



Our Connected Neighbourhoods

Executive Summary

A co-produced interim evaluation.

Introduction

This executive summary presents findings from an interim (half-way) evaluation of the Our Connected Neighbourhoods (OCN) project. Formerly 'Stirling and Forth Valley Participatory Neighbourhoods' OCN is informed by cutting edge research; 'Neighbourhoods: our people, our places' (N:OPOP), an international, longitudinal study led by the University of Stirling. The project was further developed and refined through engagement with local stakeholders (some of whom became project partners) with expertise in working with people affected by dementia and has been funded by The Life Changes Trust and Stirling Council with 'in-kind' contributions from partners including Alzheimer Scotland and the University of Stirling.

Aim

Our overarching aim is to empower people living with dementia to bring about changes in their neighbourhood that enable them to stay connected to people and places. The project is also guided by the shared outcomes set out by our funder The Life Changes Trust.

Project Strands

The project team worked with a range of stakeholders (people living with dementia, unpaid carers and local/regional/national service providers) to identify priorities and decide on three core areas of activity:

1. Environment – focusing on maintaining the built environment and public spaces inclusive
2. Arts and Inclusion – using creative approaches to support social and cultural participation
3. Digital – focusing on online access and digital citizenship

Evaluation methods

The team used a Realist Evaluation approach asking ‘what works, for whom and why?’. Views were sought from participants, volunteers, partners, and strand leaders, though the proportion of these views differed from projections. Analysis was structured around the investigation of key learning and identification of core themes from the data. **OCN Volunteers led much of the evaluation and were involved from design, to execution and analysis.**



The evaluation team used interviews, focus groups, a participant survey and regular debriefing of facilitators to generate data and came together for a collective (participatory) approach to analysis.

Overview of findings

OCN Evaluation Findings March 2019

THEMES	LESSONS LEARNED	CHANGE or MISSING
ORGANIZATION	How to better coordinate and manage time?	How can connections be more structured?
	Prioritize strands and activities	Internal & external connections
	Structured support and strategic communication	More informal meetings for all groups
		Follow up to promote continuity and long term engagement
COMMUNICATION	Maintaining connections	Maintaining connections
	Effective communication – face to face, group meetings	Effective communication – face to face, group meetings
	Consistent communication – create approaches	Consistent communication – create approaches
	Continued communication – after events/activities	Continued communication – after events/activities
FACILITATING	“Remain fluid, evolve with needs”	Keeping in touch
	Connecting strands to each other	Increase community involvement – safe environments
	Keep trying to engage statutory sector	Build potential transportation, libraries, contact with councils
"VOICE"	Direct Involvement	Ask participants
	Asking what is needed before offering service	Longer term engagement with participants
	Discovering what is important to participants first	Leadership by participants
	Personalization – consider contexts	Ideas to encourage involvement in project
INCLUSION	Build relationships	Social inclusion
	Establish what is needed first	Enable with transportation
	With family members who are first point of call for help	Access to IT in care homes to keep in touch
	Personalize relationships	Faith / spirituality strand or activities
		More involvement for all

Progress to date

- Partners and stakeholders report that OCN has enhanced communication and connections between third sector groups and organisations, supporting more joined-up working.
- Team members and stakeholders highlighted the supportive ethos and open approach to testing new ideas and approaches and learning from these.

- A detailed mapping of existing services and support across Stirling has helped OCN to play a bridging role in a wider dementia care landscape.

Areas for development

- Organisation – to bring the different project strands closer together and clarify our core purpose.
- Communication – strengthening communication internally and externally with greater emphasis on maintaining contact.
- Inclusion – extending our reach to include a greater diversity of participants and working to involve excluded groups and individuals.
- Voice – continuing to work toward people living with dementia being at the heart of the project.

Key considerations and challenges going forward

- ❑ Finding a workable balance between ‘doing’ and communicating about what’s being done.
- ❑ Negotiating the tension between deepening our connections with existing participants while extending our reach to greater numbers.
- ❑ Deciding whether our emphasis is on directly providing support or acting as a catalyst to enhance existing provision.
- ❑ Deciding who we are prioritising and how to keep our focus on them.
- ❑ Concentrating on the pathway for engaging people with dementia and strengthening the mechanism that will enable leadership by participants.

Conclusion

The overall picture from the interim evaluation is that much of the foundations for the project have now been laid and the team have managed to foster a collaborative and supportive working culture which has aided efforts to try new approaches and learn from the results. A comprehensive mapping of local support and provision has aided efforts to build connections and strengthen communication within the third and charitable sector, which has been valued by project partners. Looking ahead, the challenge is to finalise the OCN ‘model’ or approach so that people living with dementia are playing an increasingly leading role, and to balance finite time and resources in deepening existing relationships while expanding to involve greater numbers.