Local History Cafes:
An Evaluation of the Initial Programme

De Montfort University:
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
School of Nursing and Midwifery
&
Crafting Relationships Limited
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Contributors

Jayne Brown
Professor of Nursing (Older People),
De Montfort University
The Leicester School of Nursing and Midwifery
Email: jbrown@dmu.ac.uk

Katherine Brown
CEO - Crafting Relationships Limited
Email: craftingrelationships@outlook.com

David Clayton
Research Assistant
De Montfort University
The Leicester School of Nursing and Midwifery
Email: david.clayton@dmu.ac.uk

George Mcgill
Research Associate
De Montfort University
The Leicester School of Nursing and Midwifery

Wendy Padley
Research Assistant
De Montfort University
The Leicester School of Nursing and Midwifery
Email: wendy.padley@dmu.ac.uk

Kay De Vries
Professor of Older Peoples Health
De Montfort University
The Leicester School of Nursing and Midwifery
Email: kay.dervries@dmu.ac.uk

Summary

The aim of the report is to present findings from the evaluation of the initial Local History Cafe programme. It was felt important to provide some findings on the initial programme to support the programme's development and highlight emerging themes. In this respect, the report is a working document, in partnership with all stakeholders, alongside an iterative Theory of Change model, designed to inform and adapt the programme.

The evaluation is based on 40 pre and post surveys with participants who attended Local History Cafes, ten face to face interviews with participants, a focus group with participants and four telephone interviews with stakeholders (both paid employees and unpaid volunteers) who were organising and running Local History Cafes. Documentary evidence from Cafe diaries and Tumblr (localhistorycafe.tumblr.com) were also used. It is important, therefore, to recognise that the evaluation is based on limited data.

Initial findings have indicated that participation does not see higher satisfaction with health or increased quality of life. Those who completed pre and post questionnaires already reported 'good quality of life'. However, other findings suggest Cafes can be an effective way to engage older people in social and educational activities which encourage agency and can help with loneliness. The type of loneliness positively impacted on is mostly social isolation rather than emotional isolation, indicating the programme is supporting people lacking social contact from peers or the community rather than intimate relationships. The ethos of the Local History Cafe programme appears to have great potential to support the agency of older people in addressing these aspects of loneliness. The analysis of the initial programme has highlighted areas that both help and hinder the aims of Local History Cafes in this respect. Those involved, therefore, have some additional thinking to do on the current programme. Some areas of suggested development are:

- Identifying suitable, more frequent, creative evaluation and feedback tools to further develop the evidence around Active Ageing outcomes
- Increased use of Cafes for social prescribing
- Further training and support for staff and volunteers at Local History Cafe partner sites
- Additional ways for Local History Cafe partner sites to share and learn from each other, thereby ensuring a move away from silo working to partnership working, and developing nationally relevant approaches to isolation and loneliness

These developments will need to be made with partner organisations and funders, with considerations around resources, skills and how the continuing programme aligns with organisational aims. In addition, there will need to be a continuing conversation with participants past, present and future to make sure the programme meets their needs and interests.

Aim of this report

The aim of the report is to present findings from the evaluation of the initial Local History Cafe programme. The evaluation started in December 2017 and ended in July 2019 and sought to capture the experiences of beneficiaries who have attended the Local History Cafe programme and the views of those running and organising the Cafés. In doing so, it considers factors that both help and hinders the effectiveness of Cafes for supporting people with loneliness and social isolation, and how Local History Cafes contribute to the local community. It was felt important to provide some findings of the initial programme to support the programme and highlight emerging themes. In this respect, the report will be used as a working document, in partnership with all stakeholders, alongside an iterative Theory of Change model, to inform and adapt the programme.

Participants at Calke Abbey Local History Cafe

Background

About Crafting Relationships

Crafting Relationships is a values-led delivery, learning and coaching, not for profit social enterprise running programmes with older community members and primary age children, independently and together. They also coach individuals and organisations, large and small, on how to run great social good initiatives. Local History Cafes are a core Crafting Relationships programme, initially developed by CEO Katherine Brown, whilst acting as Project Director at Cotesbach Educational Trust. At the end of their period of funding, the Cotesbach group were supported to meet independently of a host site, and continue to run. The Local History Cafe programme was then transferred to Crafting Relationships for further development.

