1) Prevalence of Social Isolation in urban and rural settings

Following over 60 health & social care related projects developed in Aberdeen City in the last two years, (resulting from RCOP Change Fund investment), it has become very apparent in Aberdeen city that social isolation is a massive issue. For example: the city –wide Befriending scheme was set up in 3 months and took over 500 referrals within 5 months of operation, with over 70 different referral agents using the service from both the NHS, Local Authority but also self referrals and over 45% from 3rd sector organisations too. It was obvious to us here at Aberdeen’s TSI (who facilitated and managed the project) that we had just scratched the surface in terms of reaching those most social isolated and of course in turn those who were most at risk from declining health and a lack of social connectivity. Another huge area for us was social transport provision for health and social care appointments as well as accessing 3rd sector provision for condition –specific activities and support groups. We have been working for 16 months on our biggest Change Fund project ‘Social Transport – Collaborative solutions’ which was awarded £453k and is a cross sector project. This is already providing over 40 trips a week all over the city ensuring that people over the age of 55yrs have access to Pulmonary Rehab clinics, Heart failure clinics and also the ‘Musical Memories’ group from Alzheimer’s Scotland etc. This project will now move into its third and final phase where a dedicated service provided by a third sector partnership between Buchan Dial a Bus and The Co-Wheels care club will ensure access for GP appointments, visits to hospital, to social activities provided by 3rd sector provision and the local authority. This will be managed by a local authority Transport unit and has been deliberately design to fit in with HTAP (Health Transport Action Plan) strategy ensuring no ‘silo thinking’ between partners.

2) Impacts of Social Isolation, for instance loneliness & ill- health

From all of our organisations (over 50+) involved in the Reshaping Care For Older People Change Fund (RCOP), they have all fed back on the levels of social isolation they are finding with their client groups and record also what preventative measures can be taken to stop the inevitable decline. Not only are robust projects needed on the ground to encourage connectivity between people, groups and agencies but also transport has been a real barrier in allowing people to maintain friendships, access health and social care support, but also make new friends and connections and engage in stimulating activities. One individual told us, ‘I have might have two brand new hips but I just don’t want to carry on living after losing my wife two years ago.’
3) **Best Practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland, including examples of targeted support or initiatives (including housing, health, third sector)**

Our Social Transport – Collaborative Solutions has been perceived as a good example of reducing social isolation. It constitutes three important elements: Firstly, a robust research report from the Robert Gordon University which formed an evidence base to find out exactly what was going on in Aberdeen and what could be done about it. This drew on examples from Perth, Australia, and Vancouver, Canada as well as from all over Scotland: [http://acvo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Social-Transport-Collaborative-Solutions-Final-report-by-RGU.pdf](http://acvo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Social-Transport-Collaborative-Solutions-Final-report-by-RGU.pdf)

Secondly, we had a transport ‘£pot’ which meant we could sort out the more serious issues immediately short term, within a social transport Working group which we set up in the city: [http://acvo.org.uk/transport-making-social-isolation-history/](http://acvo.org.uk/transport-making-social-isolation-history/) Please see this press release on its progress so far. Thirdly, our final phase, it to set up a single point of referral for everyone. This means that anyone can phone, get help and advice but also be able to book transport there and then. All our older peoples Forums said that this is what they wanted: a ‘one stop shop’ that was easy and effective to use. So this is what we set out to do. This has just gone live and the new telephone number has been circulated through all the 3rd sector networks, NHS Channels of communications and through our local authority colleagues

4) **Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy**

Transport has to be a fundamental part of any planning and policy in the areas of health, social care and wellbeing initiatives but importantly, many of these problems require a ‘cross sector viewpoint’ as no organisation or statutory body can resolve these huge issues by themselves. All policy should encourage such innovation, sustainable funding for successful projects - not the dreaded year on year’ funding which haemorrhages practice, evaluation and doesn’t build social capital in our own communities to make them and the individuals that live in them resilient to life events.

5) **Effective awareness-raising within communities**

Any innovation takes time to reach parts of the community it needs to get to, all projects continually learn and must be enabled to keep learning from the work they are doing and keep improving in terms of communications as well as work on the ground. This has to be reflected in their funding structures but currently isn’t. Success breeds success but all parts of the community need to be involved. This means 3rd sector community networks, Forums and good partnership working between partners including the independent and private sectors. The TSIs (Third Sector Interfaces) have a huge role to play and their potential is immense but they are little known and still emerging from their chrysalis’s. More investment needs to happen as they support a whole range of faith groups, mental health organisations, Carer’s organisations, housing associations. advocacy organisations and housing associations, the list goes on. Also key organisation such as the Health & Social Care Alliance have
some terrific programmes such as #People Powered health & Wellbeing, these type of innovations need to be taken seriously and acted upon.

Jane Russell
ACVO TSI
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