

The impact of church-based initiatives for older people



Research Report
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“Whilst old age is a clear cause for celebration, it is also crucial to recognise that Britain’s rapidly ageing society offers a number of serious short and long term challenges...”¹

These challenges are particularly reflected in our projected demographic pattern - by the year 2024 one in five people will be of pensionable age. While there is a clear role for Government, and a clear role for charities, there is no substitute for community. Issues of housing, finance, care, social isolation and loneliness are huge areas of challenge for many of those in older years, and the Government cannot tackle them alone.

Poverty in the older years can be traced to being affected by poverty earlier in life and exacerbated by age-related issues. The Centre for Social Justice¹ outlines four key indicators to help clarify the issues affecting the poorest older people - money, housing, loneliness and social exclusion.

AgeUK² states the following:

- For the first time in history, there are 11 million people aged 65 or over in the UK;
- 3.8 million of those aged 65+ live alone;
- It is predicted that by 2041 there will be a shortfall of 250,000 intense carers;
- Latest estimates suggest 1.3 million people over 65 suffer from malnutrition, and the vast majority (93%) live in the community.

What is the Church doing?

Care for older people (in different forms) is one of the most common ways in which churches engage with their communities. Our 2012 and 2014 surveys of UK churches showed that elderly care initiatives are the 6th most common type of social action initiatives they run. In 2010, it was the 3rd most common. Caring for the elderly was also ranked 3rd in 2014 and 8th in 2012 by church leaders as an initiative that had a positive effect on church growth.

1 Centre for Social Justice 2010 – *The Forgotten Age – understanding poverty and social exclusion in later life*

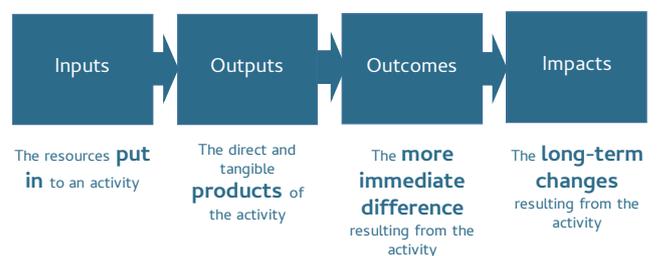
2 Age UK February 2015 http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Factsheets/Later_Life_UK_factsheet.pdf?dtrk=true

Public and voluntary services both have a part to play. The state provides a policy framework with both educational and social outcome goals. However, public funding and local government organisational reach only extend so far. Therefore the Church, as a body of people committed to long-term engagement in support of social justice, has a role to play that goes well beyond engagement with people on a religious or spiritual agenda. Christians who run church-based groups do so with a faith-based motivation, but they are looking to have a very broad range of outcomes.

Church-based elderly care initiatives will be of increasing importance given the changing nature and needs of our society.

The impact of initiatives

It is relatively easy to measure the effort that goes in (‘input’) to making an activity (‘output’) happen. It is more meaningful, however, to understand what change actually results from the activity undertaken: the shorter term ‘outcome’ or longer term ‘impact’.



Understanding the impact of initiatives for older people will inform churches, enabling them to develop their own work.

Overall, our research seeks to provide an evidence-based framework of impacts. This should encourage and inform those who are currently running projects, or considering doing so. For commissioners of public services, it substantiates the effectiveness of church-based initiatives.

Skip to the back page for a summary of our recommendations or read about the details inside!

Jubilee+ Impact Research – Survey and Analysis Method

In April 2016 we sent out a survey designed to find out about the kind of projects that are being run by churches and other Christian groups for older people. Our aim was to assess the impact these projects are having on their participants and others involved, and if there are any lessons to be learnt about what can help make these activities more fruitful.

In designing the survey, we consulted widely with networks seeking to offer expertise and promote the work of churches that engage in specific projects working with older people. Following our interviews, we created an impact model incorporating the language and framework of the Outcomes Matrix developed by Big Society Capital, alongside the impact framework that we developed in our earlier impact research projects (see our website for more details).

In this model impacts are grouped according to the degree to which they impact individuals or society as whole.



Our survey sought responses from both the church / initiative leaders and helpers ('leaders') and the older people who participated in the activities provided ('participants'). All respondents were given space for free text responses to tell us stories about their initiatives. Most responses were collected online but a number, particularly from participants, were completed on manual survey sheets that we created to be printed off locally.

