connecting you

Tackling Loneliness with Transport Pilot project

Evaluation report by Devon Communities Together, September 2023

Funded by The Department for Transport

Foreword

Most of us will have felt lonely from time to time. Regrettably, loneliness for some people is a regular, even daily occurrence. It is now understood that loneliness has serious health and social implications and the inability to travel compounds these problems. The confidence needed to use public transport can be a significant contributing factor.

The Connecting You pilot and its many partner initiatives have sought ways in which transport can offer a solution and connect people to people, places and experiences.

Each project has been measured and evaluated, not only to enable the Department of Transport to understand more about how transport can be used to help reduce loneliness, but to share our findings and recommendations with others, particularly our local communities, statutory and voluntary organisations and transport operators.

In this way, we hope that Connecting You will have a lasting legacy, offering suggestions which make the reduction of loneliness a consideration when designing services and help make transport part of the solution moving forwards.

Councillor Andrea Davis, Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

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1. The project in numbers

Map of Connecting You Provision

Project Outcomes

£89,524 delivered in small grants to **14 organisations**

Travel training delivered to **22 organisations**, **125 participants**

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Return journeys made:

- **50** by bike
- **72** on foot
- **546** by train
- **2500** by minibus
- **268** by public bus
- **20** by taxi
- **738** by car
- **16** by carshare
- **98** by coach

1000 waves caught

5000+ cups of tea/coffee drunk

10,000+ miles travelled

Oldest participant **98** years young

7500 biscuits eaten

1,854 participants across the project

4 bus driver training sessions delivered to **25** drivers

25 partner organisations delivered **21** Pilot Projects

connecting you

Project Map

Key
- Travel Training delivered
- Core Partners
- Grant-funded Organisations
- Chatty Bus

2. Introduction

2.1 Overview of Connecting You

This project derives from the Government's 2018 loneliness strategy, which seeks to:
- reduce stigma by building the national conversation on loneliness;
- drive a lasting shift so that relationships and loneliness are considered in policy-making and delivery by organisations across society;
- improve the evidence base on loneliness, making a compelling case for action, and ensuring everyone has the information they need to make informed decisions through challenging times.

As part of this strategy the Department for Transport's Tackling Loneliness with Transport allocated £5m for pilot projects across the country to 'develop the evidence base for how transport can help to alleviate loneliness'.

Connecting You is the result of Devon County Council's successful bid to Tackling Loneliness with Transport and is one of 12 pilot projects funded in England.

Devon County Council's stated aims were to:

- 'Give people confidence to use public transport'
- 'Encourage independent travel'
- 'Improve transport for the user'
- Create awareness of the issues around loneliness'
- 'Increase driver confidence to help target audiences feel more welcomed and comfortable using bus services'
- 'Improve access to the user'
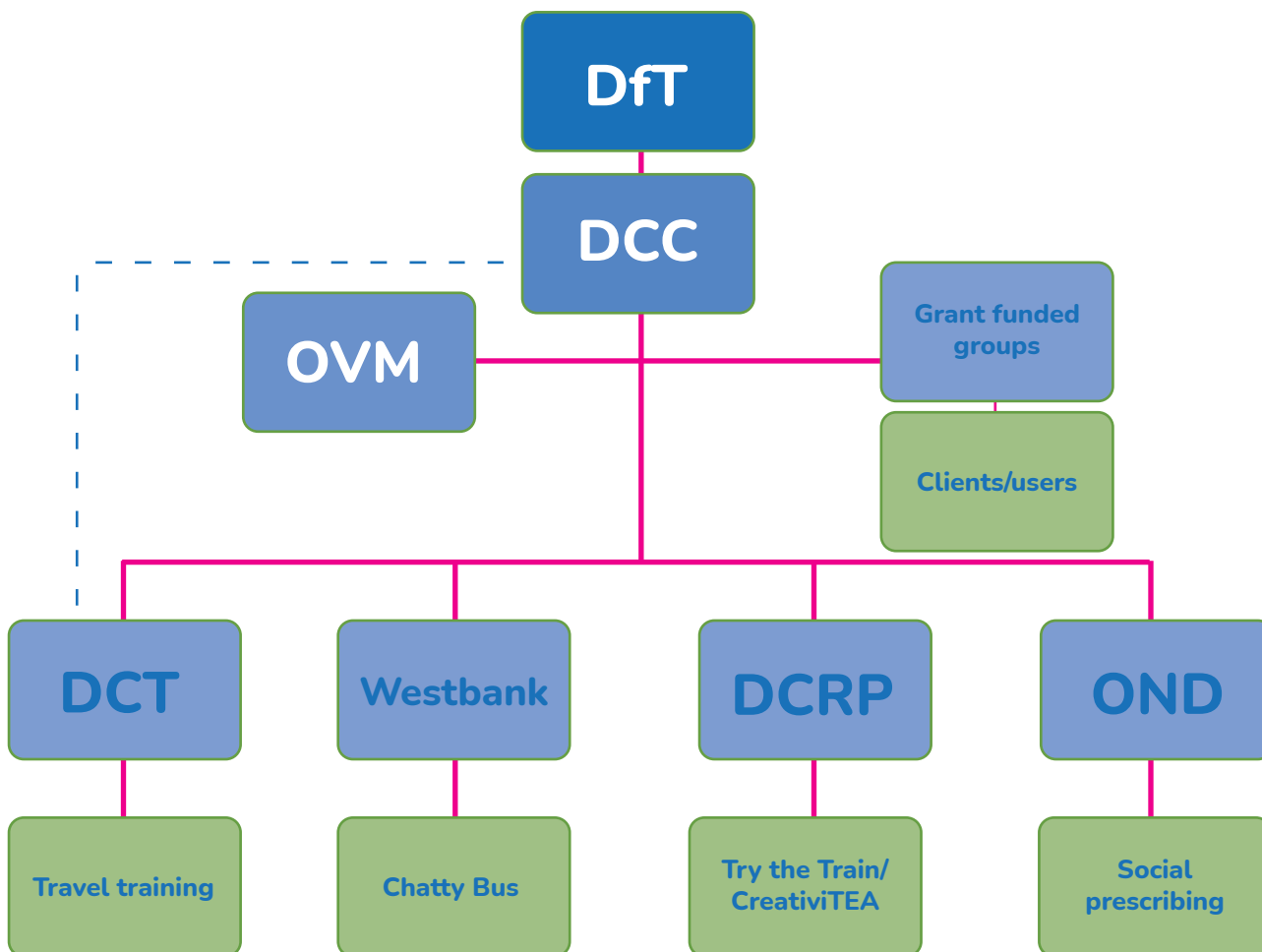- 'Improve mental health and wellbeing'[1]

Key delivery partners were One Northern Devon (OND), Westbank, Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership (DCRP) and Devon Communities Together (DCT). DCT also provided evaluation of the project. In particular the project built on previous work by Westbank (Chatty Bus) and DCRP (CreativiTEA and Try the Train).

Chatty Train

In addition to the key delivery partners, 14 community groups received grant funding to run their own, devised activities. In total 25 organisations were involved in delivering the project to 1,854 participants. A description of all the partners and their activities can be found in Part 2 of this report.

One Voice Media (OVM) was engaged as media partner, to promote the project via print, broadcast and social media.

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1   Tackling Loneliness with Transport in Devon Business Case, April 2022

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The project activities can be categorised as:

- Travel training: for VCSEs and care organisations to be able to support their clients in using public transport
- Organised travel: using a variety of modes of transport to access social, cultural, creative and fitness opportunities. This was the model for most of the grant-funded activity.
- Onboard activities: in which creative and social activities took part as part of a journey
- Driver support: training sessions and information
- Other: including self-planned travel (eg Skylark FM), transport related (eg Totnes Bike Hub)

2.2 Evaluation methods

The evaluation team at DCT (Devon Communities Together) have used a variety of qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools to measure the impact of the project interventions against the project aims and outcomes.