A number of elements have contributed to the development of the Local History Cafe programme. First, museums and heritage sites are seen as spaces for wellbeing initiatives. In the foreword to Museums, Health and Well-Being (Chatterjee and Noble 2013), for example, Professor Richard Parish, Chief Executive, Royal Society for Public Health writes about the role museums can play in societal wellbeing.

> *On the one hand, museums are observatories on history and culture, providing a lens on the relationship between health and society over time. On the other hand, from a more contemporary perspective, they offer an interactive environment that can contribute positively to present day wellbeing (p.viii - x).*

Second, Cafes are seen to facilitate opportunities that support Active Ageing. The Association for Education and Ageing (2018) have highlighted the importance of 'active ageing'. They note that active ageing is not just about physical exercise:

> *Active Ageing is about not only keeping older people physically fit but also intellectually sharper and manually more dextrous…there is also for older people the social side in all of these learning activities - doing them with other people, getting out of the house and mixing, interacting, making friends.*

Third, Cafes are developed based on the idea that individuals have a role across the whole of the life course to invest in their recreation. In The 100-Year Life, Gratton and Scott (2017), talk about creating fulfilling and inspiring longer lives. This marks a shift in culture towards lifelong learning rather than education in the first stage of life.

> *The gift of a longer life with more time creates the space for investment…Perhaps a part of the gift of a 100-year life is to re-shape how leisure time is spent, with less focus on consumption and recreation and more on investment and re-creation.*

It is within this context that the Local History Cafes programme was created as community-based heritage and wellbeing 'get-togethers' for over 50s with a central

aim to support those at risk of, experiencing or looking to keep at bay social isolation and loneliness.

What are Local History Cafes?

The Local History Cafe programme aims to:

- Tackle social isolation and loneliness amongst over 50s through a quality heritage and wellbeing programme.
- Support heritage and community organisations to learn new skills and use existing skills, experience and assets to tackle these issues.
- Apply an asset-based, partnership approach, supporting collaboration across sectors working on social isolation and loneliness.

Local History Cafes consist of, ideally, between 10 and 16 older people per cohort, depending on the venue. Cafes were designed to run over a five-month period (February - June or September - January) where participants meet monthly (five-set sessions) for about two hours. There is a break in July and August[1].

Each month comprises of tea, cake and socialising, followed by a heritage presentation. There is sometimes an accompanying activity, for example handling objects, and/or visiting an associated exhibition or installation. For the most part, chatting with speakers and each other fills the whole time.

A participation model is central to the design of the programme. This aims at developing a programme around group interests by, with and for participants, not something done to people, as well-intentioned as that might be. This is promoted as a key element of the ethos of the programme.

During session one of each Cafe, the host organisation is asked to present. This is to start building relationships with the group and promote the host venue. During this session, a conversation should begin with the group about the topics they would like to hear more about. Some additional suggestions may be based on well-received presentations at other cafes, or specialist topics[2].

The original participation model was designed to encourage regular attendance to build relationships between other attendees and the host site. It was also designed to support the highest possible footfall through each block of cafes, so as to ensure value for money for funders and open spaces for as many people as possible.

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[1] Although the original aim was to have these discrete sessions, the approach has become more organic and groups have developed and continued beyond the programme with a 'first in, first out' approach agreed by all. This decision was made through partner reviews and talking to participants along the way.

[2] For example, Erewash Museum hold in their collection, the Margaret Hope Robinson letters - an archive of more than 2,000 letters that give an emotional insight into the lives of families of British prisoners of war (POWs) during the Second World War. Letters wer shared by Museum volunteer Keith Oseman.

After the five sessions, participants have a number of options, including simply leaving the programme, volunteering with the host heritage site, accessing other local initiatives highlighted via guest speakers and shared literature, continuing meeting socially with contacts made during cafes and/or developing a continuation group around a chosen theme[3].

Funding and Partnerships

Museum Development East Midlands (MDEM) has funded six cafes between 2017 and 2020. They are Calke Abbey, Charnwood Museum, Erewash Museum, the Sir John Moore Foundation, Melton Carnegie Museum, and Glenfield Hospital (via the University Hospitals Leicester's Arts and Heritage team). A partnership agreement was drawn up in collaboration with partners, with particular input from Erewash Museum, to achieve the Cafes aims. Agreements cover intellectual property, withdrawal or termination, insurance, roles and responsibilities. It was felt that agreements needed to be simple and reciprocal for the model to work. Five out of six partners signed and returned agreements.

