



Search Newcastle

Supporting older people in Newcastle



Report on West End Friends

Who are West End Friends?

- Originally West End Befrienders who were a charity established in the 1984. Offering befriending services to older people in Newcastle's West End, with a focus on the South Asian and Chinese community.
- In 2018 West End Befrienders merged with Search and became West End Friends.
- Search was established in 1979, then called Search Rights for Elderly was a one person project focusing on welfare rights for local older people in the Benwell and Scottswood area.

West End Friends (In the six years since the merger)

- There has been a focus on bringing people together through a range of social activities. This has been shown to have a greater impact than targeted 1-2-1 befriending.
- There has been a pandemic which impacted the ability to bring people together safely in group situations. New and creative solutions had to be found to keep the connection with these people, this included telephone befriending and doorstep engagement.
- The introduction of an Asian Men's engagement worker was made in 2021 following previous evaluation highlighting lack of opportunity and take up by Asian Men.

What we now deliver

- Weekly Asian Ladies Social group
- Weekly Asian Men's Gup Shup
- Regular exercise groups
- Zoom online Bingo for the Chinese Community
- Monthly birthday club for the Chinese Community (with South Mountain Chinese Elders)
- Asian Ladies walking group
- Table Tennis sessions
- Larger scale events in the cultural calendar (Eid, Chinese New Year etc)
- 1-2-1 Befriending (only those who can't leave the house)
- Telephone Befriending

Focused Study

During funding period April 2021 to March 2024, West End Friends was supported by The National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund. Northumbria University were engaged as our evaluation partners. Dr Zeb Sattar, Dr Sonia Ahmed and Professor Sue Carr completed the evaluation over a three year period.



Evaluation Method

Adopting an appreciative enquiry framework style using activity feedback forms which were completed on a weekly basis in years 1 and 2.

In year 3, focus groups and semistructured interviews were used with service users, staff and volunteers.

Key Findings

- Most participants attending the social activities were married or widowed. Most were retired and a few stated that they had poor health.
- The majority of the participants stated that the range of social activities being delivered were adequate but they would attend more exercise classes and other varied social activities on a weekly basis if there were sessions.
- Strong friendships were being formed with group members by attending the social activities regularly. During sessions the service users supported each other in addressing language barriers and advising each other on diet, health issues and exercise.

Key Findings

- Some service users offered to volunteer and support staff to deliver group activities and food and drink where offered.
- Many participants struggled with poor health and had mobility issues.
- There was a sense of self fulfilment and satisfaction by participants who helped staff and volunteers during sessions.
- Meeting other people and having a chat was a major reason for participants to attend.

Key Findings

- Some participants said they had many discussions with their families about their future social care needs because of their frailty. Others had heard some people had poor experiences with social care support and care homes, they were worried for themselves if their health deteriorated further.
- The social activities also involved learning about health issues by inviting specialist people to the sessions e.g., Dementia awareness which participants felt were very helpful and would like more sessions like these.
- Participants who attended Tai Chi sessions felt their aches and pains improved and they felt relaxed.
- Some participants travelled a long way to attend the Tai Chi sessions.

Key Findings

- Religion played a major role in the lives of older South Asian men and women who gained peace and hope about ageing well with God's help.
- Older South Asian men attending the sessions were keen for more members to join and participate in wider social activities.
- Older South Asian men were feeling very comfortable to attend the sessions with staff and they had this space to talk which they felt was good. There was hope that these sessions would expand and more activities would be planned for them.
- The older South Asian women's groups were very popular with new and regular members attending.
- The Bingo sessions were very popular with the older Chinese participants.

Quotes

'language is the biggest barrier for the first generation immigrants, they are not very confident about talking in English and they depend on their family members'.

"I come here for exercise and the exercise is so beneficial because you get to relax all your bones and all your body and also eyes and everything. The teacher makes you, the exercise, and it's really good"

'But some people go there, with dementia, that kind of thing is where they need somebody to be bring them and transport. And supervision and everything'.

"A lot of the old people don't speak English they don't speak the language and they just have themselves they just what's the word, entertain themselves with each other so something new like bingo you know it's certainly very useful"

"You know it is a good group, they all care for each other, like they will do anything for each other and after the walk they go for a coffee together!"

"I found this session by my sister, Sophia, and she told me to join this. I actually enjoyed it and it's quite good and relaxing. And you get to know people and it's nice company and the people are pleasant"

Research and user voice

- One of the strengths of West End Friends has been the ability to engage people in consultation and influence decision making through work with our partners such as Healthwatch Newcastle and HAREF.
- Involvement in research on topics such as mental health, dementia, social care with Northumbria University, Newcastle University and Tyneside and Northumberland Mind.
- We have worked with the Elders Council in an imaginative and creative way to provoke engagement and opinion of our West End Friends on topics that affect their lives.

What's next

- Our funding ended in April 2024, longer term sustainable funding has been difficult to secure.
- We have secured NCIF funding to carry out a history project which will capture the rich and varied life stories and experiences of the people in West End Friends.
- We continue to explore other funding opportunities to sustain this vital project.
- We are continuing to work in partnership on projects with Northumbria University, the Elders Council, HAREF and other partners.