

# ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISOLATION AMONG OLDER PEOPLE—LESSONS FROM TALK, EAT, DRINK (TED) EAST LINDSEY

Researchers at the University of Lincoln evaluated a range of interventions aimed at engaging and supporting older people within a rural location. This enabled them to identify effective ways to help combat social isolation and loneliness and determine the social return on investment of Talk, Eat, Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey.

- ➔ Provided a formative and summative evaluation of the two year TED (Talk Eat Drink) in East Lindsey, An Ageing Better Community Lottery Funded project.
- ➔ Highlighted a number of successful approaches to addressing social isolation among older people, including themed group activities, befriending services, opportunities for volunteering and co-design of services, and the establishment of an Age-friendly business
- ➔ Demonstrated that TED delivered £2,418,307 of social value over two years which worked out as a social return on investment of £5.52 per £1 invested.

Age Concern estimates that by 2026 there will be 2 million people over the age of 50 who are experiencing loneliness<sup>1</sup>. Loneliness is fast becoming one of the largest public health challenges with research showing that a lack of social connections can increase the likelihood of an early death by 26%<sup>2</sup>.

In 2015 the National Lottery Community Fund committed £87 million to Ageing Better, a seven year, England wide, programme to help tackle this issue. The programme aimed to support people over 50 who were experiencing, or at risk of, social isolation and loneliness. Lincolnshire YMCA, along with partners from East Lindsey district and across Lincolnshire, were awarded funding for a 2 year project - Talk, East Drink (TED) in East Lindsey. TED was delivered using a

partnership approach, working with local businesses and healthcare professionals to build referrals process and target support to those with greatest need. A 'test and learn' approach provided flexibility to commission new activities and enabled older people to have their say in the design of activities or take part as a volunteer. These included a befriending service, delivery of digital skills training for the over 50s, men only activities and support for new Friendship Groups which developed.



<sup>1</sup>Age UK (2018). *All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life*. Available at [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/loneliness/loneliness-report\\_final\\_2409.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/loneliness/loneliness-report_final_2409.pdf) (Accessed 8/12/21).

<sup>2</sup>Royal College of Nursing (2021). *Recognising loneliness*. Available at <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/public-health/inclusion-health-care/loneliness/recognising-loneliness> (Accessed 8/12/21).

## WHAT DID THE UNIVERSITY DO?

The University of Lincoln team evaluated TED interventions, including an analysis of Social Return on Investment to explore impact and value for money. The formative and summative evaluation took place over 2 years and included interviews and focus groups with participants, and a survey of Age-friendly Businesses.

## WHAT DID THE RESULTS SHOW?

The evaluation showed that TED demonstrated:

**Innovative processes of older person engagement**, including group activities, such as Fitness, Food and Friends which provided an informal environment to engage in exercise and healthy cooking. The Men Do



group engaged older men, a demographic that is shown to be less inclined to socialise.

**Building community capacity**, adding value to Friendship Groups through access to funding, new ideas and the expansion of befriending services.

**The creation of an age-friendly culture**, with opportunities for older people to volunteer and co-design services, and an *Age-friendly Business Scheme* to accredit businesses providing a welcoming environment for older people.

**The importance of 'test and learn'**, in providing flexibility to bring in new delivery partners and rapidly change the form of engagement (e.g. phone calls and support parcels during Covid-19 lockdown)

**A strong social return on investment**, with a creditable *£5.52 of social value for each £1 invested*

**An influence on wider policy**, sharing of best practice with other regions, including the development of an Age-friendly Business Toolkit

Whilst they participated in TED...

30% of people said they felt less socially isolated  
45% reported improvements in wellbeing  
30% increased their participation in social activities

## IMPACT ON POLICY

The TED Evaluation has created an evidence base which has been used by the project team and policy makers to enable them to develop further initiatives and apply for funding to help older people in the region. This has included:

- East Lindsey District Council becoming the UK's first age-friendly district council, introducing a Portfolio Holder for Ageing Better and joining the WHO Global Network of Age Friendly Cities and Communities.<sup>3</sup>
- An agreement for Lincolnshire County Council and East Lindsey District Council to become rural pathfinder partners with the Centre for Ageing Better. This has seen them establish a five year strategic partnership to respond to the opportunities and challenges of an ageing population.
- Results from the evaluation providing further support for initiatives that form part of the Mablethorpe Town Deal, in particular the development of a proposed Campus for Future

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<https://tedineastlindsey.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup>East Lindsey District Council (2022). *East Lindsey becomes part of a Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities*. Available at <https://www.e-lindsey.gov.uk/article/18372/East-Lindsey-becomes-part-of-Global-Network-for-Age-friendly-Cities-and-Communities> (Accessed 10/1/22)