These cafes had 100% first-year funding and match funding available in year two. This funding covered venue hire, a starter speaker budget, transport, marketing and some materials. A charge of £3 per month from participants helps pay for refreshments, speakers and any extras, for example, seat cushions, reference books or Christmas activities.

Funding also covers overall programme management from Crafting Relationships, including a team induction, attending the first and last cafes in each block, marketing through standard channels and to health and social care, sourcing volunteers, managing the website, finances, reviews, identifying and applying for continuation funding, supporting the evaluation process, identifying additional programme opportunities, arranging partner get-togethers, and linking in with local, regional and national strategy around isolation and loneliness[4].

Uptake of Local History Cafes

Recent figures produced by Crafting Relationships have highlighted that since the start of the MDEM funded Local History Café programme, there have been more

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[3] For example, at the Sir John Moore Foundation, up to 30 attendees from three Local History Cafe groups have begun working on Local History Cafe Extended, developing a digital map highlighting building of interest around Appleby Magna. This will form part of their Heritage Open Days offer.

[4] Currently there are two, six monthly reviews between Crafting Relationships and Local History Cafe partners and monthly project diaries are completed in order to address issues, concerns or highlight positive events. In addition there is one annual Summer get-together to discuss, as a wider partnership, successes, challenges and how the programme is impacting on its aims. These have been attended by funders, local authorities, academics and participants.

than 130 unique participants, with over 650 individual attendances at Cafes. Figures provided by those organising and running the Cafes show attendance has varied with no identifiable pattern. The mean average of attendance a session has been eight people and mode of six. However, attendance has ranged from one session where just one person attended (due to a mix up on dates) to another where 17 people attended. In terms of gender, these figures show 20.7% of those attending the Cafes are men and 79.3% are women. Most of those attending have been described as white/British.

Activities of Local History Cafés

There have also been over 50 individual speakers, some returning to present on different topics, and 10 volunteers involved in the programme. The range of topics evidenced through the Cafe dairies and Tumblr website include talks about mining, Roman archaeology, local canals, local figures involvement in World War One and World War Two, art metalwork and Ladybird Books. Activities have included show and tell sessions for local artefacts, seeing and handling artefacts from local exhibitions, presentations of films and photography on local people, buildings and places of interest, and preserve making and tasting (jam, marmalades and chutneys).

Participants at the Sir John Moore Foundation's Local History Cafe

The methodology of the evaluation study

The evaluation has involved using both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data on Local History Cafes. All participants attending Local History Cafes were invited to participate in a survey and offered the opportunity to take part in an interview which could be held at the Cafe venue after a normal Local History Cafe event, or at another date and place of the participants choosing.

Quantitative data collection was undertaken in two rounds to meet the five monthly cycles of the original Local History Cafes:

- Round one started in October 2017 and was finished in June 2018 (the initial three partner cafes had a 'settling in' period of three months which explains the additional months).

- Round two, started September 2018 and finished in February 2019.

Data collection involved a pre/post questionnaire for Local History Cafe participants to complete. A pack containing a covering letter, a participant information sheet and a reply slip and free post envelope were given to people at their first or subsequent attendance. Pre/post questionnaires for participants were either completed on the day or left with them to take home and post as they desire. Either DMU, Crafting Relationships or a member from each partner team spent time explaining the evaluation.

The scales used for the first round of questionnaires were the WHOQOL-BREF and quality of life and the De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale. For the second round, questionnaires were changed and amended to include the UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale. Data from the surveys was input and analysed using both R[5] a programming language for statistical computing and graphics generation and SPSS version 22, a statistical computer package for the social sciences.

Qualitative data was collected through interviews with Cafe participants, a focus group with participants and telephone interviews with stakeholders who were organising and running the Cafes (including volunteer facilitators). Additional information from session diaries and online content from the programme's Tumblr website was also viewed to provide background data.

A thematic analysis was undertaken where the data is analysed to search for themes and trends (Braun and Clarke 2006). This analytical approach was iterative and inductive, building themes upwards from the views of participants and stakeholders. The research team worked together feeding back findings and continually updating thinking as data was emerging.

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[5] See https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/sscc/pubs/RFR/RFR_Introduction.html

Characteristics of those completing the survey

The quantitative data is based on 40 participants who returned the pre/post evaluation survey from Local History Cafes. 20 were from the first round of data collection and 20 from the second round. Not all surveys were fully completed which has limited the findings.

