evaluation findings can be found in the main report.

The selected pilots used as case studies were identified in collaboration with DfT, applying two criteria: the pilot quantitative data collection plan; and DfT's key strategic priorities. Following initial engagement with pilots to explore viability of case studies, a final selection of nine projects and activities across five pilots was agreed with DfT.

For each case study, the aim was to interview three staff or volunteers and up to eight beneficiaries. However, recognising that projects and activities funded in this programme presented a wide variety of differing characteristics, the evaluation team worked with the projects, delivery partners, and the pilots to ensure the case studies reflected this.

The interviews lasted up to 60 minutes. Experienced researchers moderated the interviews. As far as possible one dedicated interviewer conducted the interviews for their assigned case study, although there was some flexibility in this to ensure that interviews were able to continue on schedule and that participants' availability was prioritised. The topics discussed with staff and with volunteers were different from those explored with beneficiaries. This tailored approach was designed to gain a holistic view of the funded activity and the impact it had on different groups.

The final pilots and projects included as case studies are indicated in table E.1.

Table E.1: Projects and activities included as case studies

Pilot	Delivery Partner	Project or activity
Age UK	Multiple local Age UK branches	Travelling Companions
Devon County Council – Connecting You	Devon Communities Together	Travel Training
Devon County Council – Connecting You	One Northern Devon	Tarka Line Creatives

Pilot	Delivery Partner	Project or activity
Community Transport Association – Tackling Loneliness through Community Transport	Swan Advice Network	Swan Transport – Young Volunteers
Community Transport Association – Tackling Loneliness through Community Transport	Nidderdale Community Transport	Nidderdale Befriending Through Transport Pilot Project
Living Streets		Walking Connects – Stoke-on-Trent
Living Streets		Walking Connects – Lancashire
Transport for West Midlands	Community Transport Group	Let's Chat
Transport for West Midlands	Shencare Community Transport	Let's Chat

Case study 1: Travelling Companions

Age UK provided the Travelling Companions pilot through seven local Age UK partners. This case study draws on the pilot activities in five areas: Calderdale and Kirklees, Norfolk, Richmond upon Thames, Stockport, and Wiltshire.

The aim was to help older people who had lost confidence to travel independently on public transport following the COVID-19 pandemic or other life events. The activity helped beneficiaries to find out about and use local buses to make journeys to places and activities that they wished to access.

Overview of the project

Older beneficiaries were identified as having lost confidence to make independent journeys on public transport since the COVID-19 pandemic or following other experiences such as bereavement, divorce, a health deterioration, or having started to use a mobility aid. The loss of confidence about leaving their homes had led to social isolation and loneliness, particularly if living alone. Age UK identified beneficiaries through social prescribers, and later by promotion in libraries, local newspapers, and other community spaces.

“It was targeting those that really needed it, those that had been isolated, had not been on transport for a long time and had lost that confidence.” – Staff

The activity was structured and personalised as a series of up to six one-to-one interactions with a volunteer, with a focus on helping the beneficiary towards independent travel. A typical pattern was weekly staged sessions including: a visit to the beneficiary’s home to discuss needs and agree goals; walking together to find the nearest bus stop and timetable; an accompanied short bus journey; a journey where the volunteer supported from a distance; an independent bus journey; and a journey to another town.

The pilot aimed to tackle loneliness by enabling beneficiaries to travel by public transport locally and further afield, thereby re-connecting with friends, acquaintances, and their communities, both during the journey and at the destination. Volunteers used their contacts in Age UK and their local knowledge to link beneficiaries with other Age UK services such as Fitness and Friendship, as well as to signpost beneficiaries to local groups and activities.

Key Findings

- The activity tackled loss of confidence among older beneficiaries about travelling independently by bus, which was preventing them from leaving their homes and causing social isolation and loneliness in those who lived alone.
- The activity was tailored to individuals’ needs and personal goals for travel and social connections. The activity was of short duration (six sessions) and focussed on rebuilding beneficiaries’ confidence to travel on their own. There was evidence that many beneficiaries were able to travel independently by the end and were motivated to continue and increase their social connections and activities.
- The impact on beneficiaries was reported as increased confidence in using buses to make independent journeys (including by some who had not used a bus for a long time), and as a consequence an increase in social connections with friends, families, and local communities.
- Staff and volunteers found the activity rewarding as they saw the progress made. Supporting beneficiaries on the activities gave staff and volunteers increased awareness of the challenges facing those with mobility issues, physical disabilities, or mental health conditions.
- This new activity for Age UK was able to draw on existing staff and volunteers as well as other Age UK services to help deliver the activity and signpost to other services and groups.
- Staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries would like to see the project continue, and even to broaden out beyond older people, to be advertised more widely, and to have some follow up afterwards.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

Beneficiaries noted that the staged approach had helped to build up their confidence again to travel independently by bus, after long periods of not doing so, or gaining confidence to travel alone using a wheelchair, or following a stroke. Typically, the activity enabled them to get to hospital appointments reliably, visit a nearby town, get a haircut, go to the opticians, meet a friend for coffee, or attend a lunch club or fitness club, or choir. Beneficiaries with physical disabilities noted how positive they felt being able to make journeys by public transport on their own, while one person with a long-term mental health condition had been enabled to travel by bus alone for the first time in twenty years. Not all beneficiaries were able to progress to a bus journey, usually because of health or mobility issues, for example one whose walker was too heavy for her to lift, so the activity was limited to a local walk with the volunteer.

“The first trip, I was really, really nervous, and the second trip, I wasn’t so nervous, and then after the second trip, I started going on my own.” – Beneficiary

Beneficiaries reported re-connecting with friends and travelling to activities which helped them to feel less lonely. Not all were lonely however, either because they did not live alone or because they were happy with their own company. Nevertheless, the activity had a positive impact on their ability and confidence to get out and use public transport.