The Connecting You project involved multiple project strands and interventions delivered by partners including the recipients of project grants. With so many different types of projects being delivered, ranging from the training of bus drivers to delivery of activities at a local level, the challenge for the team was to devise an evaluation framework whereby consistent metrics could be applied across the scope of the project.

The beginning of this process saw the creation of a Theory of Change model which would allow us to measure the impact of the interventions against the expected outcomes using a variety of tools. These tools included:

- the collection of NATCEN (National Centre for Social Research) quantitative

data from project participants common to all the pilot projects;

- a short survey using the three-question [UCLA loneliness scale](#) (University of California, Los Angeles) designed to measure participants subjective feelings of loneliness as well as feelings of social isolation. The UCLA questions do not measure the sensitive term 'loneliness' (the first three questions). A fourth question asks directly about feelings of loneliness. This was completed by a sample of the participants (105 representing 6.5% of the total travel participants)

The UCLA scale is recommended by [ONS](#) (Office for National Statistics) and enables the funder to measure impact against other projects. Participants were also asked about their feelings regarding being prepared to travel. The results of the two surveys could be cross checked to reveal differences in impact across NATCEN characteristics.

As well as the quantitative evaluation tool the project also used the [MSC (Most Significant Change)](#) evaluation tool whereby stories of change were collected from storytellers across the projects. These stories were then read and discussed by a core group who identified themes which have bubbled up through the project participants own experiences. An advantage of using this method has been to allow space for introspection whereby the storyteller is learning and identifying the significance of what happened for themselves rather than being told what was important by the evaluators in the final project evaluation report.

Other methods of evaluation the team used was the collection of delivery data across the projects including number of participants, training sessions, number of volunteers, trips taken, geographical spread of the project across rural Devon and communication/marketing impact. Brought together, the results of each evaluation tool, as well as images, make up

this evaluation report. Against the project goals, they allow us to make observations and recommendations which we hope will allow understanding around the theme of transport and loneliness to deepen and develop going forward.

2.3 Theory of Change

Theory of Change models emphasise that inputs should be directed towards achieving the outcomes and desired impact.

An initial Theory of Change (ToC) introduction and workshop was attended by all the main delivery partners. This set out the ToC approach and considered overall impacts of the project with reference to the objectives in the application to Department for Transport. This was followed by meetings with the three principal partners, One Northern Devon, Westbank and Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership.

From the above, and with reference to the activities listed in the DCC bid to DfT, the following goals for long term change were identified:

- Reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation
- Increased confidence in public transport use

The DCC bid document specified a number of specific and exemplar activities to be undertaken as part of the project, building on previous initiatives. From these the following outcomes were derived:
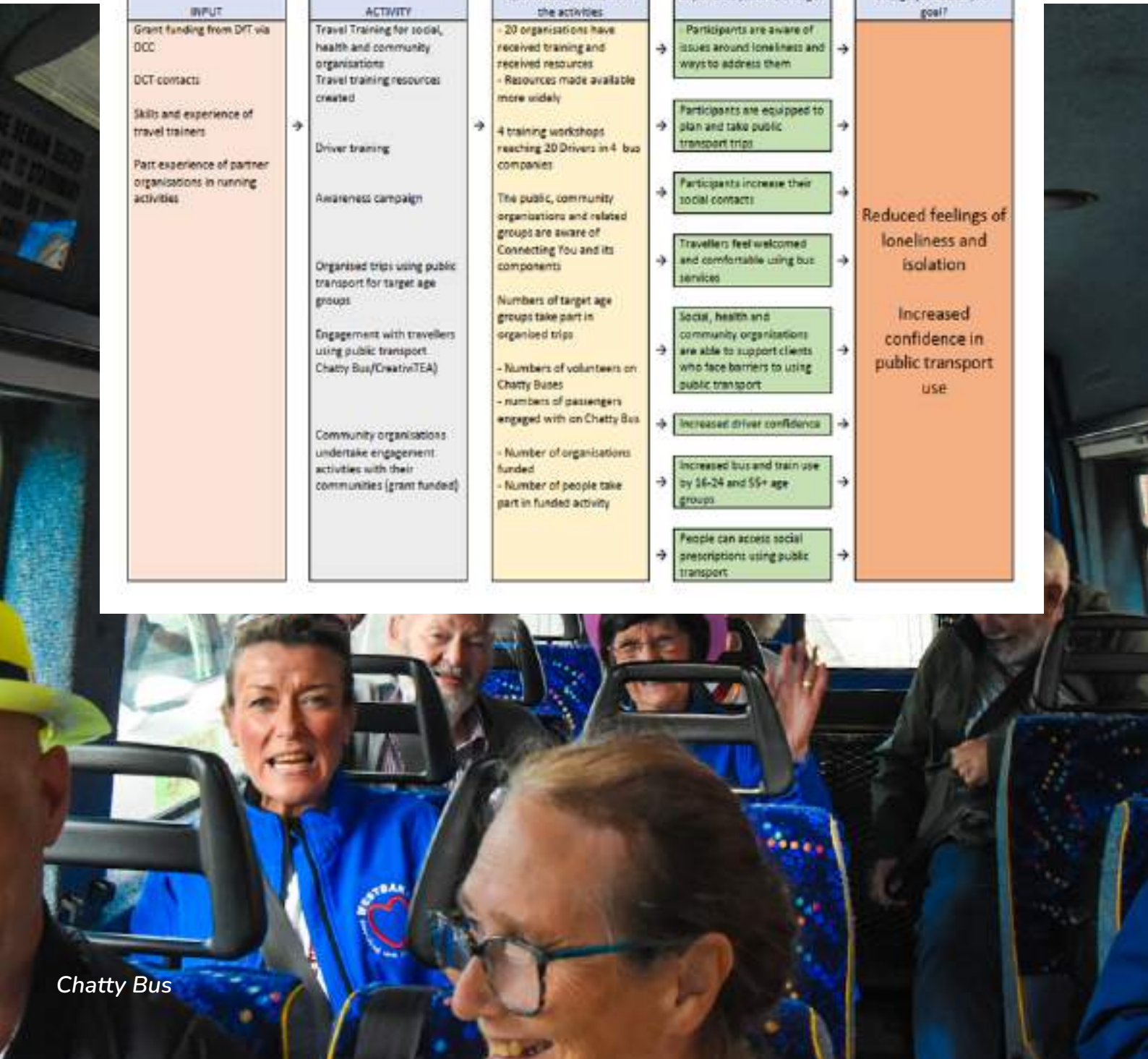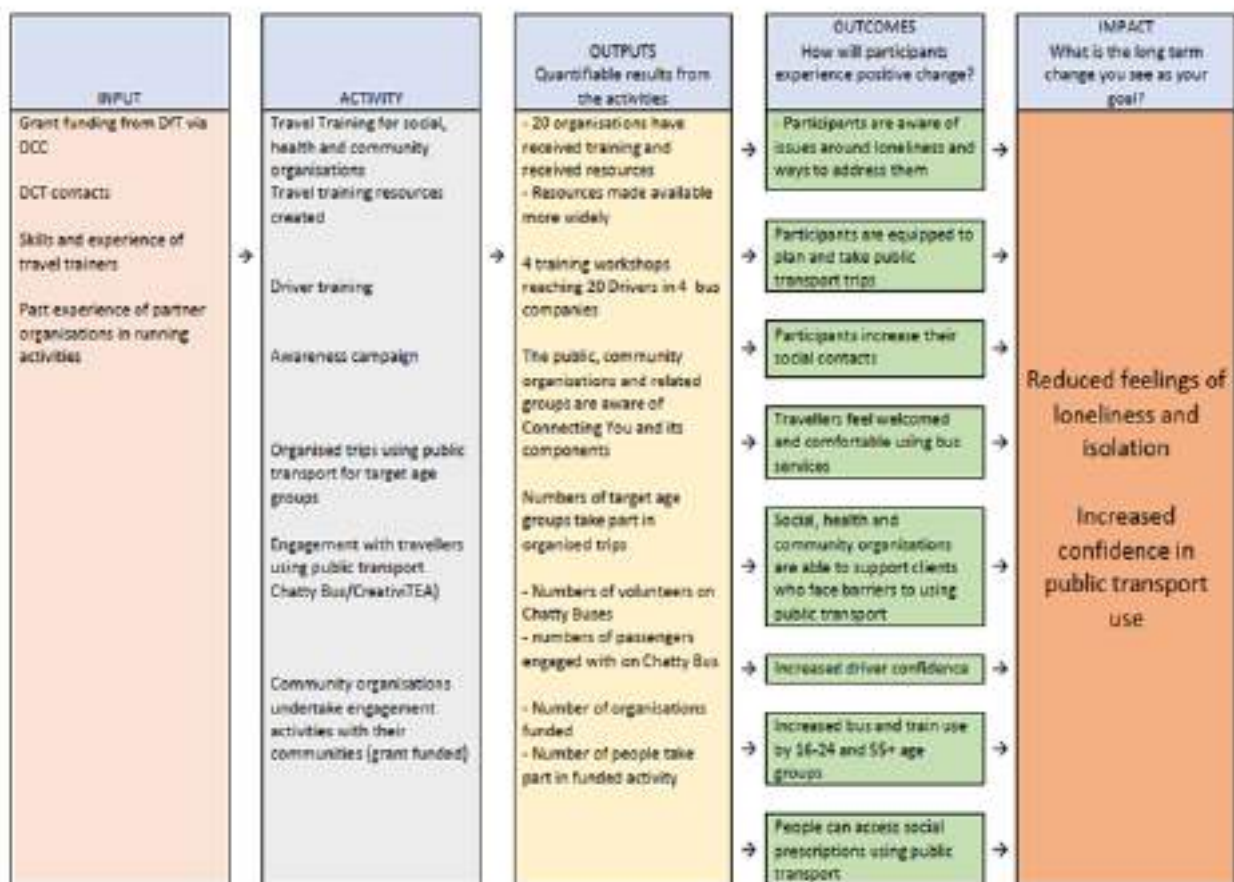
- Participants are aware of issues around loneliness and ways to address them
- Participants are equipped to plan and undertake public transport trips
- Participants increase their social contacts
- Travellers feel welcomed and comfortable using bus services
- Social, health and community organisations are able to support clients who face barriers to using public