From the 40 returns, Figure One shows 82.5% (n=33) were received from women and 17.5% (n=7) from men (a similar representation of those who attended the Cafes as described above).

Figure One: Gender of Participants

Gender (n = 40)
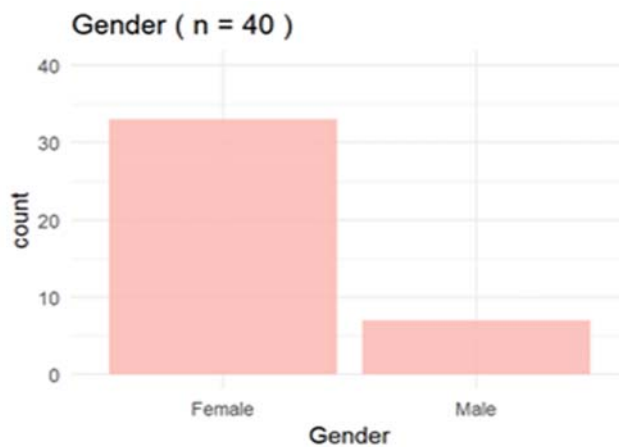
The average age of the respondents was 74. Figure Two shows that 50% (n=20) of participants who provided their age were aged between 70-89 years. Most participants, 94.6% (n=35) described themselves as English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British. An additional 2.5% (n=1) identified with 'any other White Background'. There were no participants from BAME communities.

Figure Two: Age of Participants

Age distribution (n = 40)
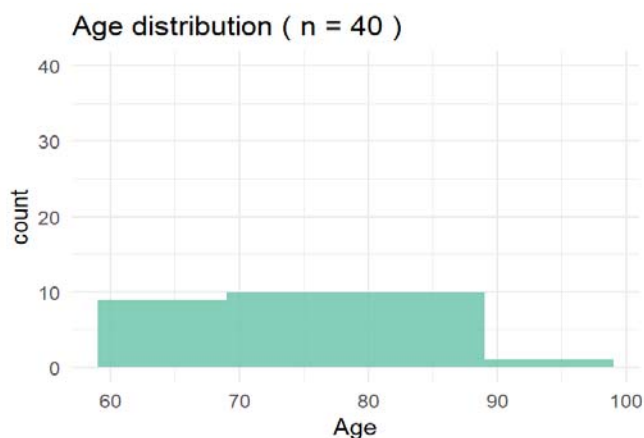
The majority of participants, 83.8% (n=31) described themselves as heterosexual. Figure Three shows that 45% (n=18) of participants were married or living as married. Nearly 60% (n=22) lived alone.

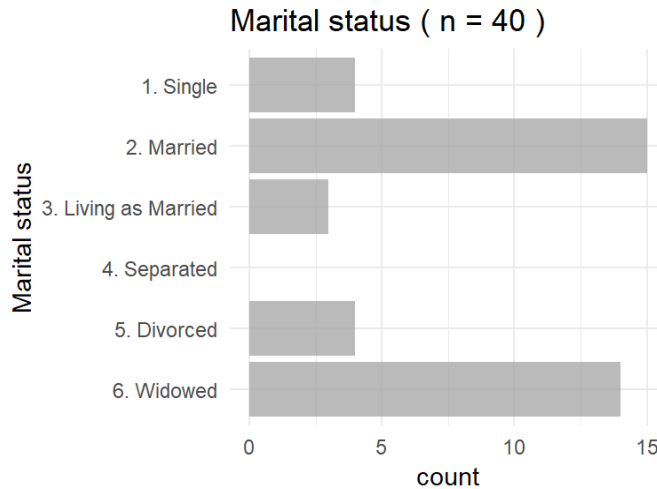**Figure Three: Marital Status of Participants**

Marital status (n = 40)

Figure Four shows that the majority of those who completed the surveys, 80% had undertaken either further or university level education (n=32). Most participants reported having good or very good health with 34.3% (n=12) reporting they were ill. The illnesses identified on the questionnaire ranged from physical illnesses such as diabetes, cancer and high blood pressure, to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Only 16% (n=6) of participants were in paid work with the majority, over 60%, having a main source of income as a company (n=24) and state pensions (n=25).