Some questions (see right) were designed to measure the 'impacts' of the group.

We converted the responses to those impact questions into percentages, then aggregated into an 'average' score to analyse all responses.

Leaders were also asked a range of questions about the initiative's activity 'model', to give us information such as:

- The kinds of activities that take place
- Goals for the group
- Location and frequency of sessions
- Team roles and training
- Leadership and oversight

10. As a direct result of the activity, to what extent do you feel that you..

| | Not at all | A little | Somewhat | Quite a bit | To a significant extent | Don't know |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Have fun | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Build friendships - feel less lonely | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Find it easier to relate well to others | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Have learnt useful life skills | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Are helped to maintain mobility and dexterity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Are helped to keep your brain active | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Benefit from engaging with other participants | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Develop personal faith and spirituality | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Volunteered for other activity involvement | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Responses converted to percentages

| Response → | Not at all | A little | Somewhat | Quite a bit | To a significant extent | Don't Know |
|------------|------------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------------------|------------|
| Score → | 0% | 25% | 50% | 75% | 100% | 1% |

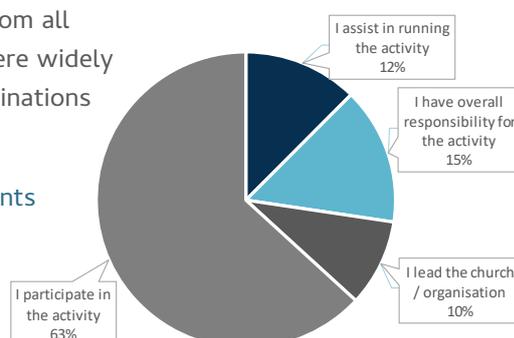
During our analysis process, we looked at these average impact scores in relation to the 'model' information, to see if there were any trends, i.e. do certain characteristics in how the initiative is run increase the likelihood of the participants reporting significant positive impacts? We mapped impact question responses to the Big Society Capital outcome descriptors and created a statistical correlation matrix against the activity 'model'.

Finally, we analysed the free text results to see what they could tell us about impacts.

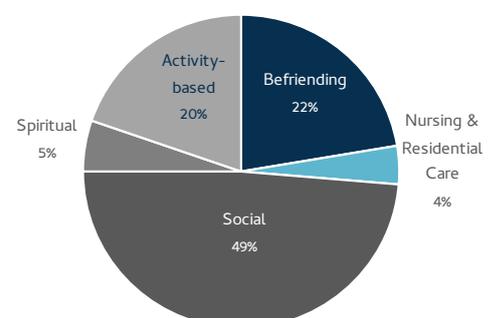
Who replied?

The respondents came from all regions of the UK and were widely spread across the denominations and types of Church.