transport
- Increased driver confidence
- Increased bus and train use among 16–24 and 55+ age groups
- People can access social prescriptions using public transport

The devolved nature of the project meant that each partner organisation had its own set of outputs, according to the types of activities it was undertaking. The broad outline of partner activities was built into the application and based on previous work that had been undertaken.

Theory of Change Framework

INPUT	ACTIVITY	OUTPUTS Quantifiable results from the activities	OUTCOMES How will participants experience positive change?	IMPACT What is the long term change you see as your goal?
Grant funding from DfT via DCC

DCT contacts

Skills and experience of travel trainers

Past experience of partner organisations in running activities | Travel Training for social, health and community organisations

Travel training resources created

Driver training

Awareness campaign

Organised trips using public transport for target age groups

Engagement with travellers using public transport. Chatty Bus/CreativiTEA)

Community organisations undertake engagement activities with their communities (grant funded) | - 20 organisations have received training and received resources
- Resources made available more widely

4 training workshops reaching 20 Drivers in 4 bus companies

The public, community organisations and related groups are aware of Connecting You and its components

Numbers of target age groups take part in organised trips

- Numbers of volunteers on Chatty Buses
- numbers of passengers engaged with on Chatty Bus

- Number of organisations funded
- Number of people take part in funded activity | Participants are aware of issues around loneliness and ways to address them

Participants are equipped to plan and take public transport trips

Participants increase their social contacts

Travellers feel welcomed and comfortable using bus services

Social, health and community organisations are able to support clients who face barriers to using public transport

Increased driver confidence

Increased bus and train use by 16–24 and 55+ age groups

People can access social prescriptions using public transport | Reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation

Increased confidence in public transport use |

Chatty Bus

3. Outcomes

3.1 Quantitative

Introduction to methodology

Quantitative evaluation tools play a key role in any assessing impact of a project like Connecting You. These include the collection of data to measure delivery against expectations and project aims. The project delivery numbers are on pg. 3.

As well as collecting numbers of participants, workshops, projects, trips etc quantitative data is collected from participants. Each activity provider was asked to collect standard, anonymous data for each person who interacted with the project. From these we have allocated participants to demographic categories. Each participant was allocated a unique ID number as part of this data collection enabling us to cross reference data collected via the project questionnaire.

The project used a bespoke questionnaire which we asked partners and funded groups to complete with project participants before activity and a few weeks after activity. The surveys' aim was to explore impact of the project on those who took part in activities.

As recommended by the project funder, the UK Government, as part of its loneliness strategy for England, we used an approach supported by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) consisting of four key questions. The first three were from the UCLA loneliness scale which seek to assess the participants' loneliness.

The fourth key question was more direct measure of loneliness asking, 'How often do you feel lonely'? As per guidance from ONS the questions were included in a larger survey whereby 'softer' questions around transport use, confidence in planning journeys and using transport framed the four questions.

'There is variation in how people understand the term "loneliness" and some people might be reluctant to admit to loneliness, and this might be particularly true of certain groups such as older men. A multi-item measure that does not mention loneliness directly can be helpful to address these issues. The recommended measures are well-tested and have a positive track record for performing well in general population surveys using different approaches to data collection.' ONS

Learning: It is advised that in future a survey should not end with the direct question around loneliness.

'We recommend that surveys do not end with the loneliness questions but finish on another, more neutral subject to avoid leaving respondents in a potentially negative frame of mind.' ONS

The survey was completed by 105 participants across the Connecting You project, representing 8.5% of the total participants.