Figure Four: Education of Participants

Education (n = 40)
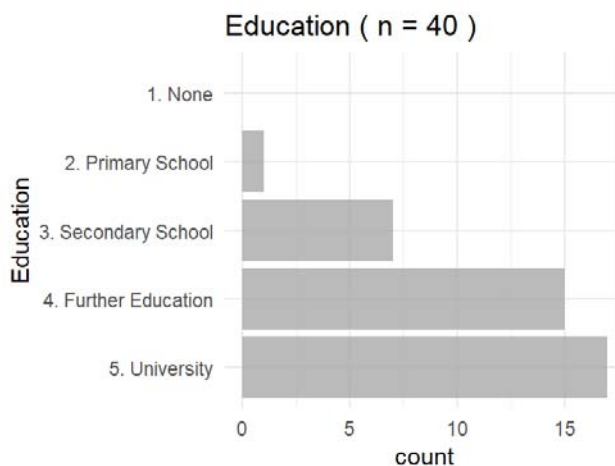
Findings from quantitative data

The WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire

The WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire has two questions which can be examined separately to provide information about the quality of life and health satisfaction. Question 22, asks about an individual's overall perception of the quality of life and Question 12 asks about an individual's overall perception of health.
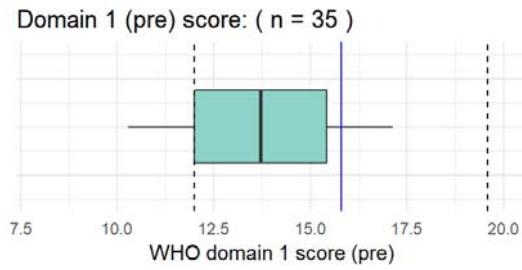

Participants from Erewash Museum's Local History Cafe

In the pre-survey 92.5% (n=37) participants answered Question 22 and 90% (n=36) answered Question 12. The average scores were 4 (indicating a good quality of life) and 3 (Neither Satisfied nor dissatisfied with their health) respectively. Post-Cafe surveys showed 47.5% (n=19) participants answered Question 22 and Question 12. The average scores were 4 (indicating good quality of life) and 3 (Neither Satisfied nor dissatisfied with their health). There was no significant change in the scores for people attending the Local History Cafe in terms of their quality of life and satisfaction with health.
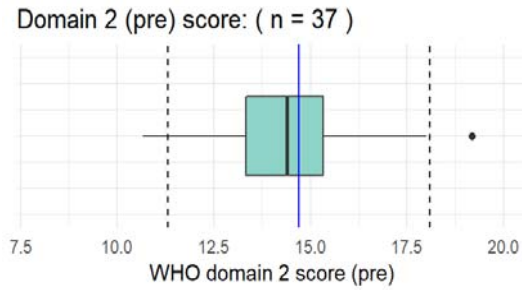
The WHOQOL-BREF also has four domains, domain 1 (physical health), domain 2 (psychological), domain 3 (social relationships) and domain 4 (environmental). In comparison for WHOQOL-BREF national means, all scores were within plus or minus standard deviation for the data. Figure Five below compares the studies scores with the national means scores. The blue line shows the (published) mean for the domain and the dotted lines show plus and minus one standard deviation for the data. Domain 1 saw lower than average scores whereas domain 3 showed a propensity for higher than average scores.
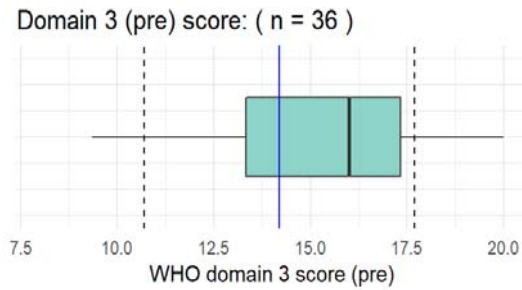
Figure Five: Comparison with national mean scores

Domain 1 - Physical

Domain 1 (pre) score: (n = 35)

WHO domain 1 score (pre)

Domain 2 - Psychological

Domain 2 (pre) score: (n = 37)

WHO domain 2 score (pre)

Domain 3 - Social

Domain 3 (pre) score: (n = 36)

WHO domain 3 score (pre)