274 respondents

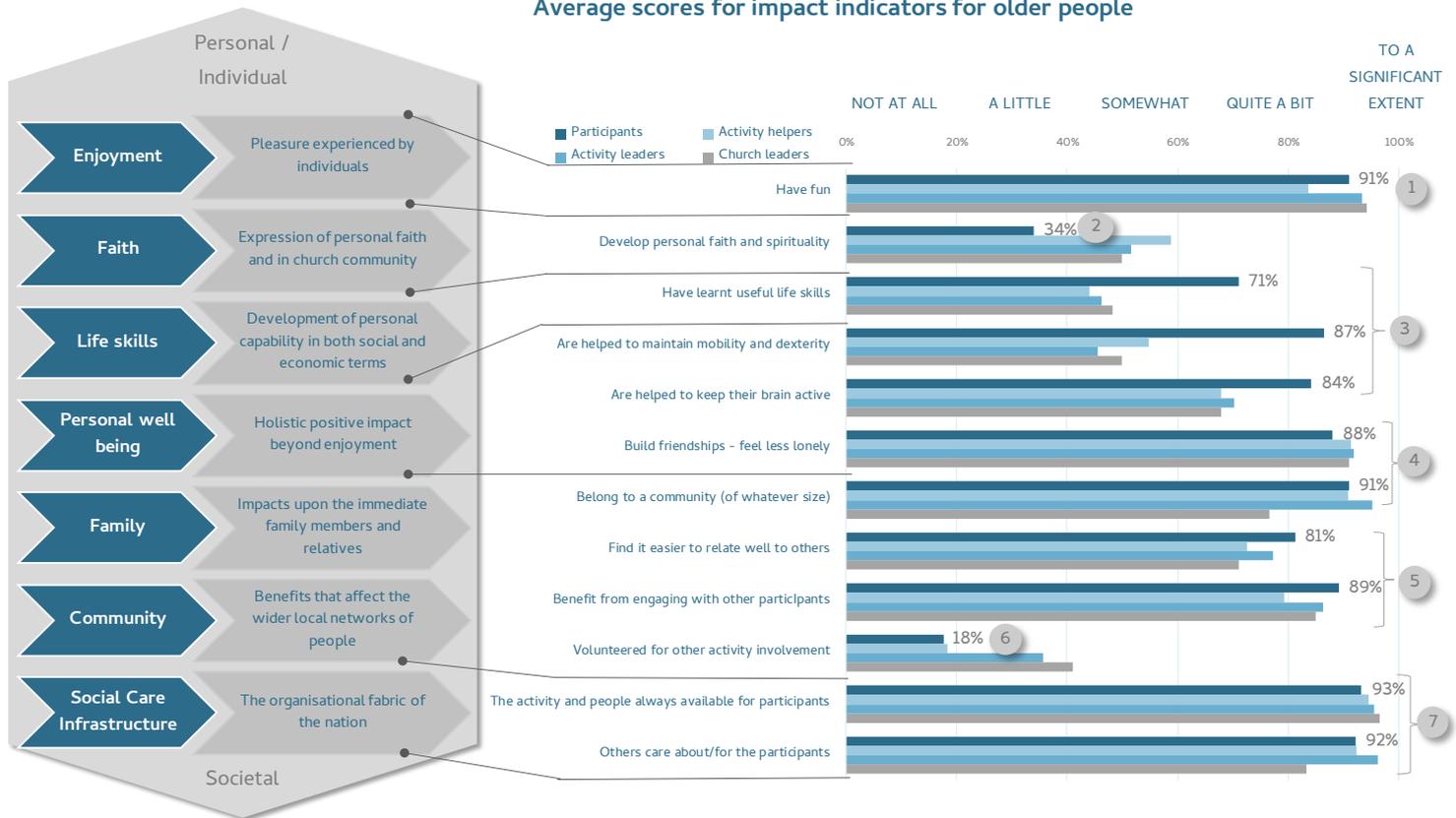


76 different initiatives for older people



Impact on older people who participate

Average scores for impact indicators for older people



- Enjoyment (have fun)**
While still a short-term outcome, enjoyment is reported consistently by leaders and participants.
- Develop personal faith and spirituality**
All types of leaders score this higher than participants (by around 20%), so it may be that there is an over-perception of the impact from leaders, and particularly so from helpers. Overall, faith and spirituality is not a highly scored outcome, but the actual activity model of groups varied in the emphasis on faith, so this income needs to be viewed in the context of group goals and church leadership involvement with correlation analysis.
- Have learnt useful life skills / Are helped to maintain mobility & dexterity / Are helped to keep their brain active**
Leaders score these significantly (36%) less than participants, i.e. perception of participants is higher.
- Build friendships – feel less lonely / Belong to a community**
These impacts are consistently scored highly by both participants and leaders.
- Find it easier to relate to others / Benefit from engaging with other participants**
Participants and leaders score similarly. This response might just be a general corroboration of the other community / family responses.
- Volunteered for other activity involvement**
Initiative (35%) and church (41%) leaders score this higher than helpers and participants.
- The activity and people always available for participants / Others care about/for the participants**
Leaders and participants agree that these initiatives do have a positive local impact on social care. Although the impact of each initiative will be small when measured on a national scale, the sum total of such impacts from church-based projects contributes significantly to the national infrastructure.