For staff and volunteers

Staff and volunteers were satisfied with the clear aims of the activity, the induction training, and the support from Age UK. They reflected on how transferable the idea of independent travel by bus might be to their (mainly older) regular clients, and also on how they would manage themselves when they could no longer drive. Staff and volunteers learned about the needs of disabled people through going out on buses with beneficiaries who had mobility issues or were using wheelchairs or other mobility aids. Staff and volunteers were pleased to be able to help and make a positive change to people’s lives and found the experience rewarding.

*“[...] the reason I do it is to try and make other people's lives a bit easier. If I succeed, then I feel pleased.”
– Staff*

For one volunteer the activity was a welcome distraction from a recent bereavement, and they valued the support of the team. Keeping busy, feeling valued as a volunteer, and feeling that they were helping people were common themes, and there was also a benefit in meeting new people and going to new places.

Other perceived outcomes of the activity

Travelling by bus instead of taxi saved beneficiaries money, which in turn made it more affordable to go out more and increase their social connections. Other positive financial impacts from taking part included receiving help from the volunteer to claim their pension, or support to re-assert financial independence from family members. Other positive impacts relating to family included relieving adult children of taking beneficiaries to appointments and of worry about the beneficiaries, while beneficiaries were relieved of guilt about depending on their children. The very limited bus services in some areas, mobility issues and ill health among some of the beneficiaries, and bad winter weather were all observed to have reduced the impacts of the activity. The projects adapted by taking things more slowly.

Some hoped for a longer-term befriending service or support, however there was also awareness that the activity was intended as a short-term scheme and that for many, the outcome of independent travel by bus was achieved.

Case study 2: Travel Training

Devon County Council invited pilot initiatives and organised these under a county-wide project called Connecting You. One of the Council's partners Devon Communities Together delivered the Travel Training project across Devon (apart from Plymouth and Torbay).

Travel Training targeted organisations working with clients aged 16–25 years and 55+ years who did not frequently use public transport and who were at risk of loneliness. The aim was to increase staff's confidence to help their service users travel independently and to reduce social isolation. This case study partly focuses on one service for young people who had various or multiple vulnerabilities, such as isolation from their families, homelessness, unemployment, or neurodiverse conditions, and who were anxious about using public transport alone.

Overview of the project

The activity was delivered through a project team of four travel trainers who reached out to organisations across Devon, drawing on Devon Communities Together's existing contacts and relationships. The offer was a free on-site travel training workshop for staff and volunteers of the participating organisations. The one-off session included a presentation, a role-playing exercise, and resource materials to help with journey planning and travel confidence. The session was designed to equip attendees to support their service users with travel techniques and advice.

"[...] we were trying to target organisations that worked with clients or service users that didn't frequently use public transport, and then we would [...] give them training, so they could work with their clients to make them feel more confident to use public transport." – Staff

Participating organisations worked with a wide range of service users at risk of isolation if they did not drive or use public transport. Older service users wanted more social connection and to travel to activities in town, whereas younger people were motivated to get to work or college.

Staff and volunteers who attended the training learned how to minimise their service users' travel anxiety, as well as benefitting themselves from the practical guidance, such as travel planning and use of landmarks to orient oneself on a journey.

Key Findings

- Beneficiaries in Devon could become very isolated if they did not drive or use public transport. Older beneficiaries had a need for more social connection, while for younger people the main motivation was to get to work or study.
- The impact on end beneficiaries was a reduction in anxiety and an increase in confidence about using public transport and making journeys independently for work, study, visiting family and friends, and for shopping.
- The increased travel confidence and uplift in journeys led to a positive impact on social connections and on reducing isolation.
- Staff in organisations who received the training felt it was useful and that it increased their confidence in helping their clients to use public transport on their own.
- Staff who were trained also noted a benefit to themselves in their own capability to plan their journeys and reduce anxiety.
- In future, extending the invitation to the training to end beneficiaries (service users) and, as relevant, their families was recommended to strengthen the impacts, as well as running such a project for a longer period.
- Staff who conducted the training benefitted from the experience of setting up and running a new project, learning presentations skills, and increased understanding of public transport in Devon and the work of multiple organisations working across the county.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

End beneficiaries received advice and practical resources via staff and volunteers at their organisations who had attended the training. Identifying landmarks during journey planning and then looking for these on the way helped to reduce anxiety about a new trip, providing reassurance that they were going in the right direction. The use of a distinctive orange travel wallet, provided by the project, where beneficiaries could put everything they would need when making a journey by bus or train also helped to increase travel confidence.

"I remember there being a part about the travel wallets where they could put all their stuff into one secure place where they could put prompts, maps, travel passes, tickets, etc. That was quite handy" – Beneficiary (staff)

Young people were reportedly happier to go out, and showed less panic or anxiety before making journeys, according to one staff member who had received the training and passed on the travel guidance and advice to service users. This enabled them to make journeys for work, job interviews, study, gym, shopping, or visiting friends and family, which in turn fostered more social connections and reduced their isolation. An outcome from the travel training for organisation staff was increased confidence in being able to help their clients to plan for travel and to overcome any anxieties about using public transport. The techniques and approaches also helped one staff member with their own travel confidence.

For staff

The activity was run as a new project and, although there was no formal training, travel trainer staff reported gaining presentation skills, knowledge of public transport provision, and (through the organisations they reached) an understanding of the travel needs and available resources for a wide range of people. Increased job satisfaction was reported due to delivering good, well-targeted training to organisations that were able to implement it.

"I think we gave them some really useful tools and some useful resources and built their confidence that they were doing good things with their clients, so I think in that sense, we did some really positive things across the county." – Staff member

The travel trainers reported increased awareness of travel anxieties among organisations' service users. Among younger age groups, these were perceived to be debilitating social anxiety owing to being isolated and staying inside. For the older age groups, anxiety about using public transport was related to the fear of falling over. Staff were able to integrate this understanding into their later training presentations.

Other perceived outcomes of the activity

To strengthen the activity, training staff suggested a longer delivery period, targeting organisations that were already working in the area of travel confidence, and having the resources professionally designed and hosted online.