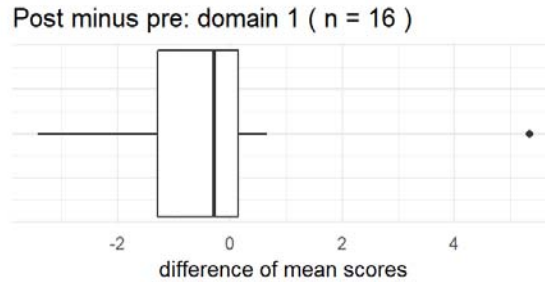## Domain 4 - Environmental

Domain 4 (pre) score: (n = 35)
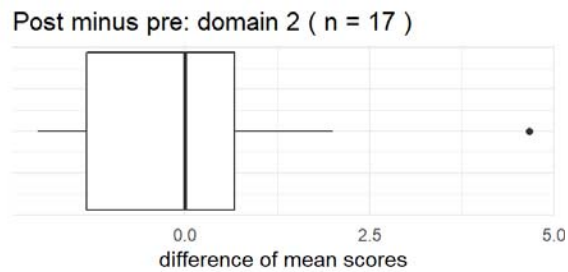
WHO domain 4 score (pre)
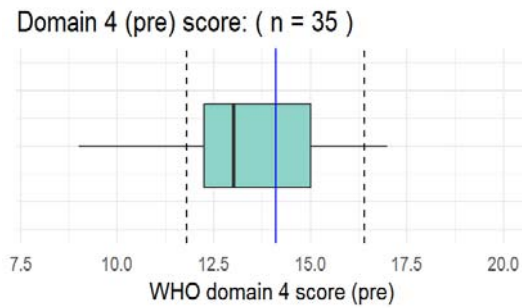
The distributions of the differences between the pre and post scores for each domain are also shown in Figure Six. As the plots suggest the differences were not significantly different from zero in any of the domains.

Figure Six: Differences in pre/post-WHOQOL-BREF scores

Domain 1 - Physical

Post minus pre: domain 1 (n = 16)
difference of mean scores

Domain 2 - Psychological

Post minus pre: domain 2 (n = 17)
difference of mean scores

Domain 3 - Social

Post minus pre: domain 3 (n = 18)
difference of mean scores

Domain 4 - Environmental

Post minus pre: domain 4 (n = 18)
difference of mean scores

During the pre-Cafe survey, nearly half, 49% (N=19), of participants felt that they had a great deal of opportunity for leisure activities compared with 20.5% (n=8) reporting they did not have much opportunity or none at all (WHOQOL-BREF Question 11).

The majority of participants 61% (n=22) did feel satisfied or very satisfied with their personal relationships (WHOQOL-BREF Question16). The extent to which participants felt life to be meaningful was mixed (WHOQOL-BREF Question 26), with 53% (n=18) reporting life was not meaningful much or not at all, compared to 47% (n=16) reporting it was moderately or very much meaningful. Post-Cafe scores saw no significant changes to these scores.

There were some patterns that emerged when the WHO domains were cross-tabulated with demographic data but these were mostly too slight to warrant more formal analysis. Domain scores by education, for example, tended to show higher scores for higher levels of education (see Figure Seven) but there may be confounding influences at play here.

Christmas at Erewash Museum's Local History Cafe

Figure Seven: Domain scores by education

Domain 1 - Physical
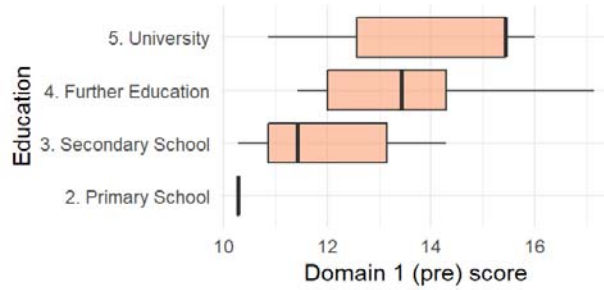
Domain 2 - Psychological

Domain 3 - Social

Domain 4 - Environmental

De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale

Figure Eight shows the scores on the De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale[6]. The De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale contains 6 items.