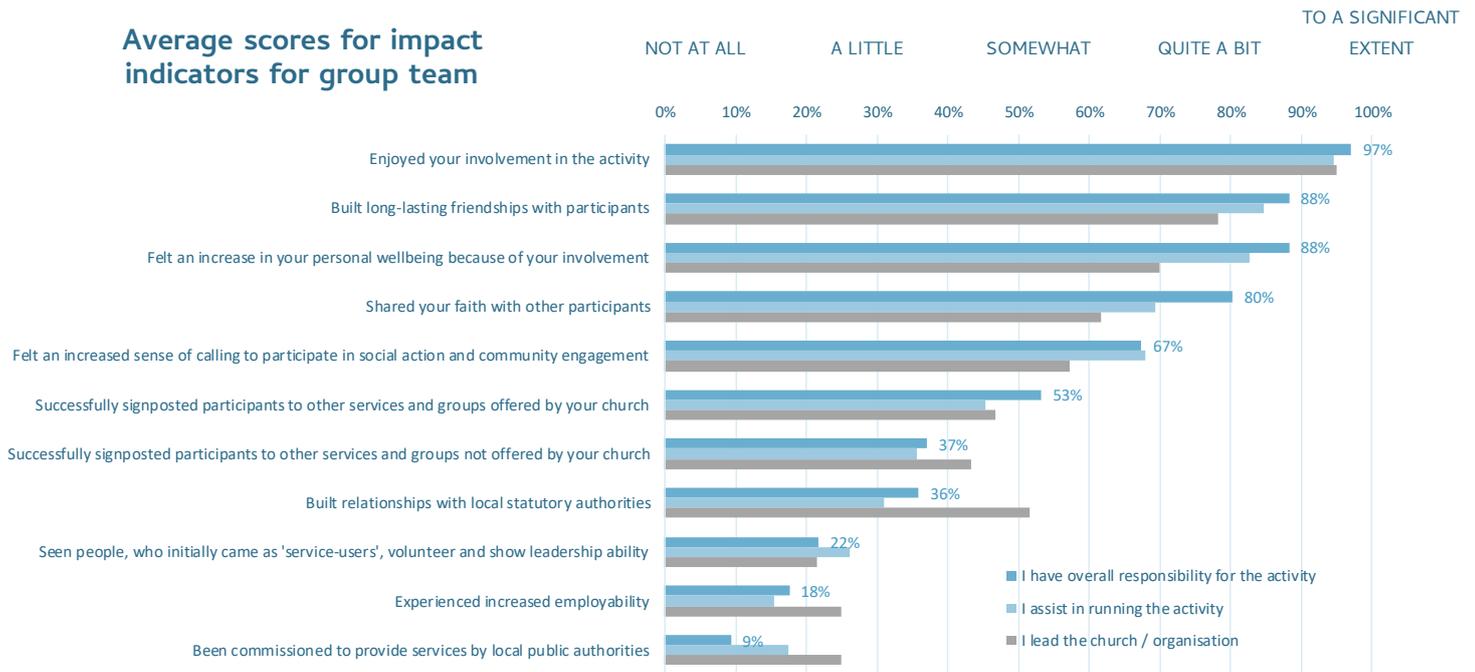
There are several areas of participant impact that leaders / helpers might be wrongly estimating - faith outcomes may be overestimated and both physical and mental wellbeing and life skills acquisition may be underestimated.

Leaders may be underestimating the extent to which participants are voluntarily becoming involved in other (unspecified) activities as a result of being part of the group.

Loneliness is a high profile topic, and participants and all types of leaders report a strong impact indicator in this area.

Impact on the leaders / group team

Average scores for impact indicators for group team



Over half of the impact categories surveyed had leader responses with average impact above 50%. However, the most highly scored were:

- Enjoyment, with almost universal agreement (96% average)
- Building long-lasting relationships with participants (85% average)
- Felt an increase in your personal wellbeing because of your involvement (83% average)
- Shared your faith with other participants (73% average)

Leaders feel a high amount of enjoyment and improved personal wellbeing, while building relationships and sharing their faith.