Rail strikes during the year had a negative effect on young people's newly found confidence for train travel when they had to take a rail replacement service. Organisation staff and trainers suggested that opening the training up to end beneficiaries themselves, and where relevant to young people's parents, could strengthen future impacts, as well as overcome any hesitance (e.g., from parents or staff) about beneficiaries learning to travel independently. One practical impact for organisations that did adopt the training was that more young people travelled independently so fewer lifts from staff were needed.

Case study 3: Tarka Line Creatives

Devon County Council's pilot initiatives were funded under the Connecting You project and delivered by a number of partners including One Northern Devon. The Tarka Line Creatives project worked in partnership with One Northern Devon to tackle loneliness through transport in areas such as Barnstaple, Umberleigh, Eggesford and CREDITON.

Tarka Line Creatives ran from December 2022 until April 2023, working with two groups which it identified as experiencing loneliness and isolation in the local area, young people aged 16–24 and people aged 55 and over.

Overview of the project

Tarka Line Creatives was a new service where groups of up to six beneficiaries took part in three supported train expeditions on the Tarka Line and one exhibition planning session. Each expedition involved travelling by train from Barnstaple to the countryside, where beneficiaries could explore new areas, meet new people, take photographs, and produce a creative writing piece inspired by nature. A final photo exhibition was organised by project volunteers.

Beneficiaries aged 16–24 were largely referred from an organisation supporting neurodiverse young people. Beneficiaries aged over 55 were reached through local groups, local news forums, and online.

"I think by the activity being organised and supported, it gave beneficiaries the opportunity to do something a bit different that was safe [...] that was going to confidence build." – Volunteer

Younger beneficiaries had experienced travel anxiety using public transport and meeting new people following the COVID-19 pandemic. Older beneficiaries were often at risk of social isolation and had physical health conditions, leaving them less confident using public transport. Tarka Line Creatives supported beneficiaries as they navigated using trains and being in a public place, whereby they could organically make social connections with others in the group, through the art of taking pictures with a camera and discussing their shots.

The number of attendees often fluctuated as a result of personal and external factors such as the weather or poor mental health. However, the service was able to adapt quickly to support changing individual needs. For example, by providing physical support to individuals who were less confident in their walking following a recent fall or supporting an autistic person who was feeling overwhelmed in a given situation.

Key Findings

- Beneficiaries felt the programme had a positive impact on their ability to independently use public transport such as buses and trains, following the completion of the sessions.
- Beneficiaries felt that the programme provided the opportunity to reduce their feelings of loneliness and social isolation by surrounding themselves with like-minded individuals from the local area.
- Beneficiaries enjoyed exploring new places and felt supported throughout the process.
- Volunteers also felt they were able to tackle their own social isolation through meeting other volunteers that were a similar age.
- One volunteer expressed high levels of satisfaction in their role and responsibilities and felt the successful delivery of the programme increased their confidence in their own professional skills.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

Both the older and younger groups of beneficiaries emphasised the travel confidence gained from going on a short train trip with others. Although the journeys were short, beneficiaries enjoyed taking the train to places that they would not otherwise go to themselves. One volunteer also noticed a positive change in younger beneficiaries' communication, who went from not speaking to anyone to being fully engaged in the activity and with others in the group.

Beneficiaries also highlighted the role that the pilot activity played in the improvement of their mental health and reduction of social isolation. One beneficiary aged over 55 felt that, since moving to the area, they found it difficult to make friends due to their age, but was able to make good friends on the pilot activity. Another beneficiary particularly enjoyed meeting other locals with whom they could openly discuss personal issues, such as their health which they felt helped with their anxiety.

"I'm able to go out now - I still get anxious, but I know that I'm going to be okay and I'm going to do it, and this has all stemmed from that one step that I took turning up at Barnstable railway station." – Beneficiary

Since taking part in the pilot activity, multiple beneficiaries regularly met up with others from the pilot activity to continue to explore their local area, using buses and trains to get around. A member of staff reported that beneficiaries felt comfortable to reach out to others on the activity because they had been a part of small groups and had engaged in multiple sessions rather than just one session which they did not feel would have been as impactful. The impact of the pilot activity extended beyond the group who had taken part, according to one older beneficiary who mentioned having encouraged more travel confidence among their own friendship group by arranging day trips by train.

Beneficiaries also reported gaining camera skills and taking pictures of nature that they were proud to showcase in the exhibition.

For staff and volunteers

Volunteers who assisted in the delivery of the pilot activity felt they were able to tackle their own social isolation through making new social connections with other like-minded volunteers. One volunteer was new to the area and felt that volunteering helped them meet others who were similar in age which had been difficult to do before they volunteered. Another volunteer, who was working remotely from home, felt that volunteering reduced their feelings of loneliness consequent of not interacting with many people day-to-day.

"I was quite struck by how much less lonely it [volunteering] made me feel and I hadn't expected that" – Volunteer

Staff and volunteers also described the feeling of satisfaction they got from supporting the delivery of the pilot activity in their roles. One volunteer felt they also gained new skills that would help them in their future career, as well as the knowledge to support an autistic person as needed and help people with anxiety or loneliness.

Case study 4: Swan Transport – Young Volunteers

Community Transport Association (CTA) worked with multiple partners, including the Swan Advice Network, which ran the Young Volunteers project through its Swan Transport scheme. Swan Transport was already established as a long running community transport service based in Radstock, Somerset.

The Young Volunteers project aimed to engage young people (aged 18-25) experiencing loneliness and social isolation by offering them volunteering roles. The activity connected the volunteers with older people who were regular service users of Swan Transport services.

Overview of the project

Young Volunteers sought to introduce young people who were also experiencing loneliness and social isolation to community transport roles and support them in becoming ready for employment. A number of volunteers had also experienced anxiety about using transport and meeting other people following the COVID-19 pandemic. Twelve volunteers were recruited through various online and in person channels, with a large amount of interest from students from the University of Bath.¹

“The young volunteers that have been there and the drivers, I just think really they're the unsung heroes because they're the ones that are giving up their time. They're the ones that really make the events work” – Staff

Young Volunteers worked collaboratively with external organisations to support the delivery of day trips, social coffee mornings, and transport for the older beneficiary group. This included working with the community minibus, working with local cafes to use their space, and with the Jo Cox Foundation to promote community social connection. A key aim of the project was to encourage intergenerational connections.

