

Strawberry Lane
**Community
Centre**

Telephone 0113 224 3850

www.leeds.gov.uk



0113 279 9292



Don't Call Me Old: working with younger older people

Time to Shine end of project report

August 2022

Summary

Don't Call Me Old(DCMO) was run by Armley Helping Hands(AHH), one of Leeds' Neighbourhood Networks. They worked primarily with people over 65 but were aware the younger older community needed support. AHH recruited a project worker with a wide range of skills, and ran a variety of activity-based groups to encourage younger older people to engage.

The project worked well but AHH discovered that the people who wanted to join in needed more one-to-one support than anticipated, so they were not able to engage large numbers of people.

This report describes the sort of activities they ran, what worked well and looks at some of the outcomes. It also takes a look at the project during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic; Don't Call Me Old played a significant role in crisis response locally and the staff reflected on how having a sense of purpose gave some members a sense of self-worth.

The work they were doing with mainly younger older people means that this report should be read alongside the Time to Shine report [Working with Younger Older People](#).

Don't Call Me Old in numbers

- 298 people took part in Don't Call Me Old between 2018 and 2022, with 115 older people(aged 50+) participating regularly
- Demographic data was collected for 267 people:
 - » 96% were of White British heritage
 - » 3% were of Asian / Asian UK heritage
 - » 1% were of Mixed heritage
 - » 66% identified as male
- Don't Call Me Old was supported by 14 older volunteers (aged 50+) and 3 younger volunteers (aged under 50) who together contributed 2,559 hours to support the project
- 8 case studies and test and learn case studies were written to share the project's learning and experiences



Ethos

Don't Call Me Old had an ambition to develop inclusive services that reflected the aspirations and needs of people aged 50-70. They planned to take a person-centred approach, aiming to develop an outreach system to reach younger older people currently not known to the organisation.

Their approach was to make an early intervention and identify people before they reached crisis point. Using a Community Engagement Worker would help to reduce the number of people who arrived at crisis point. They initially planned to hold evening and weekend sessions, finding younger older people by visiting non-traditional locations: local public houses, working men's clubs, shopping centres, leisure facilities and places of work within the locality.

Working in an area of deprivation (in the bottom 10% of the Index of Multiple Deprivation) they hoped to identify and make connections with people whose circumstances mitigated against the prospect of a healthy and active old age.

Don't Call Me Old aimed to help people to increase their confidence, create better social networks, become involved in activities, and take on new roles in volunteering, or access employment and education.



Activities

Activities were co-produced with the members, and varied throughout the project as preferences changed although the Union Men's Club was a constant throughout.

Union Men's Club

The Men's group ran throughout the project but what they did varied, starting off with ping pong and games nights. The group bonded quickly after they were able to offer support to a local man who was terminally ill. They met weekly on a Monday evening, and also took part in a number of activities and trips which they helped to plan.

Physical activities

Armley has a new sports centre with good facilities. Many members were interested in physical activity; some had chronic health conditions and would benefit from exercise, but people were reluctant to attend on their own. DCMO was able to organise introductory sessions and later found funding to make it possible to pay for a session, making it free for group members. Cost was a serious barrier for those who were unemployed, so this was vital.

The funding also paid for exercise classes and sessions learning about cooking and healthy eating, at the community centre where DCMO was based.

The group went on to try other activities including walking football, and regular walks.



Joining in with other activities.