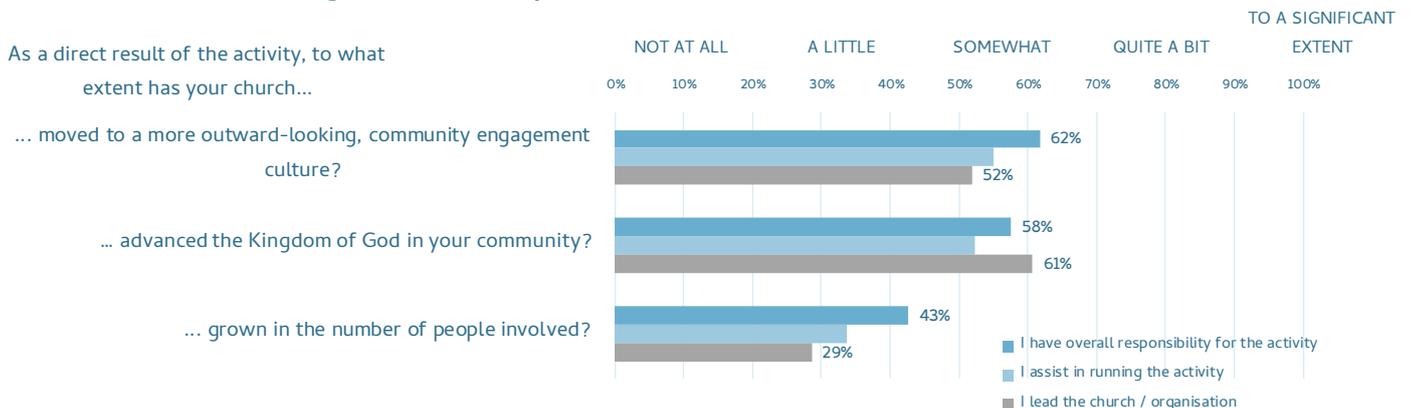
On the whole, the responses were similar between the initiative leaders, helpers and church leaders. However, it would appear that relationships with statutory authorities are reported more by church leaders, with commission of services by those authorities for a minority of initiatives.

Church leaders are the most common link with statutory authorities, although statutory commissioning is not common.

Given that physical and mental energy are likely to diminish with age, it is not surprising to see low scores for older people moving beyond the group into leadership or volunteering. Equally expected is that leaders are not reporting that they experience increased employability, given that team members might not, in general, be seeking employment.

Impact on the churches that run initiatives for older people

Average scores for impact indicators for the church



Overall, this data does not give a clear indication of conclusions or recommendations to be drawn. But perhaps further research on the correlation data would identify some specifics.

How does the way an initiative is run increase the likelihood of the participants reporting significant positive impacts?

Looking at the correlation between the 'model' and the Big Society Capital Outcome descriptors within each impact theme in turn, some factors have emerged that seem to assist churches in having a positive impact on the older people they are serving. The matrix below shows the model questions that produced the strongest positive and negative correlations to various impacts.

KEY:
 ✗ Negative correlation
 ✓ Correlation 0.40 to 0.45
 ✓✓ Correlation 0.45 to 0.55
 ✓✓✓ Correlation above 0.55