UCLA
To assess the results of the UCLA questions we have followed the official guidance where each participant is rated on a scale from 3 - 9 according to their responses.
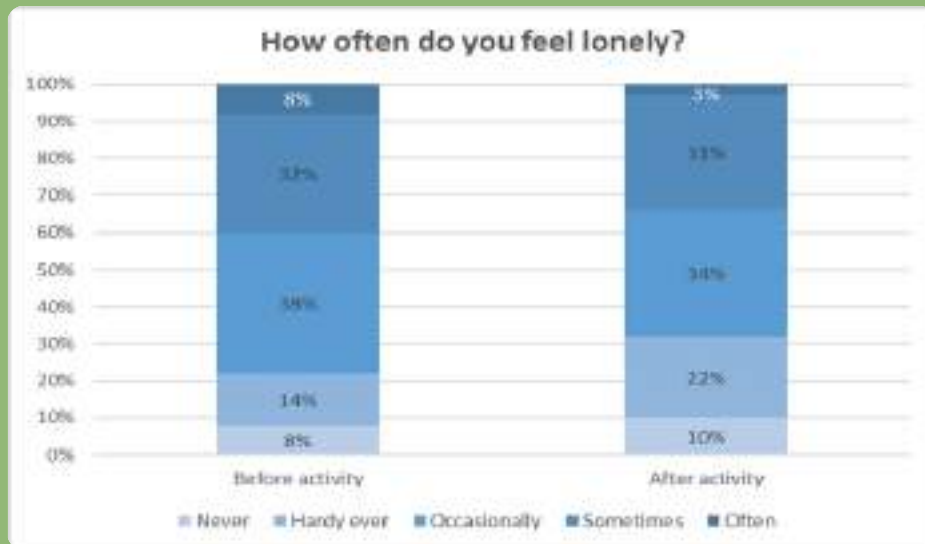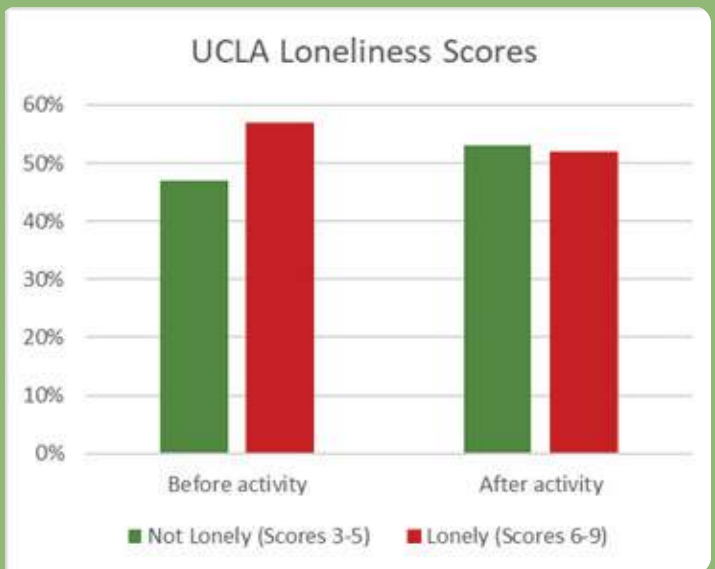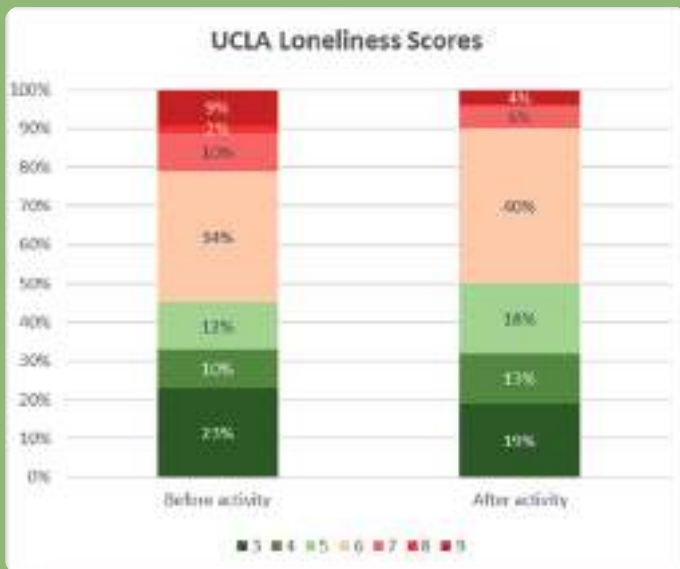
The 3-item UCLA Loneliness scale
1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
2. How often do you feel left out?
3. How often do you feel isolated from others?

1. Hardly ever or never, 2. Some of the time, 3. Often

The higher the score the lonelier the participant is felt to be. With a score of 6-9 the individual is classified as lonely.
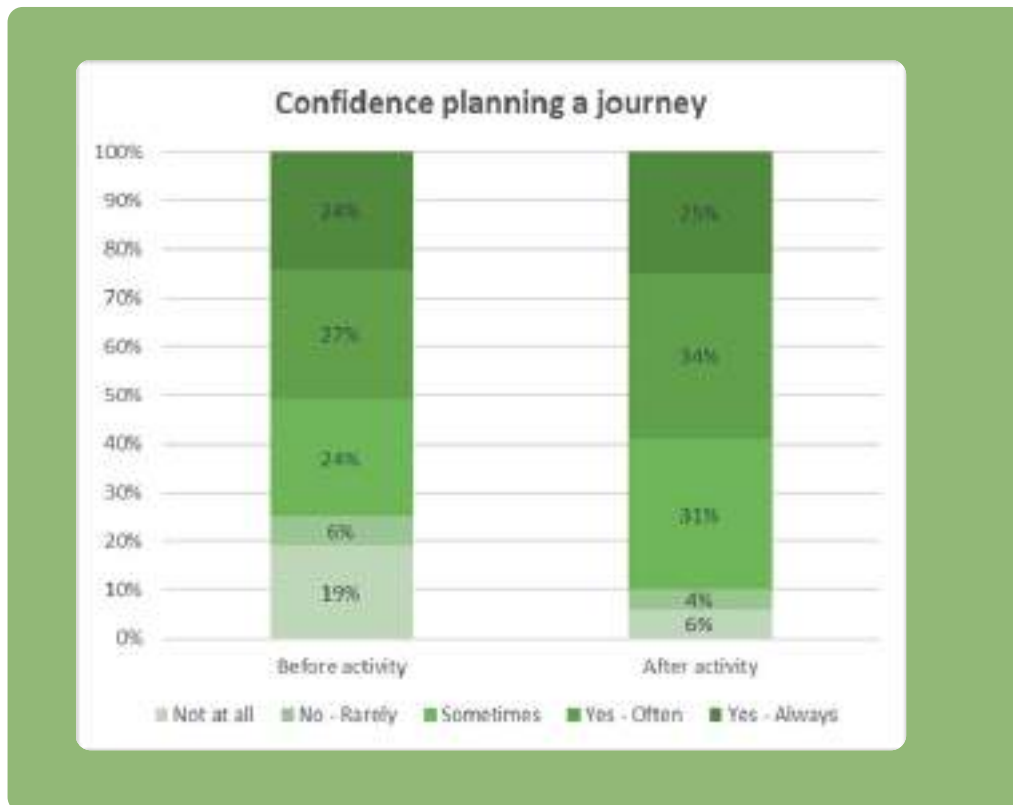
UCLA Loneliness Scores

(chart: Before activity / After activity — stacked bars with values 23%, 10%, 13%, 54%, 10%, 2%, 3% (Before); 19%, 13%, 18%, 60%, 6%, 4% (After))

UCLA Loneliness Scores

(chart: Before activity / After activity — Not Lonely (Scores 3-5), Lonely (Scores 6-9))

How often do you feel lonely?

(chart: Before activity — 8%, 14%, 58%, 13%, 8%; After activity — 10%, 22%, 34%, 33%, 5%)
Legend: Never, Hardly ever, Occasionally, Sometimes, Often

As well as looking at this headline response we have also looked 'inside' the numbers. We believe that by doing so we can identify a 'nudge' affect whereby although participants have not moved from 'lonely' to 'not lonely', many will have been nudged into being less lonely.

This idea of a 'nudge' affect is supported by the findings to the question: How often do you feel lonely?

We can see that the area of the chart for scores 6 – 9 has reduced following participation. In particular the numbers scoring 7 – 9 have reduced by around 50%. At the same time the numbers scoring 3 – 5 have increased by 11%. This supports the 'nudge' theory and demonstrates that progress is incremental.

In a longer project it would be useful to undertake a follow up survey at, say, six months to see if the reduction in loneliness has remained.

How confident are you in planning a journey?

Confidence planning a journey

	Before activity	After activity
Yes - Always	24%	25%
Yes - Often	27%	34%
Sometimes	24%	31%
No - Rarely	6%	4%
Not at all	19%	6%

Legend: Not at all, No - Rarely, Sometimes, Yes - Often, Yes - Always

Again we can see that the 'not at all' and 'rarely' blocks have shrunk dramatically (60%) post-participation, with a smaller (16%) increase in the combined 'often' and 'always' blocks.

Within the general trend, it should be noted that although 21% of respondents felt more confident after taking part, 8% felt less confident.

How confident are you in using public transport?