Key Findings

- Beneficiaries enjoyed connecting with young people and having them take an interest in their experiences.
- Beneficiaries described feeling less isolated and looked forward to attending the activities arranged by the services.
- Volunteers felt supported in identifying their strengths and developing their professional skills. Volunteers gained an increased confidence in using these through applying them to real world workplace scenarios.
- Staff and volunteers felt their roles connected them with a range of different people and helped to tackle their own loneliness.
- Positive impacts of the service were also experienced by others indirectly. For example, beneficiaries felt that the community transport increased their ability to take themselves where they wanted to go, taking the pressure off family members who previously would have been the only ones that beneficiaries could rely on.

¹ CTA's own case study of the Young Volunteers project provides additional information.
Available from: <https://ctauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SWAN-Advice-Network-Case-Study-Aug-2023.pdf>

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

The Young Volunteers project was designed to connect and benefit both young and older people in the local community. Older beneficiaries reported being lonely, for example during the day when their families were busy, or because they had been bereaved and were on their own. Enjoyment of meeting people from a range of age groups at the coffee mornings and day trips was mentioned, as well as having young people take an interest in their lives and experiences and making new friends without having to rely on family for companionship. Older beneficiaries also described an increased confidence in going out on their own and feeling less socially isolated when they were around others on the project, as well as following positive interactions with the friendly volunteer drivers who they could trust.

“[...] even if it's only once a month, to have something to look forward to and you know you're going to meet people and you're going to talk and you're going to laugh, it's good.” – Beneficiary

Older people enjoyed the variety of locations of the activities and that they could easily make their way using the activity's transport, which they were confident to use, unlike public transport. The transport accommodated mobility issues by ensuring there was space for a wheelchair or Zimmer frame, unlike regular public transport. The activity helped beneficiaries' mental health by enabling them to get out of the house and meet new people.

The benefits of the funded project were also felt by those who did not directly take part in the activity. For example, the activity relieved the pressure on family members who would typically be responsible for beneficiaries' transportation.

For staff and volunteers

Staff reported how much they valued connecting with others in the community through their role, which enabled them to meet people who they would not normally get the chance to speak to. One member of staff felt that connecting with a range of different people played a key role in tackling staff, volunteer, and beneficiary loneliness as it encouraged conversations between people with different perspectives and life experiences.

The activity helped staff and volunteers identify their own strengths as well as gain new skills. Staff noted how volunteers were supported as they navigated new and sometimes challenging situations which tested their new skills in a real-world environment. One volunteer felt they gained valuable transferable skills, as well as useful personal skills, such as empathy and patience. One member of staff felt they learned what to consider when supporting people with complex needs, such as taking into account talking aids and memory loss in risk assessments for day trips.

“[...] you learn these small skills and that is something you can take even in your personal life, even in your work life really” – Volunteer

One young volunteer felt that their role provided a way to make friends with other local volunteers and helped them get to know the area better as the activity took beneficiaries to various locations nearby. They also noted that the intergenerational aspect of the activity was a helpful way to learn from different people with varied life experiences.

Case study 5: Nidderdale Befriending Through Transport Pilot Project

Nidderdale Befriending Through Transport Pilot Project, was delivered by Nidderdale Community Transport and funded by Community Transport Association (CTA) as one of eighteen pilot projects. The project focused on providing cars and minibuses, predominantly supporting older people and disabled people living in rural North Yorkshire.

The project provided a community bus service to connect people experiencing social isolation and loneliness with each other and the environment, through regular trips to local towns and activities, along with day trips to places of interest.

Overview of the project

The beneficiary target group was local people living in rural North Yorkshire who were experiencing social isolation and loneliness. In particular, those in need of transport due to the lack of public transport available and expensive taxis. The activity was aimed at older people, but also supported disabled people and additional needs from a range of age groups.

The community transport service involved a 14-passenger, wheelchair-accessible minibus driven by volunteers and the project coordinator. The service provided transport to places such as medical appointments, work, and community groups including a social hub for people with eyesight problems who were unable to use public transport.

“We’ve aimed it really at vulnerable and isolated people in the area [...]. Tackling loneliness is really what it’s been about, and it’s getting people out and showing them what we can do” – Staff

The project also aimed to tackle loneliness by providing organised group trips, which encouraged socialising on the bus and at the destination. Demand for services was slower during winter due to the weather, but significantly increased during the warmer months, which meant more buses were provided by similar organisations in the area such as Boroughbridge and District Community Care, to accommodate the larger numbers of people attending and keep the costs low.

One new staff member, who had worked in a similar role elsewhere, was able to shadow the drivers on regular Nidderdale CTA trips as part of the training for the project. Training in first aid, driving skills, and use of the accessibility ramp for the minibus were provided for volunteers.

Key Findings

- Nidderdale provided beneficiaries with an opportunity to expand their social circles within the local area and make more connections through the community bus, which added more variety to their days.
- Some beneficiaries felt motivation to visit old friends they hadn’t seen in a long time because of accessing Nidderdale transport. As a result, these trips reduced feelings of loneliness as before engaging with the activity, some beneficiaries rarely made journeys outside their home, due to anxiety, lack of confidence and accessibility concerns.
- Nidderdale community bus has brought a sense of ease and autonomy to beneficiaries about being able to make journeys and attend necessary appointments without having to rely on family or friends for lifts or public transport and taxis.
- Staff and volunteers received necessary training for making the minibus accessible for those with disabilities including how to use the disability ramp along with first aid training.
- The Nidderdale project meant that beneficiaries’ families noticed a positive change in their wellbeing and felt grateful their loved ones had found a way of travelling more independently.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

Beneficiaries felt the project had enabled them to travel to new places and access services, increasing their confidence about going out more, and providing a sense of autonomy as they did not have to rely on family members for lifts anymore. By contrast, the existing public transport in the area was viewed as unreliable and uncomfortable, while taxis could be prohibitively expensive. The community bus thus enabled journeys to places that were harder to access. The impact was also experienced by young people who had no means of transport, and people in their 40s with learning difficulties who wanted to feel confident about going out without a carer. Beneficiaries shared positive impacts on their mental health and increased motivation to see their friends and attend planned group trips as a result of getting out of the house more and seeing the local scenery. Furthermore, beneficiaries reported reduced feelings of loneliness because of regular contact with others on the bus, in small groups, which created a welcoming atmosphere and fostered more personal conversations.

