

# Online Group Activities For Older People: **Learning from Lockdown and Beyond**

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Independent Research  
Commissioned by Open Age  
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# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b> . . . . .	4
<b>Authorship and acknowledgments</b> . . . . .	5
<b>Executive Summary</b> . . . . .	6
Key recommendations . . . . .	9
<b>1. Introduction</b> . . . . .	11
About Open Age . . . . .	12
About this research . . . . .	12
The Policy and Evidence Context . . . . .	12
<b>2. Older People’s Experiences Of Online Digital Activities</b> . . . . .	14
Reduced loneliness and Isolation . . . . .	14
Giving structure and meaning . . . . .	15
Convenience and choice . . . . .	15
Technology: barriers and enablers . . . . .	17

<b>3. Organisational Experiences</b> . . . . .	19
Launch during the Pandemic. . . . .	19
Rural opportunities: ‘Obviously, geography didn’t matter’ . . . . .	19
Reducing barriers and increasing opportunities . . . . .	20
Hybrid services: offering greater choice . . . . .	21
Technology support . . . . .	22
Organisational barriers . . . . .	22
About funding . . . . .	23
The future of online group activities . . . . .	24
<b>Conclusions</b> . . . . .	25
The value of online group activities. . . . .	25
Challenging the hard ‘digital divide’ . . . . .	25
One more valuable tool to support older people . . . . .	26
Key recommendations. . . . .	26
Notes and References . . . . .	28

# Foreword



Open Age have been keeping our members healthier, happier and having fun for longer for over 30 years. Historically we have done this by delivering a large range of in-person group activities for older people in various venues across Northwest London.

During the periods of national lockdown in 2020-22 we, like many similar organisations, were forced to rethink how we could deliver our activities while keeping our members safe. Despite no previous experience of online delivery, we took the decision to develop a large zoom based programme of activities.

From an initial small pilot in June 2020 we rapidly scaled up to a weekly programme of over 100 hours of activities. Our online programme was a huge success that challenged many of our preconceptions about what our members would and would not enjoy. Over 1800 members engaged in some way during lockdown, with around 500-600 older people regularly taking part each month.

We know we were not the only charity to move services online during this time. However not all organisations were as successful as ours and indeed many told us they were unable to move online at all.

Our experiences during lockdown have led us to believe that there is a greater role for online options in the delivery of services for older people than is currently on offer.

We want the sector to look again at the benefits of online delivery. We are not advocating that online should replace in-person activities but we do believe that older people should have the choice to access online where they want to.

However for this to happen the sector must invest in designing and delivering online services in such a way as to make them as appealing and accessible to older people as possible.

The research here was commissioned from an external professional researcher, and is completely independent - and all the more powerful for it. Open Age will certainly use the findings to inform our future service design and we hope the wider older people's sector will find it offers valuable insight into a developing area of work.

**Iain Cassidy**  
CEO - Open Age

# Authorship and acknowledgments

## Author: Dr Alex Evans

Alex Evans is an independent researcher and consultant. He has worked in the health and social care sector for over 20 years, including 10 years as a senior leader in London charities. He has particular expertise in place-based and community-led support projects, and has worked extensively on projects to support older people, as well as in the field of digital inclusion. Some of his most recent work has included research and development for a major new almshouse project in South East London, and a major evaluation of a key partnership between the VCS and the NHS supporting the development of GP networks and localities. He also spent some years as a professional academic and qualitative researcher with a special interest in health, culture and identity. He can be contacted at [dralexevans@gmail.com](mailto:dralexevans@gmail.com) or via [www.alexevansconsulting.org](http://www.alexevansconsulting.org)

## Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

This report looks at the use of online group activities for older people (social activities delivered using video conferencing) during and since the onset of the Covid Pandemic. While it explores some of the initial move online during the start of the Pandemic, it also focuses on the ongoing use of this kind of support, with a view to understanding its value for the future. The independent research was commissioned by Open Age, a charity in North West London, who deliver online activities as part of their programme. It was funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust and the National Lottery Community Fund. This summary report provides key results and analysis, while a full report provides more detailed research findings, and is available at Open Age's website.

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*"It's really valuable... especially [...] if [...] you do live on your own. [...] I am on my own quite a lot of the time. It's vital. It really [...] has been a lifeline and still is."*

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## Policy context

Online group activities sit at an important juncture in social policy questions around digital inclusion, loneliness and isolation for older people, and the need to provide better care and support for an ageing population. Where once the notion of social digital interventions might have been viewed with suspicion, and indeed, was much less feasible, some in the policy and evidence sphere are beginning to suggest that the time is right to reconsider the potential of this type of support. This is especially the case in light of the social changes of the last three years. While older people are more likely to be digitally excluded, the number of older people who are active users of the internet cannot be ignored. This research suggests that online group activities may provide a significant opportunity for organisations who support older people in our changing society, as long as they are not used to replace face to face activities.

## Older people: Who is using digital technology? Who isn't?<sup>1</sup>

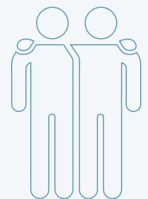
### Who is included?

- 77% of all over 65s DO have access to the internet and use it at home
- 95% of people 60-64 DO have access to the internet and use it at home
- 94% of people 55-59 DO have access to the internet and use it at home



### Who is excluded?

- 53% of people over 70 DO NOT use or have access to the internet at home
- 60% of people over 70 who also have a life-impacting or limiting condition DO NOT have or use the internet at home



All figures: OFCOM. (2022). Digital exclusion: a review of Ofcom's research on digital exclusion among adults in the UK. March 2022.



## Older people's experiences

The research showed that older people who use online group activities experience significant benefits, particularly in terms of reducing their sense of isolation and loneliness, and giving them a sense of purpose, structure, and meaning. This began for some during the pandemic, and a significant number of older people are still participating where these activities are available. In many ways, the benefits they experience are similar to those they experience from face-to-face-activities. The decreased need for travel has significant benefits especially for those with disabilities, and for carers.

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*"For me, it's the social aspect [that is] really important. The friends I've made, people I see each week at different classes. I think that's a huge, huge element of it."*

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In terms of barriers, many experienced well-documented issues around digital inclusion, related to access and skills, and suspicion about technology (as well as fear of fraud); however, the research also shows that older people who currently use online group activities are far from all technical experts. Most are at basic levels of adequacy, and many only become so with the support of organisations and their own resourceful use of personal networks. Some struggle with the social awkwardness of Zoom, and this can be a barrier to access, with a "steep learning curve". Despite these barriers, some of those who had initially found online activities unappealing have overcome their initial objections simply as a matter of pragmatism. While some non-users still find these activities unsuitable or uninteresting, many agree that if face-to-face options ceased to be available to them (e.g. due to illness or frailty), they may reconsider, if the right support is offered.