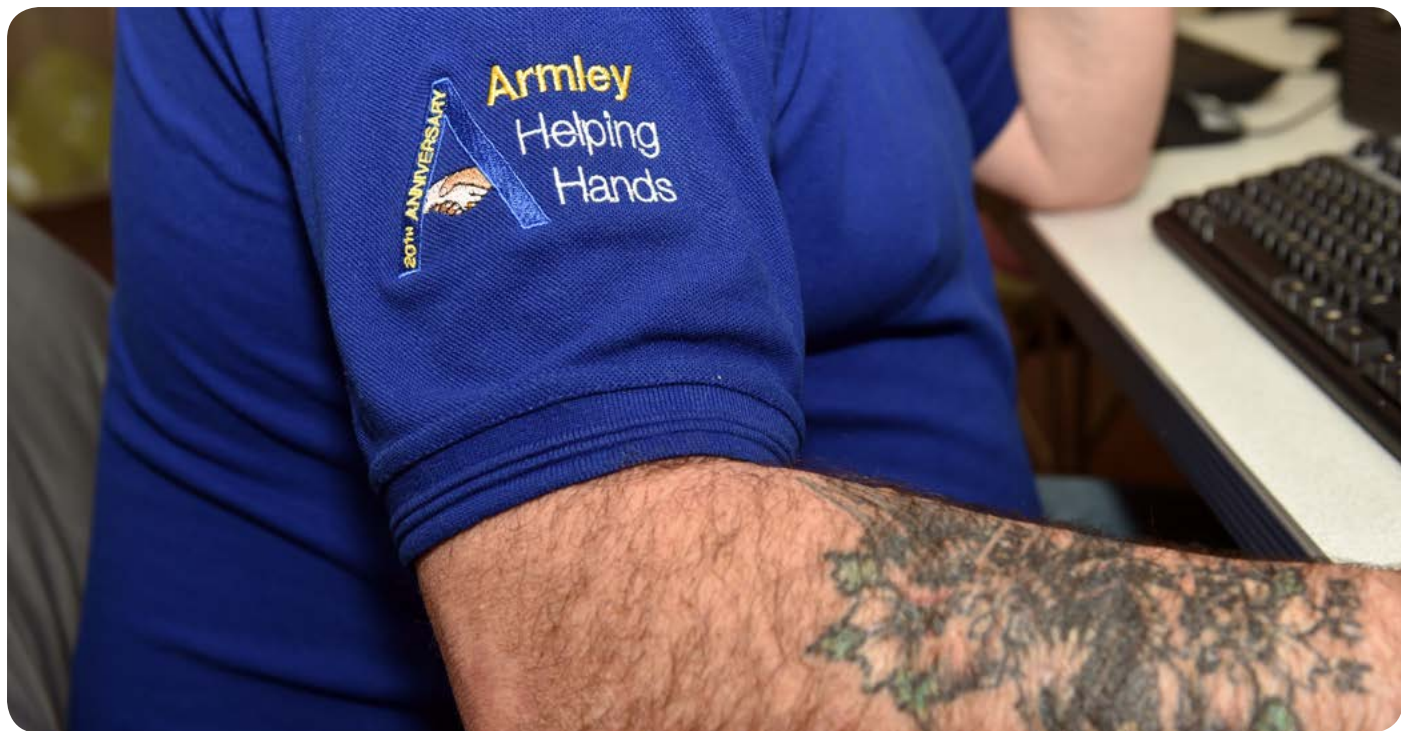
AHH runs all sorts of activities for members, including crafts, walks and outings. DCMO members also suggested and tried lots of different things including canal boat trips, visits to museums, art galleries and parks, garden activities, theatre visits and a choir. Not everyone enjoyed everything, but because they were committed to the group people often engaged and tried new things.

When group members engaged in some of AHH's main activities they were able to offer help and support to older and more frail members who needed help with mobility.

There was an issue for members under pension age as they were often unable to afford activities that involved payment. Time to Shine report [Working with Younger Older People](#) explores this further.

The digital world

Don't Call Me Old quickly got engaged with 100% Digital Leeds and registered as a hub with the Good Things Foundation. They offered training to people, and were asked by local housing officers to set up a second session. Some members were keen to help out as volunteers. For one woman, who was able to become proficient quickly despite being told by family members she was 'too thick' to learn, it proved a turning point for her self-confidence as it became apparent she was able to support others to learn.



The food bank

Don't Call Me Old members identified a need for a local food bank. The project workers supported the group to set one up in the community centre. Volunteers cleared the space and did the required training with the Trussell Trust resulting in a once a week foodbank. The skills they gained proved useful as AHH took on the role of a Community Hub during lockdowns.

Project adaptations following lockdowns and pandemic responses

Leeds City Council looked to identify a third sector organisation in each ward with the capacity to find and support vulnerable people during the pandemic. Armley Helping Hands was one. Don't Call Me Old volunteers were able to take on befriending calls and food bank deliveries (as described in the case study below). Not everyone in the group was able to volunteer but those who did were quick to support others.

As things gradually returned to face-to-face services DCMO staff were quick to offer support their to members, many of whom had struggled with isolation and anxiety.

In order to support people struggling with their mental health coming out of the pandemic, the DCMO worker set up The Listening Room, a safe space where people could talk to a trained listener in a non-judgemental environment. They 'staffed' it with AHH staff, volunteers trained in Mental Health First Aid and the local mental health social prescriber who was able to use their in-depth knowledge and connections and ease access to services.



DCMO linked up with a local volunteer group [Hookers & Clickers \(Do it for Charity\)](#), by organising transport to and support at the weekly gathering of this friendly intergenerational knitting and crochet group. AHH was able to help the volunteer run Hookers and Clickers group to apply for funding and this meant DCMO members had another place to engage. Hookers and Clickers was able to introduce a Health and wellbeing programme including chair-based exercise sessions at their meetups. Together AHH are able to support the craft group's older members and the interested DCMO members can enjoy meeting new people, feeling valued and undertaking an activity with purpose.