“The opportunity to [...] get out and about again [...] if you're not well particularly, it's very easy to become even more isolated. [...] It just makes a massive difference to your mental health.” – Beneficiary

Volunteers also reported that the comfort beneficiaries got from these trips gave them the motivation to visit people they had not seen in a long time, which reduced their isolation. The project often shared their expertise and minibuses with similar local transport organisations, keeping the cost low with more spaces available for everyone. Beneficiaries wanted to carry on attending the activity's trips with the new friends they had made but realised there was limited funding.

For staff and volunteers

Volunteer drivers received training in driving skills and using the accessibility ramp. The CTA provided a minibus and, when the groups of people were smaller, the project shared resources with existing services to take beneficiaries out in the community car instead. Getting to know the passengers and chatting together in the bus was enjoyable for volunteers, as this created a sense of community and social connection in the area.

“I wouldn't change anything that we've done so far because it's got us to where we are [...]. We're making connections and getting the word out there all the time, and I think that's great.” – Volunteer

A sense of purpose and direction and increased knowledge of the area which could be passed onto others, enhancing community cohesion, were positive impacts of the activity. Volunteers noted areas that worked less well for them such as unreliable shift slots.

Other perceived outcomes of the activity

Before engaging with the project, beneficiaries reported feeling anxious about going outside and making journeys due to struggling with panic attacks, or lack of confidence after experiencing close friends / relatives' deaths. Volunteers revealed that the beneficiaries they drive are often very socially and geographically isolated, so the transport gave them the opportunity for social interaction with the driver and enabled them to travel to new places.

“The two things that always stick with me are that people are incredibly grateful but basically, they say, 'We just don't know what we'd do without it, and you're the only person I'm actually going to speak to today now, for the rest of the day. That's the last time I'll speak to somebody today'. – Volunteer

Additionally, beneficiaries reported that their families noticed the positive effects on their wellbeing and were pleased that the beneficiary had found a way of travelling more independently and expanding their social circle. Volunteers observed that the social day trips would be more accessible to people with mobility issues or needing assistance with a wheelchair if a chaperone could be funded to help beneficiaries on and off the minibus and at the destination. Such beneficiaries were perceived to be reluctant to ask the driver and therefore self-excluding.

Case study 6: Walking Connects – Stoke-on-Trent

Walking Connects, Stoke-on-Trent, was one of four Walking Connects pilots delivered by Living Streets in different locations across the North West of England. These areas were selected due to their high levels of deprivation and loneliness, as well as low levels of walking.

The activities engaged adults aged 50+ to participate in walking groups, and train to become volunteer walk leaders and community street reviewers, which involved surveying the local walking environment. The aim of the walking groups was to improve participants' social connections, reduce loneliness, and improve their physical and mental health. Street reviewing aimed to identify, report, and thereby help to remove barriers to walking in local streets.

Overview of the project

Beneficiaries' needs included increasing social connections, alleviating loneliness, and a desire to walk more. Many beneficiaries wanted to join the walking groups for the opportunity of meeting others, as well as to be more physically active. Some beneficiaries had physical health conditions and/or limited mobility and lacked the confidence to walk alone.

A Project Coordinator engaged beneficiaries through outreach work in the local area, to advertise the weekly walking group. The walking group aimed to tackle loneliness by providing an opportunity for the walkers to meet and socialise regularly, both during and after the walk when they often went to a café together. For some weeks, the project coordinator organised activities to take place in the café after the walk, such as a singing or origami workshop. This allowed the group to extend the social occasion by doing something of interest together.

"There's something about walking that's – it kind of just happens and that connection happens. You don't have to say, 'I was feeling isolated or lonely'." - Staff

Members of the walking group were also offered training to become volunteer walk leaders and lead walking groups themselves. In addition, some were trained to carry out street reviewing, to identify barriers to walking on local pathways.

Key Findings

- The walking groups provided beneficiaries with opportunities for regular social connection with others, as they talked and built friendships as they walked.
- This opportunity to socialise reduced beneficiaries' feelings of loneliness and increased their confidence to engage in other social opportunities. Friendships made in the groups continued outside of the weekly walks, with some beneficiaries going on holiday together.
- The walks were short, on level terrain, and moved at a slow pace, with a walk leader at the front of the group and a backstop at the back. This enabled disabled people and people with limited mobility to feel confident that they could do the walks.
- The group environment also gave beneficiaries a sense of physical safety, allowing them to feel more confident about walking than they would have done if they had been alone.
- By making walking accessible for those who had previously lacked confidence to walk alone, some beneficiaries had also started to walk more in other situations, outside of the walking group.
- The walk leader training and street reviewing training increased volunteers' understanding of how to remove barriers and improve access to walking for disabled people.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

Beneficiaries reported that the walking groups enabled them to walk more than they would otherwise have done. This impact was attributed both to the regular opportunity to walk in a supportive group, and the activity giving them the confidence to walk more regularly and further distances on their own outside of the group. A staff member reported that men in particular fed back that they found it easier to talk to others while walking side-by-side. People with physical disabilities or health conditions found the short walks at a slow pace and on level ground enabled them to access the benefits of walking. Similarly, the support and friendliness of the group encouraged people with mental health conditions to engage with the groups. This enabled them the benefit from the social interaction and exercise, which, in turn, improved their mental health and wellbeing.