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***"I don't like techy stuff generally. But needs must."***

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## Organisations' experiences

Interviewed organisations who delivered online group activities over the pandemic and since have seen substantial benefits for older people. They confirmed the value they had seen for those with disabilities, and carers. Organisations in rural areas were particularly enthusiastic, noting that the reduced need for transport meant that in some ways, "geography didn't matter any more." Several noted benefits for two key user types: the very isolated and less mobile older people with higher needs; and those with currently lower levels of need who want to maintain an already active and happy lifestyle. The latter category presents organisations with an opportunity to 'upstream' support and work preventatively. Offering choice and agency to older people is also seen as a significant benefit, and is a key area of focus for organisations who are now running hybrid services. Some funders and commissioners were also enthusiastic about the possibilities these activities offer.

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***"I think you should learn how to do it now, in case you ever get to the stage where you are housebound, and can't ever go out, and that was really your only lifeline."***

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*"We hadn't done any online activities prior to lockdown, and before the Pandemic, we believed no older people would take part in online activities. But now, post lockdown, we've changed our minds."*

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## Organisational barriers and enablers

Most organisations who had begun delivering online activities during the pandemic were enabled by the flexibility many grant-makers offered in that initial period. This suggests that flexible funding can lead to substantial innovation. Some are now concerned that a lack of ongoing funding risks losing those digital innovations. Organisations faced barriers to adoption in terms of skill and culture – and in finding the practical resources necessary to support large numbers of older people without technical knowledge. Notably, some organisations who had chosen not to offer online group activities had been especially concerned about digital exclusion. In contrast, most organisations who had gone ahead had initially felt those same concerns, but had also seen the potential for greater inclusion.

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*“Online activities in a rural area would be a cheap, very accessible way of doing things.”*

***“Once [our activity] went online, obviously, geography didn’t matter...”***

*“Hybrid is really important to us now.”*

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## A hybrid future

In the future, many of the organisations interviewed wish to continue activities in hybrid form, and some have plans for expansion. Others fear that a lack of skills and funding, and competing priorities, will mean that this is unlikely to rise to the ‘top of the list’, even though most feel this could offer a valuable contribution to future work. All agreed that further digital inclusion work for older people was especially necessary in our changing society. As for older people, users were clear that, while they were anxious not to lose face to face activities if they could attend them, they had significantly benefited from the online option. For many, these activities continue to be a ‘lifeline’ and a ‘godsend.’




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***“For most older people now, it’s an option, not a necessity. We’re building in the digital option.”***

*“The key is choice and agency. Can older people decide what they need, and get it in the way they want it?”*

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## Technology as an enabler

The work here reinforces the need to see digital technology as an enabler, and not solely a barrier. The barriers that affect the digitally excluded are extremely well-explored and well-documented; less well-documented is the experience of older people who do use technology, on a broad and complex continuum. Understanding this is valuable, especially after significant social shifts in the last three years relating to use of technology. Offering choice to older people will become ever more important in the coming years, and perhaps sooner than previously anticipated.

This does not mean that all older people should be herded onto the Internet – quite the opposite; this work suggests a responsibility to keep providing services that meet older people’s needs in the way that best suits them. In order to meet the many different needs of older people, providers of support, and the people they help, require as many potential tools and enablers as possible – from a minibus, to a support worker or a friendly neighbour, to a webcam.

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*“We always knew we [as an older people’s support organisation] would eventually come to the digital world. We’d done courses for older people and so on. But COVID accelerated the digital need.”*

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## Key recommendations

### For funders, policymakers and infrastructure organisations

- **Funders should invest in online group activities for older people now** – there is a danger of losing ground gained in the early days of the Pandemic.
- **Funders should take a flexible approach to funding, to allow innovation** – this was key to the development and success of online group activities.
- **Infrastructure organisations could provide training, resources, and support** for organisations developing online services.
- **Researchers need to build evidence for effective online group activities**, and identify and promote best practice.
- **Campaigners and policymakers need to promote more nuanced messaging about digital inclusion** for older people, especially to the health and social care sector, focusing on choice and potential inclusion, as much as exclusion.



### For organisations supporting older people:

- **Provide interactive, manageably-sized, high quality sessions with good group management.** Older people value personal attention from sensitive leaders and interactive sessions.
- **Work out the right activities that speak to participants' interests**, and integrate socialisation into structured activities.
- **Your existing connection to your clients is vital.** Older people value a trusted organisation to help them get online and using these services – especially one they already know well.
- **Start small and treat it as an experiment** – and give it a chance to 'bed in.'
- **Don't underestimate the amount of technical support you may need to provide** – and be realistic about who the service can work for.
- **Don't assume none of your older people will go online**, and remember that some will be more included, even while others will not be able to take part.
- **If you can't do it yourself, consider partnering with other organisations** to share activities and services.



## Getting creative: the range of activities

Flexible funding and the need to quickly rethink services in the Pandemic drove a wave of innovation throughout older people's organisations, which has continued. These are some of the most interesting applications we found.



### Carnival in your living room

One group ran their own online replacement for the Notting Hill carnival (which was cancelled during lockdown). A couple who usually took part every year brought down their costumes from the attic. They danced to SoCa music with the group, clad head to toe in feathers. They admitted that their costumes had been difficult to fit in their living room...

### Men's Shed Online

During lockdown, several organisations had sent activity packs to older people (a common strategy during that period), but some combined these with an online group. For example, one organisation had continued their Men's Shed online – and sent specific materials and tools to the participants' homes so they could follow along online with their friends and a tutor.



### Virtual tours

In one organisation, during lockdown especially, interactive group virtual tours of museums and art galleries had been extremely popular – and had allowed live guided visits to places far away from those that participants would have been able to visit in person (eg. a London group visiting the National Museum of Scotland).

### Singing together

Singing groups and choirs were particularly popular during lockdown, and some have continued in that way since. As one interviewee put it, sometimes *"the singing was awful, but the social aspect was great."* The need to mute singers (due to the delay of Zoom) was not always a barrier – one participant said she would never have the confidence to sing if others could hear her, but this way, she could sing as loudly as she wanted.



### Pantomimes and parties

One organisation staged a Christmas pantomime, with costume changes, funny hats, and performances delivered by its staff and group leaders, for all online participants. This was regularly referred to by their participants as one of the highlights of lockdown.