| | | 7 | 8 | 9 | | | | |
|--|--|---|-----------|-------------|--------------------|--------|-----------|----------------------------|
| | | FAITH | ENJOYMENT | LIFE SKILLS | PERSONAL WELLBEING | FAMILY | COMMUNITY | SOCIAL CARE INFRASTRUCTURE |
| 1 | Links | | | | ✓✓✓ | | | |
| | Type of oversight | What is the nature of the local organisation that oversees your activity? | ✗ | | | | | |
| 2 | Church oversight | The extent of church leadership support | ✓✓ | | | | | |
| | | The extent of church leadership attendance | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| | | Alignment with church's vision and mission | | | ✗ | ✗ | | ✗ |
| | Time and frequency | Group not running all the time e.g. breaks during holiday season | | | ✓ | | | |
| | Longevity | How long team leaders / helpers have been involved | ✓✓ | | | | | |
| | Alternatives | If this activity did not exist, what would participants do? | | | ✗ | | | |
| 3 | Training of team members | Formal professional medical / nursing qualification | ✓ | | | | | |
| | | First aid | | | | | ✓ | |
| | | Safeguarding | | | ✗ | | | |
| | | Dementia | ✓ | | | | | |
| | | Listening skills | ✓ | | | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| | | Encouraging spirituality | ✗ | | | ✗ | ✗ | |
| | | Teaching life skills | ✓✓ | | ✓ | ✓✓ | | ✓ |
| | | Formal induction into helping run the activity | ✓✓✓ | | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| Prayer by individual team members | Individual team members - as part of group sessions | ✓ | | ✗ | | | | |
| | Individual team members - in separate prayer meetings | ✓✓ | | | | | | |
| Prayer in wider church context, not directly involved with the group | Not at all | ✗ | | ✓✓ | ✓ | | | |
| | As part of group sessions | | | | ✗ | | | |
| | In separate prayer meetings | ✓ | | ✗ | | | | |
| | In personal prayer times | ✓ | | ✗ | | | | |
| 4 | Why people join | Family members already involved | | | | ✓ | | |
| | | Friends already involved | | | ✓ | ✓✓ | | |
| | | Personal invitation | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | | Participation in Alpha course, or similar, run by your church | ✓✓✓ | | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| | | Participation in midweek church small groups | ✓ | | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| | | Referred from statutory / public services | | | | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Number of people involved | No. of team members/staff | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | | |
| | No. of service-users | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| | No. of accompanying carers | ✓✓ | | | | | | |
| 5 | Specific activities | Arts & craft | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | |
| | | Bible teaching / worship | ✓✓ | ✗ | ✗ | | | |
| | | Outings | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | |
| | | Music / entertainment | | ✓ | | ✓✓ | | |
| | | Christian talk / discussion for those without faith | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | |
| | | Other visiting speakers | ✓✓✓ | | ✗ | | | |
| | | Life skill teaching | | | | ✓✓✓ | | |
| | | Exercise class | ✗ | | ✓ | ✓✓ | | |
| | | Prayer time | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | |
| | | Having tea, coffee, and cake together | | | | ✓✓ | | |
| | Putting in place designated team roles | Person to mix and facilitate conversation | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | |
| | Catering team / cook / refreshment servers | | | | | ✓✓ | | |
| | Designated safeguarding person | ✓ | | ✓✓ | ✓ | | | |
| Age restriction | Having an age restriction | ✓ | | ✗ | | | | |
| What do people go on to? | Alpha Course | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | ✓ | |
| | Sunday morning worship | ✓✓✓ | | | | | | |
| | Midweek church small groups | ✓✓ | | ✓ | ✓✓ | | | |
| | Social project run by the church for another organization | ✓✓ | | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | | ✓✓ | |
| | Money and debt advice | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | |
| | Were already involved in another church activity | ✗ | | | | | | |
| Group goals | Older person has a positive experience of healthcare and attitude towards their own physical health | ✗ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| | Older person has a sense of purpose, engages in meaningful and fulfilling activity, and has aspirations for the future | | | | ✓✓ | | | |
| | Develop personal faith and spirituality | ✓✓ | | ✗ | ✗ | | | |
| | Advance the Kingdom of God in your community | | | | ✗ | | | |
| | Develop and nurture a resilient support network with meaningful connections | ✓✓ | | ✗ | | | | |

The factors that have the most significant correlation to the impact of initiatives

1 Links with specialist networks

Seem particularly important in having an impact upon personal wellbeing.

3 Training of team members

Overall, training team members in a variety of disciplines has a positive link with impact. Listening skills seem particularly valuable in increasing personal wellbeing and relationship / family impacts and in making participants feel that social care infrastructure exists. Training to teach life skills also has broad impact, but the most broadly effective training was providing formal induction for team members.

2 Church oversight

Leadership support is much more relevant to faith impacts. Personal wellbeing and family impacts are improved when leaders attend the activity. It appears that groups that align with the vision and mission of their church are less impactful, but it is hard to understand why this might be.

4 Why people join

When older people come into the group from church activities or Alpha course or midweek groups there is positive impact upon personal wellbeing and family / relationships. But this is even stronger when people come in by referral from statutory / public services.

5 Teaching life skills seems particularly important in having an impact upon personal wellbeing.

6 What do older people go on to as a result of being part of the group?

Greater impact is reported when there are other specific activities available for older people go on to. In general, this means other social projects run by the church. Money and debt advice is specifically correlated with personal wellbeing.

Impact theme conclusions

Aside from drawing specific conclusions about the most impactful aspects of the activity models, some more general trends emerged at an impact themes level.