Beneficiaries reported positive impacts of the walking groups on their social connectedness, which had alleviated feelings of loneliness. They explained that having a group of friendly people in the walking group, who they got to know over the weeks of regular walks and who would expect to see them on each walk, gave them something to look forward to each week. Beneficiaries enjoyed chatting to the other walkers, and they shared their experiences of loneliness and mental health issues with each other, providing mutual emotional support and social connection. The friendships made in the walking group extended to outside of the weekly walks, as some members met up for other social occasions, including a group of walkers who went on holiday together.

“Although we’re getting good pleasure in walking, it is nice to meet people from all walks of life and just share experiences and talk [...] You do get to know people and we’ve got a mutual interest. We’re not on our own.” - Beneficiary

Some beneficiaries noted that prior to the walking group, their level of social isolation and loneliness and poor mental health had been severe, and they directly attributed the walking group to a significant improvement in their feelings of social connectedness and mental health. They also enjoyed being outdoors in nature when walking in the park and found this had a positive impact on their overall sense of wellbeing. Beneficiaries also reported walking more on their own outside the group walks, for example to the shops, post office, or to a local park.

For staff and volunteers

Staff and volunteers also benefitted from the social interaction that the walking groups provided. Volunteers in particular found the social support of others in the walking groups had alleviated their loneliness and improved their mental health. This was a key motivation for them to volunteer as walk leaders; because they wanted the groups and their beneficial impacts to continue.

Moreover, the walk leader and street reviewer training provided staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills to understand the needs of and support disabled people who faced barriers to walking, to help them to overcome these barriers. As an example, the walk leader training highlighted how volunteer walk leaders should ensure the group walked at a pace suitable for disabled people, with a short cut option for those who needed it, a leader and a backstop, and trained volunteers in how to help disabled people cross roads safely.

“Because of the physical conditions of some of the people, I always do the walk that I’m going to lead first. There’s not many inclines, it’s quite a flat park and there are a couple of people in mobility scooters and it’s fine for them.” – Volunteer

The street reviewer training gave volunteers the skills to understand and identify barriers to walking for people with limited mobility and disabilities, such as wide road junctions, uneven pavements, and a lack of benches.

Case study 7: Walking Connects – Lancashire

Walking Connects, Lancashire, was one of four Walking Connects pilots delivered by Living Streets in different locations across the North West of England. These areas were selected due to their high levels of deprivation and loneliness, as well as low levels of walking. Activities delivered included walking groups, volunteer walk leader training and support to carry out street reviews, which assess the suitability of local pathways for walking.

Overview of the project

The target group of beneficiaries was adults aged 50+ who might be experiencing loneliness and social isolation and low levels of physical activity.

A Project Coordinator engaged beneficiaries through outreach work in the local area, to advertise a weekly walking group. The walking group aimed to tackle loneliness by providing an opportunity for the walkers to meet regularly. It also aimed to provide people with limited mobility, or who otherwise would not walk regularly, with an opportunity to do so.

"[The aim of Walking Connects was] trying to reduce loneliness and isolation, using walking as a catalyst to do so." – Staff

Members of the walking group were also offered training to become walk leaders, and were supported to carry out street reviewing, where they walked around their local streets and highlighted barriers to walking in a report that was sent to the local authority. Although there were walking groups in the area before, Walking Connects set up the first groups that also trained volunteer walk leaders.

Staff and volunteers received training in how to carry out a street review, which provided them with new knowledge and skills to understand the needs of disabled people and the barriers they face to walking on local pathways.

Key Findings

- The walking groups provided beneficiaries with an opportunity to make friends and socialise with other members of the group, which increased their social connections.
- The weekly social contact in the walking group reduced beneficiaries' feelings of loneliness, as they had a group of friendly, supportive people who they could meet up with regularly.
- The walking group provided a safe, supportive environment for beneficiaries to do a short, gentle walk on level terrain. This made walking more accessible to those with disabilities or limited mobility and gave them confidence to walk more than they would have done alone.
- Some beneficiaries felt more confident and motivated to walk more in their everyday lives outside of the walking group as a result of having participated in the walking group.
- The walk leader training gave volunteers an increased understanding of the needs of disabled people and how to support disabled people to go on short, safe, accessible walks.
- The walk leader training had a unique focus on short, accessible walks in urban environments. This was seen as a rare but much-needed focus for walking groups, to make walking more accessible for disabled people or limited mobility who cannot travel to rural areas to go on longer walks.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

Beneficiaries reported that the walking groups had given them the opportunity to walk more, increasing their confidence and motivation to walk more outside of the walking groups. The group environment was felt by both beneficiaries and staff to give the walkers a greater sense of safety and security, which encouraged them to walk more than they would have done alone. By walking more, beneficiaries' confidence in their ability to walk grew, which in turn prompted them to walk more to other places outside the group, such as to the doctors or the supermarket. Moreover, the walks reminded beneficiaries how enjoyable walking is, which also motivated them to walk more often.

"Lots of people have said that because they've been attending a walking group, that they now feel more confident in terms of walking by themselves [...] to the doctor's or walk to the supermarket" – Staff

Furthermore, beneficiaries attributed positive improvements to their physical and mental health to the walking groups. They reported significant benefits to their wellbeing and attributed these to the social connections made with others in the walking group, who were reported to be very friendly and emotionally supportive of each other, and to enjoyment of being out in nature doing physical activity. The enjoyment they got from talking to others in the walking groups gave some beneficiaries the motivation and confidence to pursue other opportunities to socialise with new people. Some beneficiaries explained that before joining the walking group they had been living with poor mental health. They felt that without the walking groups and the social connection they provided, their mental health would have continued to deteriorate.