### Kids and care homes

During lockdown, several organisations ran online group activities bringing together older people in care homes and children in primary schools via online teleconferencing for a range of shared activities, such as indoor gardening, crafting, and singing. In some cases, these links built ongoing relationships that have continued since the pandemic.



### Virtual orchestra

One organisation has connected older people with neurological damage with an orchestra 200 miles away, allowing them to conduct, play along, and collaborate directly with the musicians and an expert music therapist in real time.

### Bedtime support

One organisation runs meditation classes to help clients with sleep. With online group activities, these can now be accessed live virtually, in people's own homes – and, if necessary, from bed.



# 1. Introduction



Community activities play a huge role in many older people's lives, and have significant positive impacts on their wellbeing.<sup>2</sup> They help older people feel connected to community around them, stay stimulated and active, and prevent or reduce isolation by helping them build and retain social networks and friendships. This may be why the sudden lockdown in March 2020, when community centres closed their doors overnight, hit many of the participants in this research hard. Indeed, some found the change difficult to believe: *"At first it didn't register with me. Judy phoned and said class was cancelled today. What do you mean the centre's closed? What about the next day? What about Friday? It was just disbelief."* For some, this had a deeply negative effect on their mental health. One interviewee, who lived alone, and had limited mobility even before the pandemic, described *"a bad head space,"* feeling trapped *"in a new little world I couldn't escape from."*

In many cases older people's organisations at first had to refocus and turn their attention to emergency basic care needs for older clients. But over time, some older people's organisations with a focus on reducing social isolation decided to try delivering their group activities online. While not all were able to take up the offer, other older people found online Zoom classes transformative to their experiences of lockdown. Zoom

activities being *"a lifesaver"* *"a lifeline"* and a *"Godsend"* were phrases used repeatedly. For some, these activities came to play a central role. As one interviewee put it, *"It kept us going"*.

After the end of initial lockdowns, some organisations continued to deliver some of their activities online, often in hybrid form alongside a continuing programme of face-to-face activities, and some older people have continued, often enthusiastically, to attend activities in this way. Open Age, who continue to provide activities in this way, commissioned this independent research to help understand the current state of online group activities for older people.

## About Open Age

The commissioner of this independent research is Open Age, a charity based in North West London. A membership organisation for 4000+ older people, it offers a wide range of group activities. When the pandemic closed all face-to-face activity, it set up over 100 hours of participative zoom-based activities each week during lockdown. Their online offer was accessed by more than 1800 of their members, with around 600 regular users.

## About this research

This is a piece of qualitative research using a thematic analysis methodology, considering the experience of older people themselves, and the organisations who support them. It draws on interviews and focus groups with older people accessing a range of online group activities across multiple organisations (including those who accessed online activities and those who did not). It also draws from interviews with professionals from charitable provider organisations. The fieldwork took place between July and October 2022. The research was funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust and the National Lottery Community Foundation. The commissioner and the researcher are hugely grateful to these funders for their support of the project.<sup>3</sup>

### The overarching questions that this research set out to answer are:

- What role have online group activities played since the onset of the Pandemic, and then since the end of lockdowns?
- What is the potential for this type of activity to become a permanent and lasting tool for reducing loneliness and isolation, and improving the health and wellbeing of older people in the UK and beyond?

### Within that, we asked,

- Why have some older people continued to use online activities after the initial lockdowns? And for those who have not, why not?
- What have been the experiences of other organisations who have supported older people in this way?
- What have been the critical success factors and barriers experienced, both by older people, and the organisations who supported them?
- What is the current state of online delivery post-pandemic? Is a hybrid approach (face to face and online) a common model?

## The Policy and Evidence Context

Over the last few years, several policy areas of relevance to older people and this work have become of increasing significance. Digital technology, and the opportunities and challenges that this presents, has been centre stage in an increasingly online world. Digital inclusion and the 'digital divide' have been an area of investment and policy concentration, and this has been of particular importance to older people who, historically, and still today, make up the largest proportion of the digitally excluded.

Age is still the most substantial factor in determining those most likely to be on the 'wrong side' of the 'digital divide.' Data on the 3.7m people in the UK who do not use the internet at all shows that the majority (67%) are aged 70 or over, and 32% are aged 50-69.<sup>4</sup> Alongside age, factors of socio-economic class have a compounding factor on older people's likelihood of being able to use digital technology, with socially disadvantaged adults considerably more likely to be digitally excluded than others.<sup>5</sup> Disability is also a significant factor.



At the same time, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that significant numbers of older people do use the internet. At the highest level, 95% of older people aged 60-64 have access to and use the internet, as do 75% of those over 65. Even in the age ranges where the majority of older people do not use the internet, the minority who do is far too large to discount – 47% of over 70s is not an insignificant number of internet users. It is a fallacy, therefore, to think that all older people cannot or do not use the internet,



even if, understandably, there has been a tendency in the public policy sphere to focus on the most digitally excluded older people. (After all, those are the ones who need help the most.) Overall, framing older people's digital inclusion/ exclusion in black and white terms is too simplistic, and notions of a hard and fast digital 'divide' can be misleading.<sup>6</sup>



## Tackling loneliness

Meanwhile, an increasingly elderly population prone to isolation is experiencing an epidemic of loneliness, with a whole range of negative impacts on health and wellbeing. This in turn has substantial negative impacts on services that support older people, in health and social care and housing. During the pandemic, the centrality of digital technology in all of our lives only increased, and while this left some older people further behind, it also revealed opportunities that had previously been less well-explored. The potential for digital technology to make a positive contribution to reducing isolation, or a range of other health determinants for older people, has until recently tended to be treated with some distrust, perhaps rightly – rather, its exclusion of older people has always tended to be foregrounded.

Coming out of the lockdowns, the social policy and research sphere has started to explore the positive impact (as well as some of the drawbacks) that technology can have for older people especially around the loneliness agenda. More promising evidence is starting to appear in both the social policy and academic sphere around interventions and services using technology, and this includes uses which aim to decrease social isolation.<sup>7</sup> As part of a growing Pandemic-era recognition of the value that technology has come to provide for socialisation, an Age UK report on promising

approaches to loneliness found that, while "connecting online should not be a substitute for face-to-face, [...] the COVID pandemic has forced many to embrace online digital connection." Experts have found that "digital contact [is] providing a significant degree of comfort to people who would not connect otherwise."<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, there is a sense that the 'mood music' is right in some key areas of health and social policy for further exploration of the legacy of the early stages of the pandemic and its drive to move online. In health and social care, where prevention, reducing isolation, and the need to maintain independence for older people is most pressing, digital advancements are seen as central to the modernisation of key areas of health and social care, and to offering greater choice to users – as well as potentially making services more sustainable by increasing efficiency.<sup>9</sup> In the context of a demand to 'upstream' and focus on preventative services, and a drive to integrate digital innovations into health and social care, online group activities have the potential to contribute to a wide range of policy areas - across a spectrum of health and social care sectors, from the VCS and NHS to the housing and social care sector.