7 Faith: Given that the initiatives are church-based, it is no surprise that there are many aspects that correlate with faith impacts and that faith impacts are of interest. However, many of the factors that correlate with higher faith impact also correlate with lower impacts in other impact themes, implying that there might be some trade off. There are several factors that essentially only had a correlation with faith impacts:

✓ Factors associated with higher faith impact

- Church leadership supporting the group to some extent.
- Team leaders and helpers having been involved for a longer time.
- Team members having professional nursing or medical qualification, or being trained in dealing with dementia.
- A higher number of team members / staff and carers.
- Specific activities, both Christian (Bible teaching / worship, prayer time, talk / discussion) and more general activity (arts & crafts, outings and particularly visiting speakers).
- Where participants start going to other activities that the church is running, particularly Sunday morning worship Alpha courses.
- Having some age restriction for participants.
- And perhaps most significantly, when initiatives have a goal of developing faith and spirituality, or developing a resilient support network with meaningful connections.

✗ Factors associated with lower faith impact

- A lower level of connection between a church and the organisation sponsoring the initiative.
- Absence of prayer in the wider church context.
- Training team members in encouraging spirituality. This is interesting and perplexing, but may just indicate the need for informality and relationship when working with older people? This would require further research before we could be conclusive.
- Participants already being engaged with the church in other activities i.e. the initiative may not add to an already high level of faith.
- When the initiative involves exercise, or has a goal for the older people to have positive experience of healthcare and attitude towards their own physical health.

8 Enjoyment: Because the overall average scores are high, we only expect to pick up correlation with factors that lead to lower enjoyment, but such factors were rare. Leaders think participants enjoy the activity less when Bible teaching and worship is higher, but they think participants enjoy it more when there is general music and entertainment.

9 Life Skills: The acquisition of life skills seems to be linked to connecting the older people up with other projects and groups, rather than the activities the initiatives themselves offer. Most of the activities listed had a negative correlation with life skill acquisition.

Stories and comments shared by respondents

A large number of survey respondents took the time to add free text responses sharing their stories and telling us in more depth about how the ways in which they 'go the extra mile' and lives are transformed. While these comments were not systematically used in this report's analysis and conclusions, they offer support to a number of our key themes and findings, as shown by the examples below.

Enjoyment is reported consistently by leaders and participants

*"I love the atmosphere – the people are all lovely; it's like being brought into a family."
(group member)*

*"The team and volunteers love it – they love the experience; being able to serve them (the participants) is a really positive experience."
(group leader)*

*"I didn't used to go to church but these exercise sessions were a great ice breaker and it's lovely now to have so many new friends – at the class and at the church."
(group participant)*

Church leaders the most common link with statutory authority

*"We have a really good relationship with the council, and that is a lot to do with this [project]."
(church leader)*

Perception of group participants re life skills, mobility/dexterity etc. (higher impact than leaders)

*"We really encourage health and wellbeing and independence...we see that over time people become less anxious, and are able to take better care of themselves."
(group leader)*

Loneliness is a high profile topic

*"We need this; we're all on our own – we're all widows and we need the companionship – that is so important – we'd be lost without it."
(group participant)*

*"People are making friends they wouldn't be with otherwise."
(group leader)*

*"When you are dealing with people who are marginalised and on the edge of society and a bit forgotten – they are the people that God is interested in."
(group leader)*

Building friendships / belonging to a community

*"It (friendship and support) happens all the time, and you can't put a value on that can you?"
(group leader)*

*"Over a period of time they (participants) just blossom – it's nothing specific we do, we just love them and are genuinely concerned for their wellbeing and things that concern them."
(group leader)*

Impact upon faith journey of participants - less common but significant when it occurs

*"One lady who came to Link (Visiting Scheme) was so impressed that young people were giving up time to help the elderly, was so impressed that she thought she would see what our church was about! She came up to church, went on an Alpha, got baptised and has never looked back!"
(group leader)*