"It's just the gentle communication with other people on the walks [...] It helped me get over the initial downward spiral [...] I was getting very concerned about my mental condition. Your mind begins to go [...] I was beginning to forget everything[...] It's definitely improved because going on the walk, you have to be more positive, you have to think about the other people and I think because of that, it stimulates those parts of the mind. ...the walks started me on to other activities like ten-pin bowling, which I would never have thought of going and doing"
– Beneficiary

For staff and volunteers

Secondary beneficiaries of the walk leader training included organisations which ran their own walks and sent their own volunteers to the Living Streets walk leader training. The training allowed the organisations' volunteers to provide walks for other groups, such as elderly attendees at a day care centre. Representatives of these organisations were of the view that the training plugged a gap in provision, as it was the only walk leader training available in the area, and the only training on leading urban walks that were accessible for disabled people. One organisation noted that their volunteer-led walks were typically provided in rural settings, but the training in short walks in more urban areas for people with limited mobility and/or disabilities provided a new set of skills to volunteers, so that they were able to lead walks for people who might have otherwise faced barriers to engaging with a walking group.

"The training has been a godsend to us because without it we'd never have been able to train those two volunteers, which means the day care clients wouldn't have been able to get out and do their walks." –
Secondary beneficiary representing volunteers

Case study 8: Let's Chat – Community Transport Group

Let's Chat was an initiative by Transport for West Midlands to tackle loneliness through transport. The activity was delivered by Community Transport Group (CTG) in four locations: Coventry, Dudley, North East Birmingham, and West Bromwich.

Let's Chat was a 12-month initiative starting in September 2022 that aimed to connect people and their community through public transport to reduce loneliness. It did so through three strands: local community hubs situated in bus stations, mobile units, and subsidised transport for groups.

Overview of the project

Let's Chat targeted people who felt or were at risk of loneliness or social isolation, especially older people, people with mental health issues, and learning disabilities. The activity offered a warm place for them to come for a chat and a hot drink, as well as subsidised transport to and from community groups, so that service users could feel connected and have more social interactions.

"People feel lonely, so they tend to come to us for a nice - just a little talk. That's what we offer really, a chat and a hot drink and somewhere nice and warm where they can come and sit down, yes, and have a chat with us." – Volunteer

Let's Chat advertised on social media, but the main ways in which they were able to reach the community were through leaflets (for the mobile units) and by greeting and inviting people walking past the community hubs located in bus stations.

Staff and volunteers reported that the main needs they could not meet were related to transport. For economic reasons, as part of the CTG Let's Chat activity, the subsidised transport was only offered to groups, which meant that most individual requests had to be denied. Moreover, helping beneficiaries in terms of bus routes and schedules was reportedly discouraged, as it was outside of the scope of the activity, but staff and volunteers would help if possible.

Despite this barrier, there was agreement among staff and volunteers that Let's Chat offered a unique service in the community as there were no expectations of beneficiaries or administrative/training requirements to engage with the activity, and this encouraged take up and engagement. The beneficiaries interviewed for the case study had all interacted with the community hubs only.

Key Findings

- Beneficiaries felt that the activity alleviated feelings of loneliness by giving them a positive reason to get out of their house and something to look forward to.
- Beneficiaries reported that Let's Chat helped them to build social connections with other beneficiaries, but also supported them in their social interactions outside of the activity by helping them being more sociable.
- Beneficiaries mentioned that the activity had a positive impact on their feelings and made them happy, as well as feeling stimulated by the conversation, puzzles, and activities provided by Let's Chat.
- While the beneficiaries interviewed did not use the subsidised transport provided by Let's Chat, the activity was still an opportunity for them to walk to or take public transport to the community hubs and they felt confident in doing so.
- Staff and volunteers reported good job satisfaction, as well as developing a rapport with the beneficiaries and Let's Chat having positive impacts on their relations outside the activity.
- Staff and volunteers also mentioned an increased awareness of the different services they could signpost beneficiaries to to help meet the needs Let's Chat could not meet (e.g., employment or mental health support).
- Locating the hubs in bus stations made the service highly visible and easy to get to.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

Beneficiaries felt that the activity helped alleviate their feelings of loneliness by giving them an opportunity to get out of the house and chat with other people or play games at the community hub. It also gave them something to look forward to on days that the community hub was closed, or they couldn't come due to inclement weather. Moreover, beneficiaries expressed that going to the community hub improved their mood and made them happy, with one beneficiary considering that the positive feelings also led to improved health and lowered blood pressure. Beneficiaries highlighted the importance of the activity in building social connections with other service users, and how the activity also helped them become more sociable outside of it, for example by being more present in conversation with friends or by helping their interactions with customers at work.

"[...] going there changed my mind. I feel belonging with people instead of staying at home. Get there, I'm happy, I'm in the midst of people." – Beneficiary

As the beneficiaries interviewed only interacted with the community hub, with many living within walking distance, there is limited evidence that the activity had any impact on their feelings about travel or their travel behaviours. Beneficiaries who took public transport to the hub were familiar with the local bus routes and appreciated the hub's location in the bus terminus. One beneficiary interacted for the first time with Let's Chat as the activity supported them with finding the correct bus route and timetable to go to a medical appointment in a different town. They felt more confident going to the hospital and returned to the hub the following week for a chat and a cup of tea.

For staff and volunteers

Staff and volunteers reported good job satisfaction, which was also reflected in improved mental health and decreased anxiety. They also mentioned that the activity allowed them to develop rapport with beneficiaries and to make new friends, through the community and mobile hub or outside of work. One staff member also mentioned that the activity encouraged them to start a social group outside work to meet more people in their community.

"I feel like with Let's Chat I've met different people, different kinds of ages of people, different kinds of mentalities of people. Some with mental health, some with disabilities, some elderly pensioners. But I've made a lot of friends." – Volunteer

Staff and volunteers also reported the importance of the training they received on a variety of topics, such as suicide prevention, dementia support, mental health support, as well as transport related training. They also appreciated the opportunity to discover all the existing support in the community through the different leaflets that were on offer for beneficiaries, which the staff and volunteers were then able to refer service users to.

Other perceived outcomes of the activity

Staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries were all very clear on the importance of the activity, especially the hubs, in the local community, but felt that the activity still needed more time to reach its full potential and impact on beneficiaries. The location of the hubs in bus stations made them visible and easy to reach for bus passengers.