## 2. Older People's Experiences of Online Digital Activities

We talked to a range of older people from community organisations, using in-depth individual interviews, focus groups, and observations of sessions.

Our key questions were:

- What benefits do older people derive from using online group activities?
- What barriers do they experience? Do they have any objections?
- In what ways have these activities made a difference to their quality of life?
- Why have some continued to use these activities, when face-to-face activities are often now running again?

### Reduced loneliness and Isolation

For many participants, this social connection and camaraderie combats social isolation and loneliness. This can be especially important for those who live alone: *"It's really valuable... especially [...] if [...] you do live on your own. [...] I am on my own quite a lot of the time. It's vital. It really [...] has been a lifeline and still is."* One of the most common benefits users described was an opportunity to build a sense of community and connection to others through active friendships. Participants experienced a boost to their *"Mental happiness. We are not alone, alone at home, with nothing... boring. So it's good to talk and laugh."*



Indeed, some users said that they had initiated friendships online, and found it especially exciting if they later saw friends in person whom they had met online, and vice-versa. This was a particular benefit of a hybrid approach, where older people attended both online and in-person activities. Knowing the other people in a group, recognising them, and being recognised in return was just as important as it was in 'real life'. It was also important to group members that they felt the group leader knew those who were attending. As in the 'real' world, the continuity of a familiar face who shows that they value participants was paramount.

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*"You still get to know people [...]. But you notice when someone's had their hair cut – 'Oh, [Leila], you've had your hair cut,' or [...] You don't normally have a dog.' 'Yeah, I'm looking after my daughter's dogs.' Even though it's through digital, you see a lot more than just them participating."*

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While a few said that connections they made online felt less intimate than face to face, many others were at pains to stress that these connections were just as valuable as in person.

## Giving structure and meaning

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*“You have to have a plan and you have to structure your day, because if you don’t, you have endless hours filled with nothing.”*

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Many older people especially appreciated the structure that these activities gave to their week, and the fact that it gave them *“something to look forward to.”* They felt that a lack of structure in their lives posed a danger to their wellbeing, particularly after retirement. For many participants, the structure of online activities provided a way to combat this feeling. They felt it helped them retain mental acuity, and by extension, improve their wider wellbeing: *“If you don’t, then your brain goes to mush, and you start doing silly things.”*

## Convenience and choice

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*“Before was a necessity, because I didn’t have an alternative. Now, yeah, it is a question of convenience.”*

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The convenience of online activities was one of the most common benefits raised by participants. There were many who used online activities to combat significant barriers to participation; as well as those for whom online group activities simply offered a way to ‘do more’ to provide a full and active life.

### Travel, mobility and caring

One of the most common benefits users noted was a reduced need for travel. This was particularly the case for those with reduced mobility, and those with disabilities. Alongside physical barriers, some older people who suffered from agoraphobia and other mental health issues – especially in the aftermath of lockdown – had found a lifeline in Zoom.<sup>10</sup> For unpaid carers too, the reduced need to travel long distances was of significant value, since it provided the ability to stay close to a loved one while still taking part in outside social activities. Of course, it also enabled them to take part alongside the person they cared for. For some, who were completely housebound, this presented their only option for group socialisation – it was a matter of much more than convenience.

### ‘It helps me do more’

Alongside those who experience particular barriers such as disabilities or responsibilities, some were simply enthusiastic that online activities allowed them to ‘do more’ and fit more activities into an already busy and lively schedule. Zoom gave some already active older people more time to enjoy and expand the range of activities they attended.

### Staying connected when things change – and an ‘insurance policy’

Participants also valued the flexibility that online group activities offered when their circumstances changed. For example, those with worsening health or mobility issues were able to continue activities online when they were no longer able to attend in person. Relationships, as well as routines, could be maintained.

“Well, that was, as I say, when my husband was very ill, if he could have done something on Zoom, he would have been happier.”

Alongside dealing with temporary changes, some participants were explicit that online group activities acted as a kind of insurance policy against future more permanent changes in their own mobility: “I think you should learn how to do it now, in case you ever get to the stage where you are housebound, and can’t ever go out, and that was really your only lifeline.”

## Choice of activity

Many of the benefits participants experienced were related directly to the activity they took part in. Those who attended exercise classes were naturally most excited about the impact the classes had had on their fitness; while those who attended a quiz were happiest that the quiz kept them mentally active. This serves as a reminder that ‘one-size-fits’ all does not work for older people’s activities, online as much as off.

## ‘Power-users’

Where a wide variety of activities took place, older people spoke of enthusiastically “throwing” and “launching” themselves, or “jumping [with] both feet” into activities (often alongside in-person activities where possible). They frequently became ‘power-users’, actively building their own programme of online activities to match and meet their own particular interests or health and wellbeing needs.



## Technology: barriers and enablers

*"I don't like techy stuff generally. But needs must."*



Clearly, technology is still a significant barrier for both users and non-users, and there is no shortage of studies on the technological barriers that older people face. At the same time, we found a very diverse picture of the enablers, as well as the barriers, they faced in terms of digital inclusion.

### Skills and devices

Users demonstrated a very wide range of skill level. Where perhaps once online group participants might have been considered at the bleeding-edge of technology users, it was clear most were not enthusiastic 'silver surfers' or technical wizards. Most did not identify themselves as especially adept or technically advanced, but at various levels of basic adequacy. Similarly, access to devices was on a continuum, and could be complex and multi-faceted: one participant, while using her hand-me-down iPad for Zoom, proudly showed her phone "for the elderly" (a simplified mobile phone) as evidence that she wasn't "good with technology."

Many organisations offer support to older people to get online; however, it was also common for participants to find support from friends, family, or neighbours, and many were resourceful in finding the help they needed from other sources. There were also many examples of peer support being provided both in online groups, and offline outside the activities (including during the sessions observed).

### Free devices: a mixed blessing

Several organisations also talked about issues with schemes providing older people with devices during the pandemic. They spoke of older people who found themselves stuck with devices they could not use, and, after an initial free period, saddled with contracts they could not afford, which were difficult for them to understand or negotiate. Some questioned the motives of providers. One organisation told the story of one of their clients who had been featured in a TV news report as an example of success. But behind the scenes, she had been confused, anxious, and upset by a device provided with no support, and a contract she could not afford or understand.