Confidence using public transport

	Before activity	After activity
Yes - Always	27%	31%
Yes - Often	29%	33%
Sometimes	22%	25%
No - Rarely	6%	5%
Not at all	17%	6%

Legend: Not at all, No - Rarely, Sometimes, Yes - Often, Yes - Always
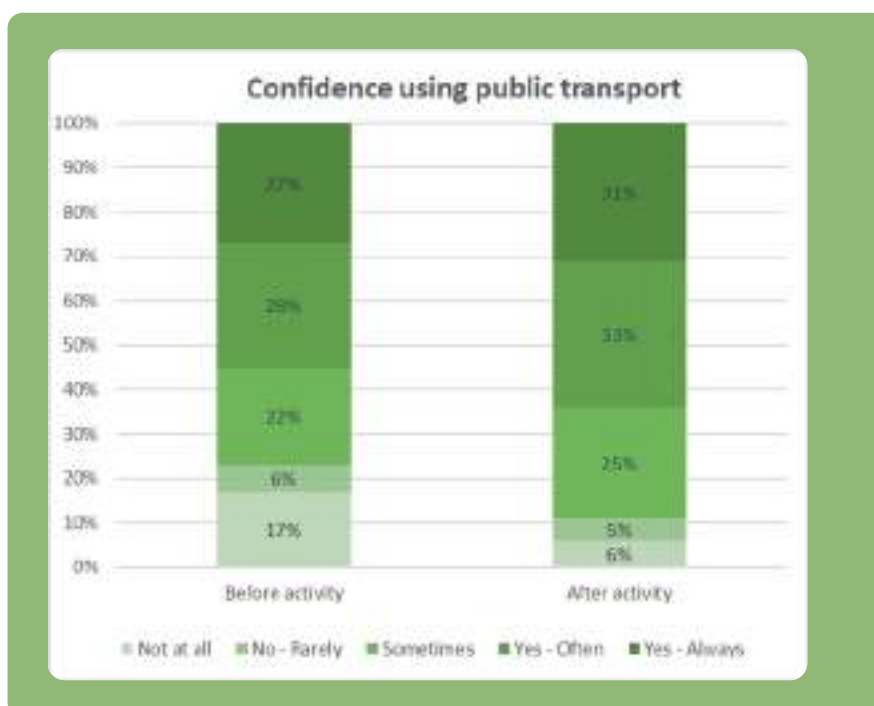
Here too, whilst the overall 'nudge' was towards greater confidence, and 28% of respondents felt more confident, 13% of respondents felt less confident.

It was unexpected that a significant percentage would feel less confident after taking part. Many of the project participants may not have used public transport for a while, so encountering changes in

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systems like using ticket machines, online timetables etc., would perhaps account for the reduction in confidence. Also, physical and cognitive ability might have decreased in some participants, creating greater challenges compared with their previous experience.
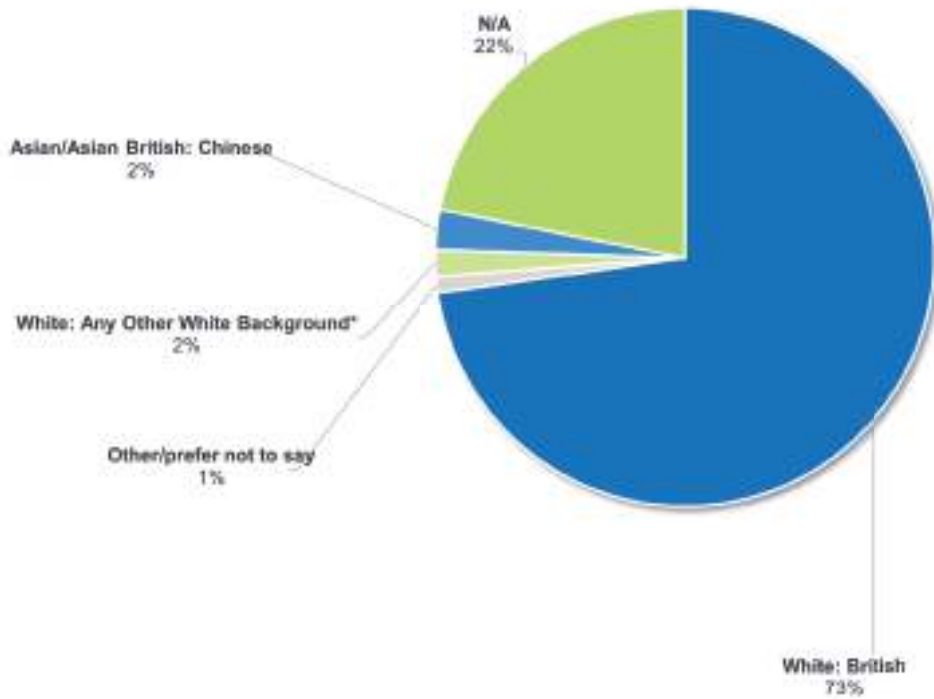
Demographic characteristics of participants