- I experience a general sense of emptiness (EL)
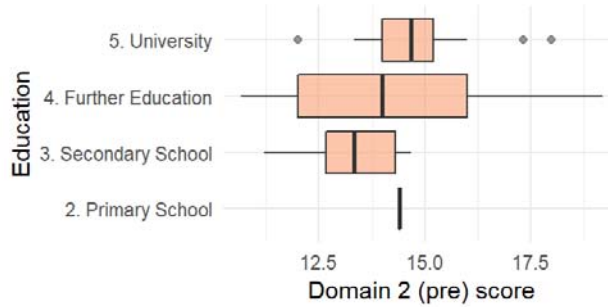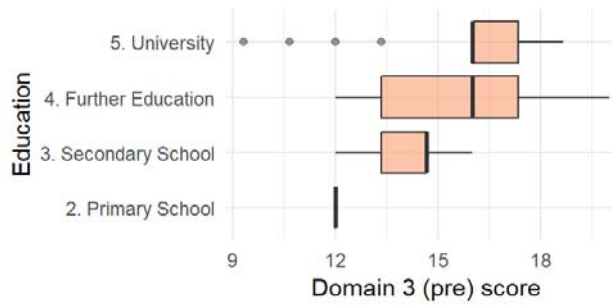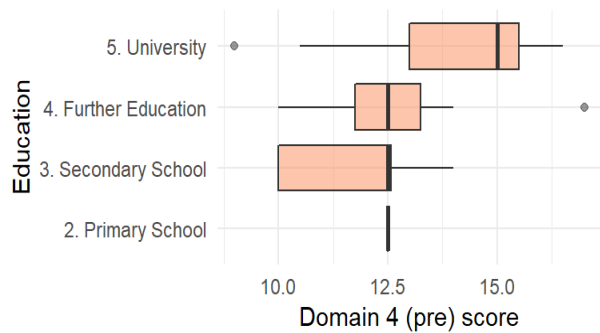- I miss people around me (EL)
- I often feel rejected (EL)
- There are plenty of people I can rely on when I have a problem (SL)
- There are many people I can trust completely (SL)
- There are enough people I feel close to (SL

Three are made about 'Emotional Loneliness' (EL) and three about 'Social Loneliness' (SL). Emotional Loneliness concerns a lack of an intimate relationship and Social Loneliness concerns lack of social contact from peers or the community. The scale uses three response categories: Yes/more or less/No and are scored either 1 or 0 to create a scale of 0-6. EL and SL took together to see 0 as least lonely and 6 the loneliest. The scale can be divided into EL and SL scales of 0 as least lonely and 3 most lonely respectively. Scores of two are regarded as a minimum threshold for loneliness where scores of two, three and four are seen as moderately lonely and five and six as severely lonely.

The pre-Cafe scores saw 95% (n=38) participants complete all 6 questions. Of these, 29% of participants (n=11) scored zero or one (not lonely); 47% (n=18) scored two, three and four (moderately lonely) and 24% (n=9) scored five and six (severely lonely). Accordingly, 71% (n=27) of those completing the survey experienced loneliness according to this scale.

Figure Eight: Pre Cafe De Jong Scores
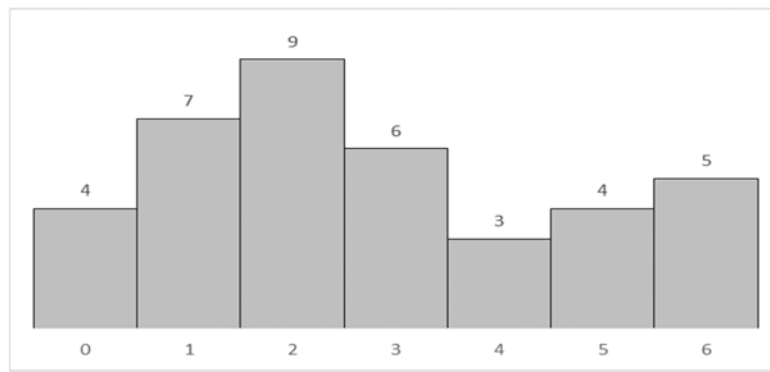
The demographic breakdown of these scores suggests minor differences along certain demographic lines. For example, considering the male and females scores

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[6] The UCLA Scale was not included in this analysis because the small number of post returns did not enable and viable statistical tests to be completed.

gives Figure Nine below. Males scored slightly higher (more lonely) on this scale than the females.

Figure Nine: Gender by De Jong Pre Score
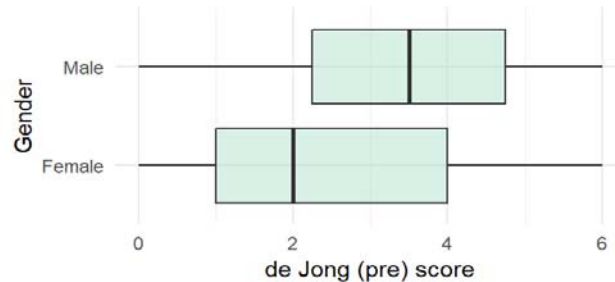
The De Jong (pre) score by education suggests some influence from the educational level on the scores with higher educational levels associated with lower scores. De Jong (pre) scores by marital status show a particularly high score for 'divorced' (see figure Ten) but the effect of living alone appeared only minor but in the direction that we might expect towards higher scores.