### Digital Provider Upselling: 'Borderline Financial Abuse'?

Most concerningly, some organisations talked about the experiences of older people with telecoms and digital services providers. There was a particular problem with confusing and often unaffordable contracts which older people had taken on without understanding them, often due to aggressive upselling. Some charities had to intervene on clients' behalf. This, one organisation said, felt like 'borderline financial abuse'.



## Suspicion about technology, and digital coercion

Frustration with the increasing drive to use online services, from banking to bus passes - seen by some as a sort of bullying – was a significant barrier, which cut across users and non-users. Perhaps strongest of all these suspicions was a belief that online group activities would inevitably replace face-to-face – indeed, many seemed suspicious that this may be the aim of the research. They felt they were being forced to do something they would never be able to do, and that those pushing digital inclusion were oblivious to their experiences.

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*“You don’t really care about us. You say you do, but you don’t. I’m 86, my wife is 92, we’re not going to get online and all that stuff. All the younger ones, they do all that as a matter of course. You could have just waited, but you didn’t.”*

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Online scams, privacy, and security were of particular concern. In these cases, the need for a trusted organisation who could support – and provide a ‘protective layer’ between the technology and the vulnerable user – was seen as highly valuable.

## ‘It’s just not the same’: social awkwardness

Not all older people who tried online activities felt a strong sense of human connection, and some felt that online activities were a poor substitute for in-person contact. *“They’re only better than nothing for a while. And it’s a very poor relation. In my opinion.”* Those people often linked this to a frustration with the social awkwardness of Zoom. Despite the discomfort, some had pushed through what one person called *“a bit of a steep learning curve.”*



## On balance

Overall, negative attitudes to technology were clearly a barrier for many, and for some these were insurmountable. For others, the practical desire to get what they needed was enough to overcome that barrier with the right support. Users were by no means all technology enthusiasts; most were just pragmatists.

Finally, perhaps what was most striking in conversations with many older people who enjoyed online activities was the very similarity between their experience of online and face-to-face activities. Indeed, some people in groups often amalgamated online activities and in-person activities when discussing them, and seemed not to see a clear divide in terms of the medium itself. Rather, they were interested in what they got out of the activity, however it might be delivered.



## 3. Organisational Experiences

In order to expand our research from the older people we spoke to directly, we consulted professionals in ten organisations across the UK, to find out more about their experiences of running online group activities over the lockdown, and since. Among them, we included some organisations who had not delivered these activities, to ensure we also captured their reflections. In the following section, we draw out key themes. This includes some of the opportunities and positive impacts they encountered, barriers and challenges they experienced, and their hopes and plans for the future.<sup>11</sup> The present work provides additional insight to the lockdown periods, but also, a snapshot of ongoing provision since lockdown (as of July - September 2022).

### Launch during the Pandemic

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***“We hadn’t done any online activities prior to lockdown, and before the Pandemic, we believed no older people would take part in online activities. But now, post lockdown, we’ve changed our minds.”***

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For organisations whose key purpose is partly to bring older people together to build relationships and reduce isolation, the lockdown could hardly be more testing. In some organisations, alongside making necessary digital adaptations to day to day working practices internally (such as adopting remote working), there was a realisation that they could use some of those same new technologies to work with older people directly.<sup>12</sup>

For organisations who decided to try running online group activities, there was no guarantee of success. All were very aware that the activities would not be suitable for those who were digitally excluded, and some were sceptical as to whether there would be a high level of interest. However, those organisations we spoke to who went ahead found there was in fact sufficient interest and participation, and that, despite barriers and uncertainty, the positive impact had been substantial. Those who had not run online activities had found barriers insurmountable, or decided that they would not be suitable for their users.

### Rural opportunities: ‘Obviously, geography didn’t matter’

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***“Online activities in a rural area would be a cheap, very accessible way of doing things.”***

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Online activities had been particularly powerful for the rural organisations interviewed, which can cover very wide areas. (The rural organisations interviewed covered between 1,000 and 2,000 square miles.) One noted that, once they moved online, “*obviously, geography didn’t matter.*” As in older people’s own accounts, reducing reliance on transport featured heavily in their responses. Organisations reflected that, even where some face-to-face activities are possible for older people in rural areas, there is a question about how many of those activities could practically take part in, given the long distances that can be involved. One organisation working with older people with disabilities noted that a 90 minute journey each way to a service was prohibitive, even in a taxi.

Shorter trips may be possible weekly – but not daily.

Cost for users and organisations was also a consideration. Many older people in rural areas face higher cost of living pressures, especially around driving. Similarly, for organisations themselves having to provide extensive (and expensive) transport services was problematic given that “most traditional day centres are struggling with significantly reduced numbers” since Covid. Providing group activities for those spread across a wide area always met problems of transport (in some locations, for example, there may be only 3 buses a day), and any in-person activity for a widely dispersed community could find it financially unviable to hire a venue and leader (or find available volunteers).

Organisations in rural areas were far from blind to the additional challenges faced, especially related to well-known issues with patchy, slow broadband, and weak mobile signals/ black-spots. For example, in Northern Ireland, it was noted that “You don’t have to go far outside town to find people who [...] don’t even have mains electricity, never mind broadband.” Some noted, however, that the drive to get online was stronger in rural areas, where shopping, paying bills, almost all aspects of everyday life otherwise become extremely difficult for older people: “If you can afford [technology], and you can get it, you do. Because how else would you do anything?” All the more reason, they said, to put a significant amount of effort into their digital inclusion work.

## Reducing barriers and increasing opportunities

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*“For some, [...] this is their only option. [...] ..But it’s [...] an option that should be there generally.”*

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***“I think it’s like a real spectrum: [...] some people who have higher needs, need to zoom. But equally, some people who have very low needs want the Zoom as well.”***

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While all of the organisations interviewed were very mindful of digital exclusion, those who had run online group activities believed that online group activities also created opportunities for greater inclusion. Like older people themselves, they noted that online activities could be particularly valuable for specific groups, such as those with disabilities, and carers. For carers, being able to enjoy group activities and also stay close to a loved one, or to avoid costly care they could not afford, was of huge value. Like older people themselves, organisations also noted the benefits of the flexibility and continuity offered as older people’s circumstances changed.

Alongside the opportunity to reach those who might otherwise be excluded due to particular barriers they face, organisations found that for some, online activities meant that they were simply able to do ‘more,’ to maintain a happy, active, stimulated older age. For some with higher levels of need, it could be a ‘life-saver.’ For others, this approach simply offers convenience, and a welcome enhancement to quality of life.