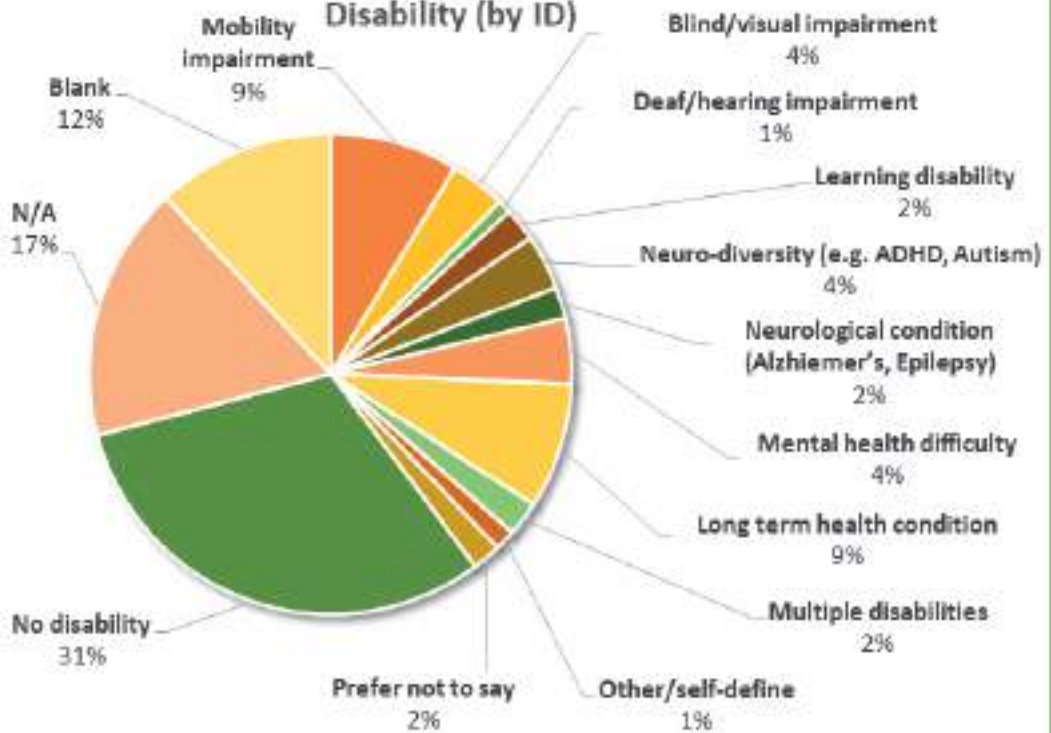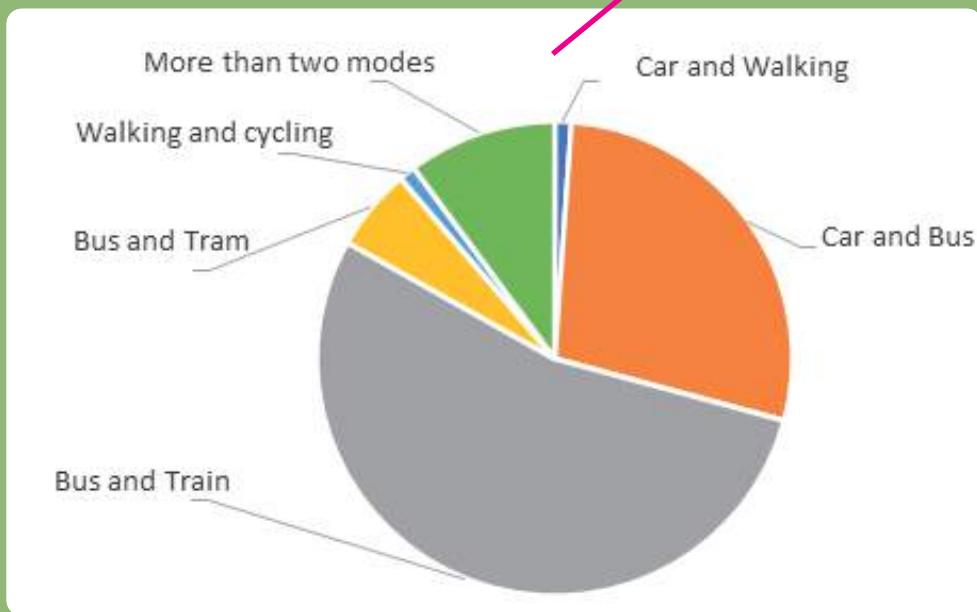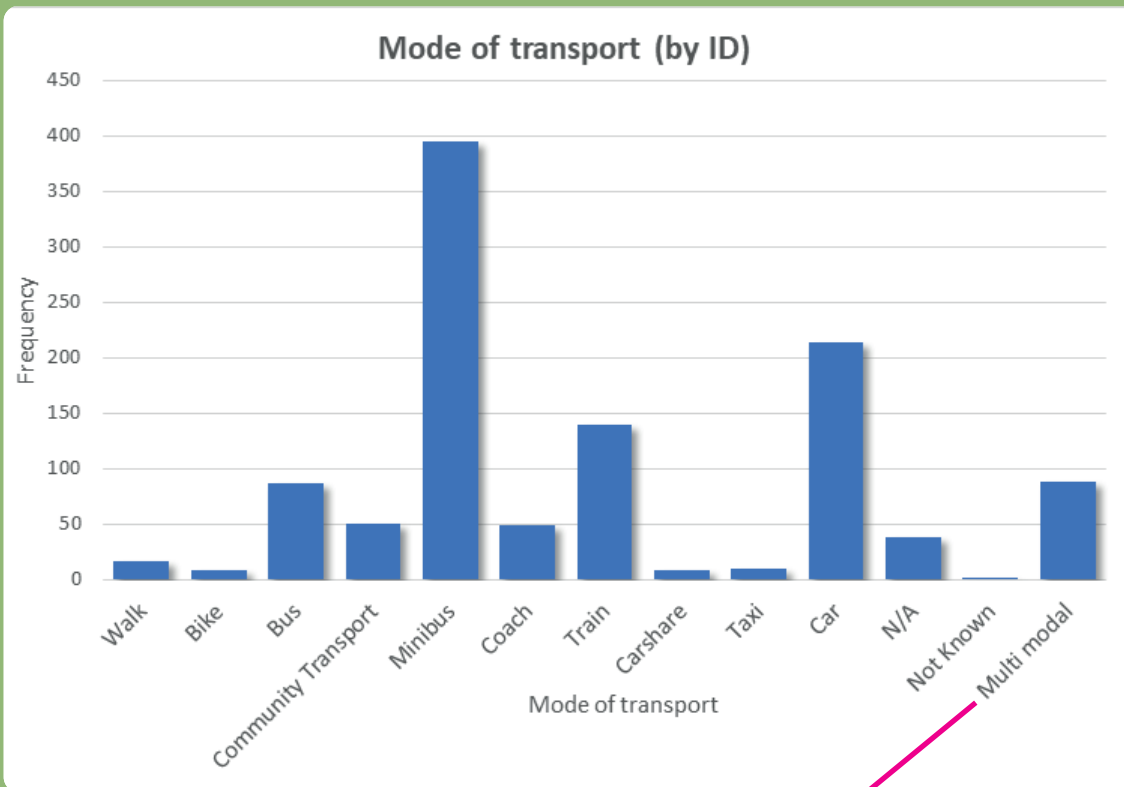The following charts show the demographic makeup of participants on the project.

Age (by ID)

Less than 15 — 1%
85+ — 11%
16 to 25 — 17%
26 to 34 — 1%
75 to 84 — 22%
35 to 44 — 1%
45 to 54 — 3%
55+ — 18%
65 to 74 — 15%
55 to 64 — 11%

Gender (by ID)

Non-Binary — 1%
Other/self-define — 0%
Male — 45%
Female — 54%

Ethnicity (by ID)

- N/A 22%
- Asian/Asian British: Chinese 2%
- White: Any Other White Background* 2%
- Other/prefer not to say 1%
- White: British 73%

Disability (by ID)

- Mobility impairment 9%
- Blank 12%
- N/A 17%
- No disability 31%
- Prefer not to say 2%
- Other/self-define 1%
- Multiple disabilities 2%
- Long term health condition 9%
- Mental health difficulty 4%
- Neurological condition (Alzhiemer's, Epilepsy) 2%
- Neuro-diversity (e.g. ADHD, Autism) 4%
- Learning disability 2%
- Deaf/hearing impairment 1%
- Blind/visual impairment 4%

Mode of transport (by ID)

Frequency vs Mode of transport bar chart with categories: Walk, Bike, Bus, Community Transport, Minibus, Coach, Train, Carshare, Taxi, Car, N/A, Not Known, Multi modal

Pie chart (Multi modal breakdown): Car and Walking, Car and Bus, Bus and Train, Bus and Tram, Walking and cycling, More than two modes

Chatty Bus

3.2 Qualitative

Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change involves the collection and selection of stories of change (outcome and impact). Its primary purpose is to enable learning. Over the course of the Connecting You project we collected 27 Stories from stakeholders across the CY programme. These were targeted beneficiaries and/or programme staff/volunteers.

MSC is a qualitative method of evaluation. It is useful in this project as we have multiple strands of a project all working in different ways towards the same goal. This methodology allows findings to bubble up from the actual project participants rather than be narrated down by the evaluation team. MSC allows time and space for an element of self-reflection by story tellers.

The process also allows participants time to self-reflect upon their experiences; accordingly, we recognise that the MSC process is as valuable as the findings themselves.

Each story capture had consistent questions

(which in MSC methodology are called domains) within it. The questions were:

1. **What was the change which occurred?**
2. **How did this change happen?**
3. **Why is this change important?**

Stories were progressively discussed and analysed, choosing the most significant stories and then passing them on to the next level. Eventually, a few stories emerged as the most significant of all.

As with any tool or methodology there are potential biases. These include the bias towards stories of success, bias towards those who are good at telling stories, bias towards people who are keen to talk, and subjectivity in the story selection process.

The 27 MSC stories were collected and reviewed by a group of four project leads from DCC and DCT. Each person was asked to highlight which stories resonated with them. A discussion then took place where the stories and reasons behind choosing them were talked through. Eventually three stories were chosen to highlight in this report. These stories are reproduced below accompanied by a short narrative explaining the group's reasons for highlighting them.

TORIE

Torie's story, captures the test-and-learn nature of the project, which really delivered for participants and the organisation. Amanda's story highlights the importance of the activity and use of creative practice to deliver. Lisa's story gives a flavour of the positive work carried out by the travel training team.

Background

Torie is project manager for the Wellmoor grants funded project 'Day Trippers'. The project is based in Moretonhampstead on Dartmoor – with limited bus links to the outside world. The project has seen groups of residents taking community mini bus trips to destinations across the County.

Wellmoor

Torie and two volunteers from Wellmoor attended a 'travel training' session with DCT on 21st Feb 2023, which promotes independence and tools for using public transport. Recently, Day Trippers have been using public bus and trains for their trips instead of a minibus.

Wellmoor also run another project called Friendly Friday's which is a warm hub and aims to reduce isolation.

Tori started her role with Wellmoor as the project started. A story from Torie has already been collected in March 2023, two months prior to this story.

What changed?