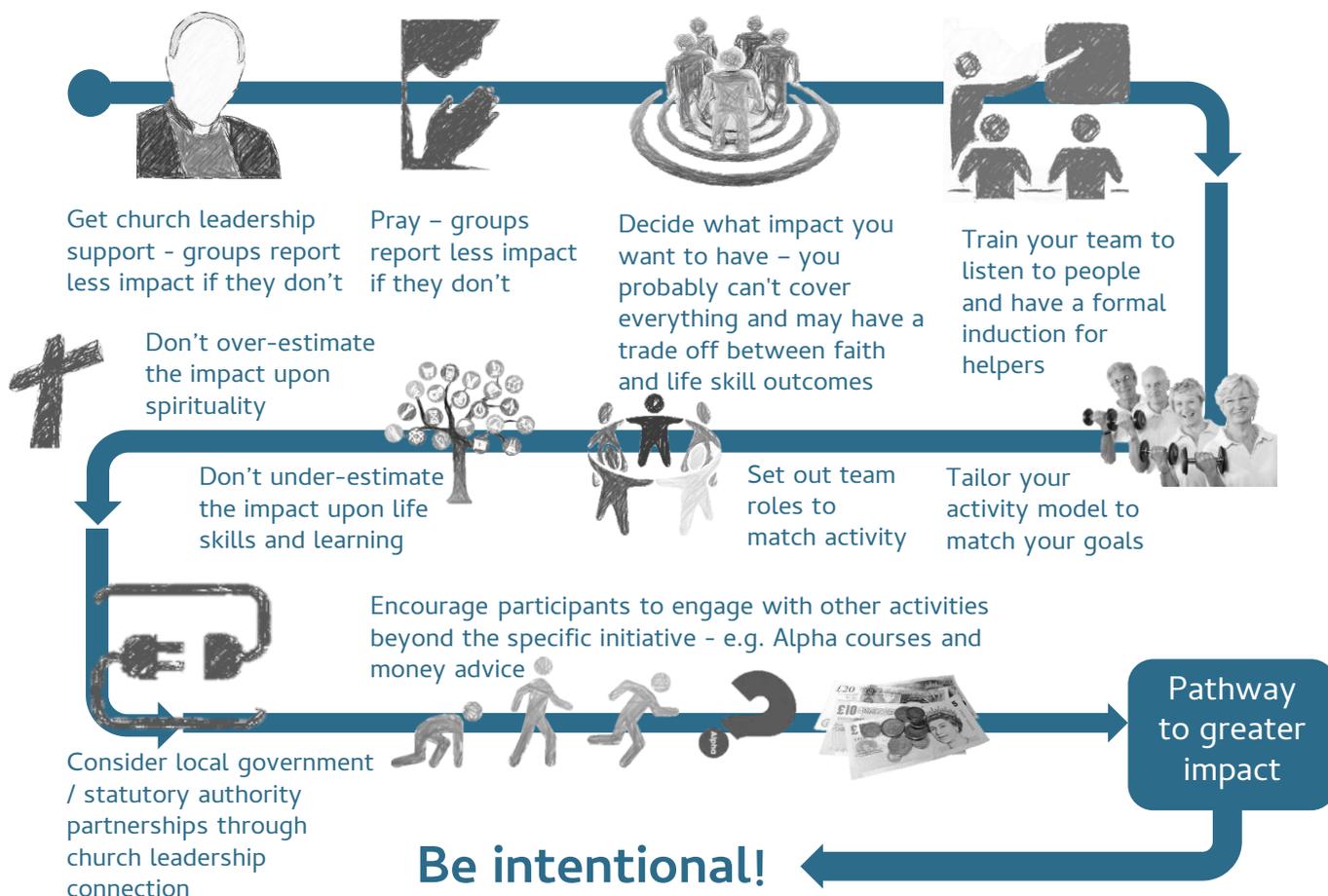
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Turn over for a final summary

Conclusions and recommendations for church-based initiatives for older people wanting to increase their impact

The specific points of analysis and evidence above led us to formulate a number of points of advice.



While it's possible to argue that a lack of enjoyment will lead to a lack of participation and therefore the high impact indicator scores in this area are obvious, initiatives should note that enjoyment is a key part of the experience for both participants and leaders.

Church leaders should be supportive and potentially attend initiatives. They are more likely to be the respected people with links to statutory authorities and an absence of church leadership engagement is likely to correlate with initiatives that report lower impact, particular in faith impacts.

Leaders should not underestimate the physical and mental benefits that participants will perceive, but conversely they should take care not to overestimate the perceived spiritual and faith benefits.

Groups that want to deliver stronger impact for the personal wellbeing of older people should consider being part of wider specialist networks.

In summary, churches that want to make an impact in their communities through engaging with older people should **be intentional** about their goals and activity models. They should decide what impacts they are aiming for – groups seldom cover all aspects of the impact framework.

While recognising that there may be choice between spiritual and practical outcomes, there are several factors that can be correlated with a broad range of increased impacts, such as training and definition of team roles. Greater impact also comes when participants are successfully signposted to other activities.