## Two user personae

### Gita: 'I can do so much more...'



- In her late 60s, Gita wants to enjoy her retirement. She has a very active social life and 'throws herself' into all kinds of activities, and has a wide circle of friends. She has fairly good mobility too, although she has a recurring condition that means sometimes she has to take a step back for a few weeks. The most important thing for her is not to lose the activities that make her life worthwhile, and to stay active and occupied. She uses online group activities to allow her to *do more*.

### Irene: 'This is my lifeline...'



- In her early 70s, has very limited mobility and lives alone. In-person, she can only access one or two activities in person a week at most, usually when a minibus is provided. Now she is able to attend a wide variety of online activities alongside the few in-person activities. She would rather be there in person every time, but this is the next best thing and means she feels less lonely and housebound.

## Hybrid services: offering greater choice

*"For most older people now, it's an option, not a necessity. We're building in the digital option."*

Many organisations have now settled on a 'hybrid' mode of delivery, in order to offer older people options that maximised their chance of attending. The importance of choice was paramount. This was reflected beyond the voluntary sector: an NHS commissioner discussed the successful moving of commissioned fitness and falls prevention programmes online over the pandemic, and felt that, "Despite the fact that most people can go back to in-person, I don't think we should go back to a position where that is not an option." A key charitable funder of older people's services perhaps put this best: "The key for us is choice and agency. Can older people decide what they need, and get it in the way they want it?"



## Technology support

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***“There’s no point in persuading a 90 year old man to do his Sainsbury’s shop online, when all he wants is to get BT Sports. Don’t say ‘you have to because this is the future’ – say ‘what do you want to enjoy? What do YOU want from this?’”***

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Organisations related the substantial effort of providing technical support for older people to use the service, both during initial start-up in lockdown, and to some extent since. Alongside the specifics of the technology, this required patient confidence-building and ‘moral support.’ Most organisations offered individual one-to-one support over the telephone (or in person, where possible), alongside some training and written materials, and the need for intensive, tailored individual support for those who had the ‘furthest to go’ technically was a common theme. Many organisations simply had to rely on the existing skills of their staff, where they existed, and struggled where they did not. While the fast ramp-up of digital support necessitated by the Pandemic may be unusual, the need has not gone away, and organisations noted that providing online activities still required significant technical support.

Given that motivation is key to driving digital inclusion, organisations found online group activities to be a useful ‘hook’ that gave older people a reason to engage digitally.<sup>13</sup> This was another reason that organisations felt the particular activity delivered was important.

Finally, all recognised that, realistically, some older people won’t ever be able to get online – even if they want to. So where did they draw the line? Some drew boundaries around hardware and access, while others also provided support in this area. Overall, however, the feeling was perhaps best summed up as:

*“You have to be sure that getting people online is the best approach – the time it takes has to be proportionate to the impact, and it being the best approach for them.”*

## Organisational barriers

### Staff skills and attitudes to technology

When asked to consider organisational challenges experienced related to online group activities, staff skills was a key theme. One organisation pointed out that, even if they had highly skilled digital inclusion staff, those leading groups and activities often had low technology confidence and skill. This was even more the case for volunteers. Another familiar theme was a lack of ‘buy-in’ and cultural resistance from staff. Especially during the pandemic, “staff were exhausted” and did not want to take on “another new thing”. This lack of enthusiasm, they thought, was sometimes passed on by staff to potential users.

### Concerns about digital exclusion

Some organisations who had not run online activities were honest about the fact that they had not even considered the possibility. Some had assumed at the outset that older people would be disinclined, or unable to take part, due to widely-known digital exclusion factors. They quite rightly recognised that, in working with the most elderly and disadvantaged, they were statistically likely to find lower take-up.<sup>14</sup> One organisation working at national level put it simply: “Some older people use the internet. Ours don’t.” This is not a tool suitable for all older people, and it is right that organisations should consider carefully whether it is suitable for their clients.

At the same time, however, those organisations sometimes recognised that they were necessarily basing their decisions on their own perceptions of their client group, rather than any “hard data” on their own service users. Interestingly, organisations who had run activities had the same initial thoughts, but had come to the conclusion that, despite this, its potential was sufficient to be ‘worth a try.’ Some said that the pandemic had revealed more use of the internet than they had previously recognised.

Overall, digital exclusion remained a concern for all, and most noted that online group activities were not the best solution for the very oldest since they would tend to be least digitally knowledgeable. One noted, however, that this is also the case for face-to-face methods, where a lack of mobility in the most elderly client group often prevents attendance. Online was therefore no better, and no worse. For them, the value in the online option was in adding another type of intervention to a toolkit which requires a good deal of flexibility, in a client group with a great deal of variation.

## About funding

### Flexible funding in the Pandemic led to innovation

In the initial stages of the pandemic, many charitable funders offered more flexible and unrestricted grants to allow organisations to act quickly and effectively in a time of great change. Organisations said this was a key factor in allowing the experimentation that led to innovation in online digital activities.

### A danger of losing ground

Since the pandemic, funding for online group activities has become more of an issue. Most organisations have had to reduce their online offer – they were clear that running an online offer alongside an in-person offer is not resource neutral.<sup>15</sup> Some were particularly concerned that by having to scale back their online group activities since the end of lockdowns, they were losing the digital ground they had gained.

### Future funding

What, then, was the appetite from charitable funders? A senior grant maker from one of the UK’s largest charitable grant makers, who fund a wide range of activities for very vulnerable older people, reflected on this. *“However people deliver services is fine, for us. [...] We care about outcomes. Whether the service is delivered on a computer, or face-to-face, the key is the effectiveness.”* For them, *“The key is choice and agency. Can older people decide what they need, and get it in the way they want it?”* It was noted that since the pandemic, previously sceptical trustees of charitable funders had become much more open. Overall, as far as they are concerned, the funding landscape could continue to support these activities, *“although we’re mostly interested in hybrid, because we think that choice is so important. But hybrid is here to stay.”* NHS, housing, and social care experts we spoke to also felt that there was a mood and appetite for funding this kind of work – if the funds were available. Making the case for value for money would be key.



## The future of online group activities

From all organisations interviewed, there was a recognition that as time goes on, and demographics shift, the barriers to online group activities will only reduce. Further, some organisations believed that there was not only a demand, but an imperative to think about working in ways that older people will come to expect. As one put it, *“We always knew we would eventually come to the digital world. [...] But COVID accelerated the digital need.”* All of the organisations who had so far run online group activities had plans to continue delivering these. For them, hybrid approaches are the future. Some had specific plans for growth and development of their online group activities, sometimes considering strategic expansions, such as offering their online activities to other organisations’ clients, developing specific apps which incorporate Zoom, or even monetising their online offer, or using it to enhance membership benefits. Alongside this, most older people’s organisations we spoke to had plans to increase the amount of digital inclusion work they did supporting older people – although again, this would be dependent on available funding.



