

Connect Hackney Community Conversations

Social isolation and loneliness among Hackney over 50s

We are recruiting local organisations to host community conversations on the topic of social isolation and loneliness, with a focus on people aged 50-plus. Bursaries of up to £500 are available for discussion groups with a minimum of 15 participants at least 70% of whom must be aged 50 or over, or for a series of one-to-one interviews.

What is Connect Hackney?

Connect Hackney is part of the Big Lottery Fund's Ageing Better programme, which is aimed at reducing and preventing social isolation among people aged 50 and over. The programme has a significant research and evaluation element – we want to understand the different interventions that help older people to stay connected and active in their communities in ways that suit them.

This may mean increasing people's knowledge about what's on locally, helping older people use the internet to keep in touch with relatives, or building their confidence to join group activities. Or it may mean helping people to volunteer or get involved with meetings to influence services for older people. By testing different approaches we will gather evidence that shows what works, what doesn't and why. We want to inform policy and approaches to social isolation at local and national levels.

What is the difference between social isolation and loneliness?

There is no set definition of these terms but we understand social isolation to mean having few social connections. This means only having contact with friends, family or neighbours once a week, or even less, and not participating in the kind of activities that mean spending time with others, such as sports, arts groups etc. Loneliness is not simply being alone – it is feeling sad or unhappy about being alone.

Why are we holding these community conversations?

The success of our programme depends on us developing a good understanding of ageing in Hackney and how it affects people's lives. These conversations will help us learn more about how older people feel about socialising, what they enjoy doing and what barriers they face that stop them having the social



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and community life they want. Hearing from local older people will also challenge any assumptions we may have about their social habits.

By talking to older people we will be better able to identify the range of ways that people aged 50-plus experience ageing and their connections with others. It will help us to find out what ideas older people themselves have about how to improve their quality of life and have more opportunities to spend time with others. It's essential that we hear from older people themselves, as research shows that their involvement increases the likelihood of developing projects and interventions that really work for them – although this doesn't necessarily mean developing projects that are solely for older people.

Target groups

We are particularly keen to hear from groups working with **men, carers, LGBT+ people, the Turkish and Kurdish communities** and people from other **black and minority ethnic communities**, as these groups have been under-represented in our work and also in national research on isolation and loneliness. We are also keen to hear from organisations working in **Hackney Wick, King's Park ward** (covering Millfields, Clapton Park and Kingsmead) and **Haggerston**, as our research shows the population of these areas is at high risk of social isolation.

Risk factors for social isolation

Research has consistently identified a set of factors that put people at risk of being or becoming socially isolated: living on a low income, self-reported ill health or disability, having a caring responsibility, being from an ethnic minority, not living with a partner and not owning a home. People experiencing "transitional life stages" – divorce, bereavement or retirement – are also at increased risk of isolation.

What will we do with the information we gather?

The issues and ideas raised in our community conversations will be combined with other information – census data, national research on social isolation and the views of other stakeholders, including colleagues from the public sector and community groups. We will bring all these perspectives together to develop the Connect Hackney approach to reducing loneliness and social isolation. This includes identifying key areas of work such as the communities we want to work in, the types of projects and interventions we would like to commission and the geographical areas we should prioritise.

Facilitating honest conversations

Talking about isolation and loneliness can be difficult and there is no single approach that will work for all people. The Campaign to End Loneliness has developed some guidance on how best to approach the topic, including these points:

- Have an understanding of what loneliness is – do some research on the topic
- Don't make assumptions about what older people can and can't do
- Empathise – imagine what it's like to live with their experiences and worldview
- Be honest and genuine – don't be patronising
- Be respectful
- Have a warm, non-judgmental demeanour
- Actively listen to what is being said

What is a 'community conversation'?

A community conversation is a discussion group or series of one-to-one interviews – whichever is most appropriate for the client group – that allows members of the community to share their knowledge and experience on a set topic. They will be structured around a series of open-ended questions that we have designed to enable participants to share their experiences and ideas relating to social isolation. The events should be informal, accessible and non-judgmental. We will ask for a report on the event, for which we will provide a template. The report should not contain personal details of the attendees nor should it attribute comments to particular individuals.

Community Conversation questions

These are the questions we would like you to ask in your group discussion:

- 1) How often do you meet people/socialise/get together with people at the moment? *(Use whichever form of words seems best for your client group)*
- 2) Are you involved in any social activities at the moment? What are they and what would you like to do?
- 3) Would you like more opportunities to meet people at community events like street parties or other social activities? Are there other kinds of events or activities you'd like to see organised?
- 4) Has your social life changed as you've got older? Why do you think this is? *(Please draw out what makes it easier or harder for participants to socialise)*
- 5) What activities did you enjoy as a child? Do you still enjoy these things?
- 6) How do you find out about social activities or events?
- 7) Do you use the internet to keep in touch with people or to find out about social activities or other services? If not, why not?
- 8) Do you know any isolated people? What makes them isolated?
- 9) Is there anything else you'd like to share about staying socially connected in Hackney as you get older?
- 10) Have you heard of Connect Hackney before? How did you hear about it?

How can your organisation take part?

Firstly, please note the following requirements:

- 1) Each discussion group must have at least 15 participants
- 2) At least 70% of participants must be aged 50 or over
- 3) At least 80% of participants must be Hackney residents
- 4) You will need to provide evidence of attendance by completing a simple register
- 5) You will need to write up the findings of the discussion into a report of approximately 1,000 words (we will provide a template)

Please be aware that a member of the Connect Hackney team may attend some of the group discussions, primarily as an observer – this will be agreed in advance with successful organisations.

Information about the process

The conversations will need to take place **during the last two weeks in September** and you will receive the funds once we have received a satisfactory report and evidence of participation. The deadline for submitting the report of the conversation is 5pm Thursday 5 October. In your application, you will need to state how much you are applying for and what costs the funding will cover – for example, room hire, transport costs or refreshments. For further information or if you have any questions, please contact Judy on 020 7923 1962 or email judy@connecthackney.org.uk.

Apply to host a conversation

Please email your completed form to Kim-Lien Ong, Connect Hackney's programme support administrator, on kim-lien@connecthackney.org.uk by **5pm Thursday 7 September**. We will let successful applicants know by 5.30pm Tuesday 12 September.

Unfortunately, we are working to a tight schedule and we cannot consider your application if it is not received by the deadline.