"On the community, it's a needed project. Still the project hasn't reached its potential yet, so we haven't, we're not even close to peaking. People are just starting to understand what the project is about and how the project can help them." – Staff member

Staff members and volunteers also highlighted that as Let's Chat could easily signpost and refer beneficiaries to different services, beneficiaries did not need to visit all the services individually in person to find the support they required. Moreover, as the activity offered a variety of workshops in collaboration with other organisations (e.g., electricity and water companies, local council, NHS, and employment agencies), this had additional perceived outcomes for the beneficiaries, such as increased confidence in using technology (e.g., computers and email), and increased awareness of available services.

Case study 9: Let's Chat – Shencare Community Transport

Let's Chat was an initiative led by Transport for West Midlands, which partnered with Community Transport Group, Walsall Community Transport, and Shencare Community Transport to deliver the activities. This case study focusses on the activity delivered by Shencare Community Transport, located in South West Birmingham.

Let's Chat was a 12-month initiative starting in September 2022, which aimed to connect people and their community through public transport to reduce loneliness. It did so through two separate strands: mobile hubs and subsidised transport.

Overview of the project

Let's Chat targeted people who were lonely or at risk of loneliness by offering them a place to go. To do so, Shencare offered subsidised door-to-door transport to take beneficiaries to services that they needed to access e.g., shopping or to visit day centres. The transport could be booked by individuals who could use the service with their friends. The mobile hubs activity offered people a warm place to have a chat and a cup of tea (in converted buses that were parked in various advertised locations). The mobile hubs were used to invite people for a chat or to register them for the subsidised transport.

Beneficiaries were either already familiar with Shencare as service users or heard about the activity by word-of-mouth. Staff members reported that an important challenge had been reaching beneficiaries who did not go out of the house, as they were usually able to reach people by being in the places they already went to (e.g., day centres or shopping centres). Despite this challenge, the activity gained popularity and staff members mentioned that it was now difficult to keep up with the demand.

"I didn't realise [...] that there was such a demand for the elderly [...] to get out and about and how stuck they were if they can't [...] manage public transport, and they can't afford taxis [...] so far to me, I think it's been a success doing this pilot scheme." – Staff member

The Let's Chat pilot funded the pilot mobile hubs and a scaling up of the existing subsidised transport minibus service from Shencare. This was well received by the beneficiaries, who felt that similar services offered by other providers were not as reliable as Let's Chat. Beneficiaries were extremely satisfied with the service, the ease of communication, and the friendly drivers and hub staff.

Key Findings

- Beneficiaries reported that the activity allowed them to get out of the house and go on social outings, which for one beneficiary was the only time they would leave their home.
- Beneficiaries mentioned that Let's Chat allowed them to build social connections, both with the other users and with the drivers, who were part of the social aspect of their outing.
- Shencare's buses were perceived by beneficiaries as more reliable, cheaper, and safer than other alternatives (e.g., public transport or taxis).
- Beneficiaries felt that the activity gave them greater autonomy and independence and allowed them not to rely on family members for activities such as grocery shopping.
- According to staff members, beneficiaries who used the mobile hubs also saw their mental health and confidence increase through chats and signposting. In some cases, the beneficiaries went back to the activity to update or thank them.
- Staff members mentioned that helping people was good for their own mental health and reported good job satisfaction as well as increased workload.
- The activity reduced the burden on other services in the area, by taking beneficiaries to the organisations instead of the organisations having to visit the beneficiaries at home.
- The activity increased the number of people going to day centres and similar social activities.

What were the perceived outcomes of the funded activity?

For beneficiaries

Beneficiaries interviewed had used the subsidised transport to go on weekly outings (such as shopping or to day centres), which for some was their only outing of the week (outside of medical appointments) and something to look forward to. The activity was therefore seen as a social outing that allowed them to see their friends, which they felt also had a positive impact on their mental health, even if the main purpose was only to go grocery shopping.

“They stop me being very depressed. [...] Loneliness is an awful thing, it really, really is, and this stops people being lonely.” – Beneficiary

Beneficiaries also highlighted how much safer they felt using Shencare’s buses compared to public transport. The service offered by Shencare was also seen as more reliable than other local subsidised transport such as a ring and ride service. Other benefits of the activity included that there were fewer people than on public transport, and the service was cheaper than having to take a taxi. The beneficiaries also mentioned that the drivers were careful, helpful (e.g., carrying their shopping inside and helping them walk up the steps), and part of the social aspect of the trip. The beneficiaries also appreciated the independence and autonomy Let’s Chat offered them, as they enjoyed being able to do their shopping themselves instead of ordering online or having to rely on family members. Staff members also reported that the mobile unit had an important impact on the beneficiaries, by offering them a place to chat, but also by being able to signpost them to the relevant resources, which in turn made them generally more confident and improved their mental health.

For staff

Staff members reported good work satisfaction, albeit also an increase in workload. This could be seen as positive for the drivers, as most of them worked part-time providing school runs and could decide to do additional hours driving for Let’s Chat. Staff also mentioned that helping the beneficiaries and building a rapport with them was also good for their morale.

*“So when you’re helping people you always get a feelgood factor and that’s what it’s given to the staff really”
– Staff member*

As the staff members at Shencare already had extensive experience in the same or similar positions, there was no need to provide them with additional training.

Other perceived outcomes of the activity

Beneficiaries pointed out how Let’s Chat had further impact on people around them, as they did not have to rely on family members to go out. Staff members also highlighted that without the activity people would be stuck at home, as many of them lacked confidence to take public transport either owing to mobility issues or from a residual fear of crowded places following the COVID-19 pandemic, or were unable to afford regular taxis. Let’s Chat also worked with day centres to bring beneficiaries there weekly, which increased the number of people able to attend. Moreover, Let’s Chat was able to remove the burden from other services and organisations (e.g., social services, meals on wheels, or carers) by increasing beneficiaries’ independence and autonomy, and taking them to the services instead of the services having to reach them.

“[...] but it’s taking a weight off other services or social services, carers, meals on wheels that would have to go out to these people’s houses and provide service to them by going there and cooking their lunch as carers would and making sure they’re all right. By us going and taking them to a day centre, the person is at the day centre being looked after.” – Staff member