For organisations who had not run online group activities, there seemed to be an openness – if not always a strong appetite - to explore these further. For some, there were lingering concerns that they would be actively excluding many older people. Some felt this kind of activity must fall to the ‘bottom of the list’ for now given their many competing priorities. As ever, some suggested that maintaining existing services was difficult enough, without having to develop completely new ones outside of their area of expertise.

# Conclusions

## The value of online group activities

The research showed that older people who use online group activities experience significant benefits, particularly in terms of reducing their sense of isolation and loneliness, and giving them a sense of purpose, structure, and meaning. This began for some during the pandemic, and a significant number of older people are still participating where these activities are available. In many ways, the benefits they experience are similar to those they experienced from face-to-face-activities.

The decreased need for travel has had significant benefits especially for those with disabilities, and for carers. While many also experienced the usual issues around digital inclusion, around access and skill, and suspicion about technology, preventing some from accessing activities, users are certainly not all technical experts – most are at basic levels of adequacy, or become so with the support of organisations and their own networks.

Many organisations who delivered online group activities over the pandemic saw substantial benefits for older people, and confirmed what older people themselves told us. The reduced need for transport can be especially valuable for organisations in rural areas, and organisations see significant benefits both for very isolated and less mobile older people with higher needs, and for those who want to maintain an already active and happy lifestyle. Offering choice and agency to older people is also seen as paramount, and several of these organisations are now running hybrid services, for precisely this reason.

Many of these organisations have been enabled to innovate during the pandemic precisely due to the flexibility of funding that grant-makers had adopted in that initial period. In the future, many of the organisations here wish to continue activities in hybrid form, and some have plans for



expansion. Others fear that a lack of skills and funding, and competing priorities, will mean that this is unlikely to rise to the 'top of the list.' All agreed that further digital inclusion work for older people was necessary in our changing society.

## Challenging the hard 'digital divide'

Online group activities sit at an important juncture between policy questions around digital inclusion, loneliness and isolation for older people, and the need to provide better quality of life to retain independence and prevent serious illness in an ageing population. Where once the notion of social digital interventions might have been viewed with suspicion – and indeed, was much less feasible – there is a growing feeling in policy and evidence circles that the changes of the last few years have made the time right to reconsider how this field of support might benefit older people and the wider population. While older people are more likely to be digitally excluded, the number of older people who are active users of the internet cannot be ignored. This kind of activity may provide a significant opportunity for policymakers and organisations who support older people in our changing society.

The work here reinforces the need to see digital technology as an enabler, and not solely a barrier. The barriers that affect the digitally excluded are extremely well-explored and well-documented; less well-documented is the experience of older people who do use technology to an extent. This is valuable

information, especially after significant social shifts in the last three years.

The unhelpful dichotomy presented in policy forums between the technology ‘haves and have-nots,’ who exist on either side of a ‘digital divide’ conceals much more of a continuum of use, and indeed, some older people underlined the need to resist ageist presumptions. The research suggests the need, therefore, for more nuanced discussions about digital inclusion and older people, which recognise the opportunities as well as challenges. Hybrid services offer one area where we can start to think past unhelpfully dichotomised inclusion/ exclusion paradigms.

## One more valuable tool to support older people

Choosing not to run online group activities because it will exclude the most elderly is problematic: activities at community centres are also less accessible to those clients, and yet the same arguments are not made for those in-person activities. Offering choice to older people will become ever more important in the coming years, and perhaps sooner than we had previously anticipated. Of course, this does not mean that older people should be herded onto the Internet. Instead, perhaps, this research shows that we have a responsibility to keep providing services that meet older people’s needs in the way that best suits them.<sup>16</sup>

No one solution is right for all older people, who are not a homogenous group. (Indeed, we are looking at up to 45+ years and multiple generations – not to mention the wide range of social, cultural and economic factors which help to determine digital inclusion.) Older people themselves deserve to have a range of options and activities available to them, delivered in a way that suits them. And in order to meet many different needs, providers of support, and the people they help, require as many potential tools and enablers as possible – from a minibus, to a support worker or friendly neighbour, to a webcam.

## Key recommendations



### For funders

- **Invest in online group activities to avoid losing them**  
The pandemic has highlighted the value of online group activities for older people, and investing in them now can help maintain momentum and prevent the loss of ground gained during the pandemic by organisations.
- **Take a flexible approach to funding**  
The flexible funding approach taken by grant-makers during the early days of the pandemic led to substantial innovation. Online group activities are a key piece of evidence that shows the effectiveness of this funding strategy.
- **Provide training and support**  
Organisations need training, resources, and support to develop online services. They also need help to understand and explain the benefits their clients may experience.

### For policymakers and researchers

- **Help to identify and promote what works**  
There is currently little evidence or understanding of what constitutes a good quality online group activity. More research on this would be valuable.
- **Support more nuanced messaging about digital inclusion**  
Some continuing policy debate on digital activities for older people is becoming unhelpful, and discouraging investment in digital activities which may benefit many older people. The digital ‘divide’ is a continuum. While a significant proportion of older people will never go online, providing services for those who can is increasingly a matter of inclusion – not exclusion.

## For organisations supporting older people

- **Provide good leaders and group management**

Group leaders should be skilled, personable, and able to provide support to engage participants. Even experienced group leaders may need extra time and support to get used to Zoom.

- **Find the right activities**

Older people (and no doubt, people of all ages) are particular about the activity they want to take part in. Just as in face-to-face activities, they want to see a range of things offered, and take part in those that speak to their own particular interests. The 'hook' is vital.

- **Ensure interactivity and smaller groups**

Fully live and interactive sessions with small groups seem to provide the best opportunities for intimacy and friendships to form. A mix of general and structured activities tends to be preferred – structured activities with more freeform talking in breaks, or between 'sessions' can work very well. (For example, during a quiz.)

- **Make it as easy to use as you can**

Simple and easy access to sessions are very important for older people - and for the organisations who support them. Make it as easy for older people as you possibly can to join sessions.

- **Provide technical support where you can**

Accessibility and support from skilled staff is essential for a good quality online experience. But this has to be proportionate, and you need to make sure this is a realistic solution for the older person you're working with (and one you are able to offer). Otherwise, you risk them becoming stressed and frustrated, and losing confidence.

- **Your connection to your clients is your greatest asset**

Older people value a trusted organisation to help them get online and using these services – especially one they already know well.