Since the travel training session, Wellmoor have adopted the way of thinking that they need to increase confidence and independence of the Day Tripper attendees. The 'phase 1' project idea of Day Trippers was inherited and after the travel training session, Torie spoke with a volunteer who also attended, about the idea of using public transport for their trips out, who agreed it was a good plan. "It was your input through Travel Training that sparked the idea that there needed to be a 'phase 2' of the project". *Smaller groups are taken out now due to challenging logistics of having large groups on public buses. Some keen attendees in 'phase 1' loved being able to go on specific trips but aren't signing up for public transport trips, perhaps because it's a bit challenging, and because ideas of places to visit shrunk when not using the minibus.*

For some it has been confidence building and they are becoming more adventurous. So far the group has gone on the bus together with taxis back but last week did the whole

journey by bus. "There was worry the return wouldn't be ok but they managed and got a 'buzz' out of it."

How did the change happen?

The warm hub project – Friendly Fridays – and Day Trippers have been a good combo for reaching people. Facebook and posters don't always reach the people in need, so being able to talk about Day Trippers to attendees of the warm hub has been helpful. One woman who cares for her elderly mother who comes to Friendly Fridays has now been encouraged to come out as she really needed it.

Day Trippers has also created bonds which impacts the warm hub. As people are already connected from the trips there are more conversations between people and different groups.

Why is the change important?

Some of the 'Day Trippers' have become much more confident and are now saying, *"we could do this on our own"* and have plans outside of the project. *"One chap who comes on the trips had always relied on his brother, never really left the town and he can't read or write. Recently he took the trip down to Slapton on the public bus!"* Since the trips he talks to lots of different people – his horizons have been broadened. He now talks about ideas for Moreton like live music and has twice come to the warm hub on his own, talking to people well out of his social sphere. *"I have seen this with others too, people used to stay in their own 'spheres' and now they are more interlinked and less isolated." "I think it's a really positive thing for the community. Before they weren't aware of other's needs and issues and now they're becoming more aware."*

"Being able to get out on social trips and connect with people is massive"

Wellmoor

AMANDA

Background

Tarka Line Creatives was a creative wellbeing project. From December 2022 until March 2023 small groups travelled, on the Tarka Line Railway from Barnstaple in North Devon exploring nature and landscapes with photography and creative writing. The Tarka Line Creatives Exhibition was held at Barnstaple Library from Monday 24 April to Saturday 29 April 2023.

Tarka Line Creatives

Amanda who ran the project, used to be a community film maker and had just started to go freelance. She saw the advert on Facebook for the grant and had wanted to lead photography walks and saw this as a great opportunity to do this. She collaborated with North Devon Voluntary Service to partner with to find volunteers to help deliver the project, as well as with One Northern Devon social prescribing. Amanda said the project was extremely rewarding and meaningful, although time outside of session such as planning/safeguarding etc/downloading photos and editing etc did take more time than expected.

Younger people were harder to recruit compared to older populations. Amanda found creative ways to get young people to engage, she had connections with Petroc and Waymakers. Higher number of neurodivergent younger people attended. Some needed extra support at times e.g. teacher had to attend.

Amanda worked with Kingsley School SEN 6 formers who were volunteers. Then they also became participants so they could experience benefits too.

What changed?

Amanda said the group has had a significant impact on creating social connections. Many people now meet outside of the group and they have formed new social groups. One participant hadn't traveled for 15 years on public transport and following attendance the participant got a bus pass.

One older man who attended was illiterate and vulnerable with mental health difficulties and history of homelessness. He was referred by social prescribing and was known to CMHT. He said he really appreciated being with others and it gave him confidence, especially finding things in common with the group. He told Amanda he felt proud, and that *"you will never know how important this has been to me".* He has now joined other groups and also attended college to learn to read/write and showed his certificate about this to everyone at the exhibition.

Amanda said she was *"almost in tears"* at times watching the group engage with

each other, being supportive. There were some *"magical moments"*.

The groups were really supportive to each other. A participant who was initially guarded/defensive helped another woman who had forgotten her boots, and made her boot coverings from plastic bags so she could walk through the mud.

Tarka Line Creatives

One of the volunteers had been off work with Leukemia. This was his first step to going back to work. His wife hugged Amanda at the exhibition and said how important volunteering for the project had been to him. Amanda said this was really moving. At the exhibition one participant who was very self-conscious and didn't speak or give eye contact normally really came out of himself.

One volunteer had just moved from Scotland and didn't know anyone and felt she had nothing to do. Getting to know the area through the project had a direct impact on her life as it helped inform where she chose to buy her house.

Everyone was given a notebook with recyclable pens to record their experiences during the trips, and it was their choice if they wanted to share. Some of the words written were very moving and were displayed at the exhibition.

One learning for Amanda was that some physical needs, such as mobility issues and those who had needed toilets frequently, limited who could attend. E.g. limited room for wheelchair/scooter on bus/train, lack of public toilets (In Barnstaple closed due to Vandalism).

How did the change happen?

Combination of supporting safe social connection, creativity without pressure/expectation and accessing nature all seemed to be important aspects of change. Having the photographs was physical evidence of what they had achieved and gave them purpose during the activity.

Consistency of same group - There were 3 groups who travelled together each time in the same group, this made each group cohesive, and worked better than drop-in sessions. Amanda said *"after the first meeting the group was a group", "every person felt like they got to know each other"*. An autistic girl who had a "meltdown" and was supported by volunteer said *"I felt like people were there for me"* and that she felt supported by a volunteer. Amanda also stayed with her when she missed her train and it was a 2 hour wait and the girl really valued this level of care and support. Participants knew they had support of the volunteers and this felt really important.

Volunteers - Importance of having enough volunteers. Also, when recruiting, the most important quality of the volunteers was kindness rather than experience.

Creating safe and inclusive spaces - Amanda said everyone in the group was different, so many different personalities and needs but they bonded and had fun. It was an organic social group with peer support, supporting both differences and similarities.

Making accessible for all – inclusive/level playing field e.g. refreshments included in budget so no one got left out due to finances. One attendee was illiterate so Amanda had to make sure all the information he received was in an audible form, via telephone etc. It was made clear it was OK for people not to speak if they didn't want to. Amanda said space was given with no demand, importance of not having expectations. No remit for photos or writing. Even though freedom was a threat for some it enabled them to make choices.

Importance of access – Amanda wanted it to reach those who are 'off the radar' and feels she managed to do that. As well as contact with Petroc and Waymakers she put articles in the paper and also attended coffee mornings to find ways to reach people.

Amanda said that 16-24 year olds were harder to recruit, 4 dropped out. One way around this, to encourage more younger people to attend, was to bring in people younger than 16 to attend as volunteers. Their parents came with them. Amanda found creative ways to fill groups.

Co-creation – all the participants co-created the exhibition and the volunteers helped set this up. At the exhibition *"people were so proud"* and all dressed up.

Why is this change important?
It was able to reach some people who were more on the fringes of community.

The project had significant impact on both the participants and volunteers lives, supporting people to feel more connected, confident, develop a sense of purpose and feel proud.

Tarka Line Creatives

LISA

Background

Kazlum is a private enabling service based in Exeter and Mid Devon for service users accessing supported living, aged 18 or over with learning difficulties or mental health needs. Many of their service users have profound disabilities, although some are more able with different levels of independence.

Connecting You provided two separate Travel Training sessions for their support worker team (24 support workers attended in total).

I spoke with manager Lisa (who did not attend the training) to gather feedback of how the training had impacted the team and service users. This was especially poignant as during the training there had been expression from some of the support workers that they could not see how travel training could be relevant for their service user group and that accessing public transport was too high risk to consider.

Lisa spoke with the team to gather some feedback of how the travel training sessions have had any impact prior to us speaking.

What changed?

Since the training the team have started working with two different service users who previously were not accessing public transport.

One service user has epilepsy which was both a physical barrier and psychological barrier. Since attending the travel training staff have supported him to become familiar with a bus route and adopted a graded approach to him using the bus. He has now taken a bus journey on his own and the staff met him at the other end. This was a great sense of achievement for the service user. This service user may not ever become fully independent with transport but travelling on the bus alone has itself had a positive psychological impact on him.