Other activities continued in a modified way. For example, DCMO continued to offer digital support through one-to-one sessions with a volunteer digital champion, to help those still experiencing barriers to getting online. Activities restarted with walking, and one-to-one sessions before classes restarted. They worked closely with Active Leeds to engage people in activity.

Legacy

The Don't Call Me old project has had a clear influence on its parent organisation, Armley Helping Hands. Working through DCMO has helped AHH see their local community in a different way and enabled them to build partnerships with different organisations. The project has enabled AHH and their community partners to recognise the value of early intervention with people aged 50+, in the pre-retirement phase of people's lives. Investment in the project through Time to Shine has enabled them to think about the bigger picture in terms of ensuring social wellbeing for decades into the future.

AHH are continuing to provide person-centred support to their members aged over 50, although they no longer have an outreach worker to proactively engage new members. In the medium term they will continue to seek funding to extend the project. The involvement of the younger older people and the fostering of wider partnerships has built community spirit and created a sense of belonging, a sense of place, and a sense of self-worth and given AHH a stronger voice with decision-makers in the city.

Learning

- Intersectionality was a strong theme. People were often referred to the project as the result of another issue which has led to them feeling a loss of confidence - ill health, bereavement, redundancy, all striking at a time when it was likely the person would also be feeling the effects of ageism.
- Staff at AHH learned that working with this age group could be tricky. They were used to working with much older people who might be frail but who had a good level of resilience. They found that this age group lacked the resilience of older members, perhaps as a result of the multiple problems which had brought them to the group. The most resilient people in the 50-70 age group would not choose to engage with an older people's organisation because they still have good personal networks through work or family.
- The project worker would spend a lot of time working with someone to increase their skills and confidence. This would often also pay off for the organisation as people were then very happy to engage as volunteers through co-produced activity - for example, the food bank.



How a project stepped up

This was first shared as a blog at the end of April 2020 and sums up the value of the project to the group members.

“During my time running the Don’t Call Me Old project based at [Armley Helping Hands](#), I have had many moments of joy, happiness and pride in the amazing people who take part in it.

The volunteers, who may have travelled a great distance in their personal lives and battled many issues, including abuse and mental health problems, have truly been an inspiration to members and to me.

This year has presented a challenge no one could ever have expected. For the first time in its 25-year history, Armley Helping Hands was forced to stop its delivery to our vulnerable members.

We decided to ring them all – a mammoth task. It took nearly two days for me to contact the members of the Don’t Call Me Old project, and I realised I needed a better way to do this.

I am amazingly lucky to have a cohort of volunteers who give above and beyond what is asked of them. I asked four of them a simple question: would they be willing to call a group of ten members each to offer a befriending service. All the volunteers said they would love to help.

Our members were keen to take part, and let me share some basic information. With ground rules in place for everyone, phone calls were soon being made.

What no one was prepared for was the amount of calls we received (and still do) from people who were self-isolating, or were in one of the protected categories, and couldn't go out of their house.

We run a food bank as part of the Don't Call Me Old project. Using our stocks to deliver around 50 food parcels, I soon had to arrange collection of supplies from local closed food banks. This was over a ton of food – a huge challenge to move. We were then offered food from other agencies, but only if we could pick it up.

I asked some of our other volunteers to come and help staff – realistically the only way we could continue to operate. With gloves and masks provided by the council, and everyone given thorough guidance regarding social distancing and hygiene within the centre, we arranged tables and stacked the food to allow us to pick the food bundles.

Over a month into the crisis and we are still receiving food from different suppliers, which we sort and hand out to people who are struggling. We're averaging over 400 food bundles, on top of our regular weekly food bank, which currently deals with over 30 tickets a session.

My role has changed immensely to more of a warehouse managing role, ensuring stock collection, rotation and distribution!

None of this work would be possible without our AMAZING volunteers, who have really stepped up to the mark and made all the work we are currently doing possible.

When this project closes I will consider myself blessed to have met people who put others ahead of themselves, turning up for work with a cheery disposition no matter what they are facing in their own personal lives. They have so much pride and dignity when they put on the Don't Call Me Old shirts.

To all the volunteers: a massive and heartfelt thanks not only from me but all the members and clients who you help on a daily basis.


Mick Howard

Armley Helping Hands

Contact us

To find out more about Armley Helping Hands go to their [Facebook](#) page

Leeds Older People's Forum Joseph's Well, Suite C24 Leeds LS3 1AB

 0113 2441697

 hello@opforum.org.uk

 www.opforum.org.uk

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