- **Start small and don't be afraid to fail**

Organisations who started these activities had no idea if they would work. For most, they found success, but little would have been lost if they had not. They did need to give them time to 'bed-in', however – returns may not be immediate.

- **Take a hybrid approach**

Nobody wants to lose face-to-face services they use. Older people are used to seeing online services replace things they rely on – they will need reassurance that you are not going to suddenly take away their existing activities.

- **Work in partnership**

You don't need to do everything yourself. You can work with other providers with knowledge and experience, and share activities with them.



# Notes and References

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2 See, for example, Warr, P., Butcher, V., & Robertson, I. (2010). Activity and psychological well-being in older people. *Aging & Mental Health*, 8(2), 2004-Issue 2.

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3 The primary research comprised:

- In-depth individual case study interviews, group interviews and focus groups delivered online and inperson with 52 older people
- Online activity session observations across 3 organisations
- Interviews with professionals from 10 front-line provider organisations across England and Northern Ireland
- Contextualising interviews with professionals in organisations working at a strategic level, including one housing policy-focused organisation, an NHS commissioner, and a grant-maker from a major charitable trust
- Informal evaluations, and case study documents

Apart from Open Age itself, we have chosen not to name the organisations where interviews took place, in order to avoid identifying any older people, and to ensure that organisations were able to be open about the challenges as well as the successes of their work. However, below is a brief description of each organisation.

- Open Age, a membership charity for older people based in North West London.
- An older people's community organisation based in Northern Ireland which offers a major charity-led social prescribing programme using community development methodologies as well as delivering activities for older people itself.
- A major UK public arts organisation who deliver arts workshops across the UK with a range of community groups, including with older people with neurological impairment, working in partnership with the NHS. We focused on a project in North Yorkshire.
- Three local community older people's charities, including one multi-purpose community centre working with older people as well as children and families. These were based in ethnically and socioeconomically diverse London Boroughs, and all offered a range of support for older people, from group activities to befriending and care coordination.
- A national infrastructure organisation connecting volunteer-led faith-based community support projects for older people, which also runs its own front-line support activities in a town in the South East of England.
- A community older people's charity providing range of support for older people, from group activities to befriending and care coordination, covering a wide mixed rural and semi-urban area of the West Midlands.
- A national organisation in the disability sports sector who developed activity programmes for older people during the lockdown.
- A small charitable specialist housing provider for older people in London.

We also interviewed a range of expert professionals from fields including the NHS, housing organisations and policy networks, and grant-makers from charitable trusts.

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6 Even the idea of a single divide is an oversimplification: Campaign to End Loneliness have noted that there are *multiple* digital divides (for example, relating to equipment, affordability, skills, and confidence). See Joplin, K. (2020). Promising Approaches Revisited: Effective action on loneliness in later life. Campaign to End Loneliness.

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8 See Joplin, K. (2020). Promising Approaches Revisited: Effective action on loneliness in later life. Campaign to End Loneliness. Further recent evidence and policy briefings on loneliness which mention the value of digital interventions can be found in Mental Health Foundation (2022) Mental Health Awareness Week 2022 – England Policy Briefing. Mental Health Foundation. [https://tacklinglonelinesshub.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/MHAW22\\_Loneliness\\_England\\_Policy\\_Briefing.pdf](https://tacklinglonelinesshub.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/MHAW22_Loneliness_England_Policy_Briefing.pdf)

See also: McCall, V., Gibson, G., Rolfe, S., Serpa, R., Lawrence, J. (2022). Promoting Inclusive living via Technology-Enabled support | The INVITE Project. University of Stirling. (p.17)

9 For example projects, see the TAPPI inquiry: Housing LIN. (2021). The TAPPI Inquiry Report: Technology for our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation – Phase One (Webpage). <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/The-TAPPI-Inquiry-Report-Technology-for-our-Ageing-Population-Panel-for-Innovation-Phase-One/>

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10 Many are still struggling with the aftermath of the pandemic: some vulnerable older people are still shielding; some had found that, post-Covid, their mobility had decreased significantly; others felt anxiety about leaving the house more generally, or had developed agoraphobia.

11 Prior to this work, there have been a few other studies of online group activities during the pandemic. The National Lottery Community Fund published an overview of their Ageing Better fund activities supported during lockdown – a test and learn programme which saw most of its activities having to move online, contrary to expectations at its outset.

Elsewhere, the University of Salford and Manchester Metropolitan University evaluated community provision of remote online activities during the pandemic in Salford, and found that, while these services do not offer a 'panacea' for older people, many of whom cannot engage, 'the move to remote and online methods of delivery has provided proof of the ability of older people's activities and services to continue to operate timely, effective, and much needed engagement and support for older people in Salford.' Both of these studies relate to an earlier stage of the pandemic. The present work provides additional insight to the lockdown periods, but also, a snapshot of ongoing provision since lockdown (as of July - October 2022).

See National Lottery Community Fund. (2022). Delivering Digital projects for people Aged 50+ experiencing social isolation – learning from Ageing Better. National Lottery Community Fund. Accessed 28th November 2022. <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/ageing-better/Ageing-Better-Delivering-digital-projects.pdf?mtime=202209112448&focal=none>

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12 As the Lloyds Bank Foundation found in their study of small charities' experiences during lockdown, 'charities [...] consistently cited their most significant achievement as remote adaptation.' For more on the experience of small charities during the pandemic, including digital as both an enabler and a barrier, see Lloyds Bank Foundation. (2021). Small Charities Responding to Covid 19, Summer 2021 Update. Lloyds Bank Foundation. Retrieved from [https://www.lloyds-bankfoundation.org.uk/media/vdpndfd5/lbf-small-charities-responding-to-covid-19-part-3\\_final.pdf](https://www.lloyds-bankfoundation.org.uk/media/vdpndfd5/lbf-small-charities-responding-to-covid-19-part-3_final.pdf)

13 This concurs with National Lottery Community Fund's (2022) Ageing Better Report – the need to find 'a "hook" or incentive' that works for the individual. (p3.) For a detailed discussion of motivation, see Yates, S. (2019) *Motivational Barriers of Non-users of the Internet*. Good Things Foundation. [https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/digital\\_motivations\\_report.pdf](https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/digital_motivations_report.pdf)

14 Again, see OFCOM. (2022). 'Digital exclusion' Op. Cit

15 Again, this concurs with National Lottery Community Fund's (2022) Op. Cit. study on digital projects over lockdown.

16 This is even more important when socio-economic class and a range of other demographic factors are likely to play a significant role in older people's access to the internet – the potential to further compound inequality must always be part of our thinking.

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