CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Tackling isolation and loneliness
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Introduction

In 2009 the Third Sector Strategy Group (government departments, the Council of Voluntary Organisations representatives of the faith groups), instructed a Development Officer to conduct a gap analysis in the south of the Isle of Man. The objective of the analysis to develop a project that would fill the gaps in current provision and demonstrate good working practices between the above parties, within 6 months.

Practice change implemented

Community initiatives were co-produced in conjunction with local residents to reduce social isolation. A local version of Men in Sheds was set up as well as 3 social groups. Eight years later, “The Hub” has a timetable of creative, games, fitness, food and drop in sessions with approximately 152 weekly participants.

Timeline

Meetings with health professionals, local politicians, local authorities, teachers, police, 3rd sector and voluntary and social groups, mums and tots, 6th form students and 100 local residents were held over a 4 month period. Each group was asked the same questions –what works well in the south, what does not, what do we like/dislike, what could we do better. Additional efforts were made to engage men since they were not present in the first round of consultation. A steering group was set up to transform a space for the hobbies Shed and by October 2011, a part-time paid coordinator was hired and 38 regular members. A further facility was provided to set up a community hub that would tackle the wider issues of isolation and loneliness.

Highlights

Three main elements came out at every gathering:

1. Isolation/loneliness
2. Lack of relevant/up to date information on local services (government or community)
3. Not enough relevant facilities for youth if not sporty or artistic

A number of issues were raised by the men:

1. Since retiring felt obsolete
2. Unless played golf or had specific hobby there was very little do to

3. Since retiring/moving/changing jobs/widowed had lost contact with former work mates, social groups and found it difficult to join things, felt shy.

4. Wife/partner organized the socialising

5. Since retiring there were a lot of little jobs to do round the house but this meant they were not getting out enough.

6. A full time carer for a wife with a long term illness.

**Sustainability**

Costs are kept to a minimum by utilizing volunteers and donations. The project required modest start-up funding provided by the Manx Lottery Trust.

**Transferability**

Each community will want something that is tailored to their particular needs.

**Conclusions**

No assumptions should be made about what communities need; good research, communication and public gatherings are essential. There is a clear benefit for people and organisations of working together across sectors. “Coming into the Hub is like having a warm blanket put around me.”

**Discussion**

Consultation and collaboration can lead to reduced isolation and loneliness.

**Lessons learned**

Don't be afraid, be thorough but be prepared to make mistakes, make sure you have some funders who are there for a bit of duration, do lots of promotion.