A second service user was fully reliant on staff to provide lifts, accessed everything in staff cars and had become dependent on this. Since the travel training the service user has now been supported to access the bus, which he has reportedly really enjoyed and has positively reminisced on the past times when he used to get out and about on the bus.

How did the change happen?

Since the travel training Lisa feels the team now have had a shift in their approach and attitude around enabling independence, and that there is a recognition that even if full independence

Exeter

cannot be gained meaningful change can still happen in someone's life. She reports the team have been making some adjustments to how they work, and stated that the travel training has *"made staff think better"* regarding supporting independence.

Lisa fed back to the team that even though the team felt the training was not applicable to some of their more profoundly disabled service users they recognized it was useful for some, and that it could be useful for future service users.

She fed back that the team said that the training itself was engaging, useful, good content/resources and the team enjoyed how it was delivered. Lisa feels that having external trainers in helped bring a new perspective to the team.

Why is the change important?

It is enabling service users to make positive changes in their life by using public transport, even if full independence on transport isn't reached.

It has had an impact on staff attitude around independence.

Travel training from Devon Communities Together

4. Learnings and Recommendations

Throughout the Connecting You project we have listened, observed, and had conversations with participants and partners. This work is unpacked throughout the report. This section distils the main themes, learnings, recommendations which we feel have arisen. The list isn't exhaustive.

The most successful projects and interventions adapt and change during delivery

Projects and organisations receiving grants – and the grant givers themselves – should promote 'test and learn' during delivery. Great examples of this exist throughout the project, including the decision by the Department for Transport to extend the timeframe.

Transport is increasingly a core issue for providers (especially in rural areas)

As Suzi, Manager of Kingsbridge Care Hub put it, *"There's no point in having services if people can't get to them."* The partners CY has worked with are key for residents and for strategic planners looking to ways to tackle issues such as (in this case) loneliness. Increasingly they can't get to people and/or people can't get to them. Where suitable public transport isn't available every community should have access to community transport.

There is a need for coordination and cooperation between Community and Public Transport operators

Community Transport is often perceived as a 'safety net'; the final option if someone cannot use conventional PT for reasons such as mobility or rurality. This project has repeatedly shown the value of community transport and minibus travel in building beneficiaries' confidence and as a stepping stone towards independent public transport use.

Projects such as CY shift participants towards desired outcomes

Participants don't necessarily become 'not lonely' but rather 'less lonely'. What comes next is key for completing the mission. Legacy and sustainability need to be at the forefront of project planning. We are pleased to see that the majority of delivery partners will continue the projects and work initiated by the CY project.

The best way to reach the 'hard to reach' is through those who are already trusted by them

Through a multi partner approach and the distribution of small grants to organisations within communities CY reached the those aged over 55, reaching the younger age group was more difficult.

There is a need for transport and loneliness support in schools, youth settings and colleges

The project consistently identified that younger participants (age 16-24) lacked basic travel skills. As this age group is 'hard to reach', it makes sense to engage with them in school.

We can't control the weather, but we can prepare for it

Weather and strikes are outside our control. However, it could have been predicted that a project starting in autumn and winter might face delays and cancellations. Most affected were those working with elderly clients. Some activities had to be postponed or adapted due to weather, whilst some partners delayed all delivery until after winter.

There should be flexibility in defining eligibility for a loneliness project

Using age categories to define eligibility for the project is understandable, but somewhat arbitrary. Some participants fell outside the age ranges, but identified as lonely and benefited from participation. At the same time others, who fitted the age profile, did not self-describe as lonely.

Capturing data adds to the work of delivery organisations

The capacity of partners needs to be taken into account when planning what data is required. Structured communication channels with partners are required, ideally with a single point of contact for each. When setting up a project it is important to consider the most effective way to collect data from a vulnerable user group.

Some participants may experience negative change

Using the UCLA loneliness scale we were surprised to find that confidence and loneliness levels for some were reduced after the project. A small number of participants reported that they were less confident in planning journeys or using public transport after taking part. The reasons for this are explored in the analysis of quantitative data.

Some individuals may need extensive support over a long period and to work in small groups

Often we are drawn to the number of participants as a key indicator, where the larger the number the better. Working in depth with fewer participants should be encouraged.

An academic partner could add rigor and value to evaluation

Commissioning (open call) an academic with interest in the field of loneliness and transport to produce a piece of work could have added value to and explored the topic in relation to our findings and learnings.

Plans and planning which address transport poverty can not only positively impact communities but also address climate change goals

(More use of public transport versus car usage) Funder and delivery agents might consider capturing via a green indicator carbon footprint of projects and impact upon climate change goals.

Mobility poverty affects many people, particularly in more vulnerable sectors

Participation in a project like Connecting You does not resolve structural barriers to transport, such as the move to digitise services, potential closure of ticket offices and absent, infrequent or unreliable services.

5. Summary

As the team assembled the elements of this report, we were surprised by how much had taken place under the auspices of Connecting You and by how diverse an output had been created. From one-on-one training and support to large group activities, from single, transformative trips to multi-journey odysseys; taking in walking and cycling, buses and trains, minibuses and taxis. This speaks to the breadth of vision expressed in DCC's strategic vision which proposed trialling 'a breadth of services' in the belief that 'a selection of transport solutions confronting loneliness is the best way of testing the response from the beneficiaries to new travel opportunities'.

Did all this activity achieve the aims set out in the Council's bid?

Give people confidence to use public transport and encourage independent travel

There are countless examples throughout the report which testify to increased confidence and of people who began, renewed or increased their use of public transport. Helena, who was supported through travel training to take her mobility scooter on the bus; participants in the Tarka Line Creatives project who began to plan their own outings and activities among many others. Important in this was recognising individual needs and the provision of achievable steps towards independence.

'One chap who comes on the trips had always relied on his brother, never really left the town and he can't read or write. Recently he took the trip down to Slapton on the public bus!' Wellmore activity leader.

Improve transport for the user and increase driver confidence to help target audiences feel more welcomed and comfortable using bus services

Perhaps the most difficult element of the project, at first this seemed insurmountable. Given the challenges faced by bus operators since Covid, unsurprisingly most were unable to attend driver training sessions. However, as a result of sessions with community transport groups and a flexible approach, Devon In Sight were asked to create a Disability Awareness Training Manual for drivers. This has received accreditation, providing an incentive for operators to encourage drivers to use it.

Create awareness of the issues around loneliness

Within the Connecting You partnership there has been a step change in understanding the issues around loneliness and the role of transport in alleviating it. Most significant is in directly observing how loneliness is a result of many other factors, including life changes, (rural) geography, mobility, and access to services. This enhanced understanding will inform future programmes of work.

CreativiTEA

More widely, …

Improve mental health and wellbeing
As with confidence, there are many examples from across the project where participants have reported improved wellbeing. Perhaps the final word should be from two of the participants.

"I cannot express how much the Mid Devon Mobility Community Hub sessions have helped me. When my husband passed away, I found it hard to get out of bed every day and was always feeling low. I now look forward to the days where I visit the Community Hub… I am so glad I came to that first Knit & Natter group, and I have met lots of new friends since coming to the Community Hub, long may it continue." Mid-Devon Mobility participant.

"One the young girls [who is on the Autistic spectrum] would only communicate with us to begin with, by writing things down. By the time we had been on the train for 15 minutes doing the activities, she was laughing and passing around chocolates to everyone." CreativiTEA activity leader.

Appendix
A1. Abbreviations and Acronyms

CMHT – Community Mental Health Team
DCC – Devon County Council
DCT – Devon Communities Together
DfT – The Department for Transport
GWR – Great Western Railway
MSC – Most Significant Change
NATCEN – National Centre for Social Research
ONS – Office for national Statistics
TLwT – Tackling Loneliness with Transport, the Department for Transport's pilot project of which Connecting You is part.
ToC – Theory of Change
UCLA – University of California, Los Angeles