Figure Ten: Martial Statues by De Jong Pre Score
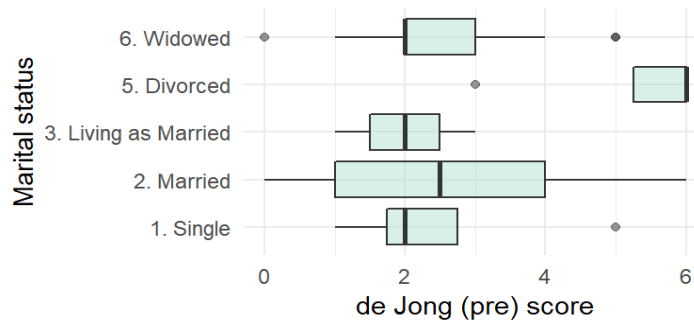
In order to test the hypothesis if Cafes made a difference to loneliness, a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was undertaken on the scores from the pre and post-De Jong Gierveld 6-Item Loneliness Scale. This tested the hypothesis whether there was a difference in the loneliness scores e.g. a reduced score, following attending the Local History Cafes. The test showed there was no difference in the scores and the Cafes did not necessarily help with loneliness[7].

However, further individual analysis of the scores saw 45% (n=18) of participants completed all 6 items the post-Cafe De Jong scale. Of these, 28% (n=5) saw no change in their scores; 33% (n=6) had higher scores and 39% (n=7) had reduced

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[7] The median of differences between the pre and post scores was equal to zero. The significance level was .05.

scores. Furthermore, participants, on average, scored two on the SL scale compared to one on the EL scale. This suggested when participants were lonely, this was more likely due to social loneliness. The average scores on the scale reduced from three to two. In terms of EL, there was no change in scores but for the SL scale, the average changed from was from two to one. Accordingly, the reduced experiences of loneliness for some participants may be connected with feeling more connected with their peers or community (reduced Social Loneliness), an aim of the Cafes.

Accordingly, not everyone who attended the Cafes was lonely but the majority were. Most of these participants were moderately lonely. The evidence does not support that Local History Cafes will help everyone with loneliness. Rather, they appeared to help some and potentially those whose loneliness may result from friendships or peer contact (Social Loneliness). This aspect may also explain why some loneliness scores actually rise e.g. if an expectation of meeting new friends isn't realised or if the experiences of loneliness are emotional rather than social in nature.

Participants at Melton Local History Cafe

Characteristics of those being interviewed

The qualitative data from Cafes were collected from various sites. Table Two provides a breakdown of the characteristics of Cafe participants who were interviewed. All sites were involved in the evaluation but have not been identified to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Four telephone interviews were undertaken with stakeholders including both a volunteer and paid employees of the heritage organisations. These stakeholders were also drawn from different sites. These have also not been identified to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The focus group was undertaken with participants from one of the Local History Cafe including a volunteer. The group involved eight people and included a mix of both men and women.

Table Two: Characteristics of Interview Participants

	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Sexuality	Marital status	Education level
01	63	M	White British	Heterosexual	Single	Technical
02	79	F	White British	Heterosexual	Widowed	University
03	72	F	White British	Heterosexual	Widowed	University
04	79	M	White British	Heterosexual	Widowed	University
05	67	F	White British	Heterosexual	Married	University
06	82	F	White British	Heterosexual	Widowed	Technical
07	69	F	White British	Heterosexual	Married	University
08	80	F	White British	Heterosexual	Married	Technical
09	69	F	White British	Heterosexual	Married	University
10	70	M	White British	Heterosexual	Married	University

Findings from the qualitative data

The qualitative analysis will consider what helped or hindered the work of Local History Cafes. In this respect, Force Field Analysis (Lewin 1945), provides a useful way of framing these themes; themes that can be considered for the next iteration of the programme.

Force Field Analysis is concerned with decision making and understanding what factors help or hinder the aims and objectives of a change programme. The qualitative analysis highlights themes that emerged that either helped or were barriers to the ethos of the Local History Cafes, for example, whether they supported older people to gain confidence and stave off or overcome issues of loneliness and social isolation. The Local History Cafe approach is not concerned to deliver a traditional 'social group' in this respect. Rather, the approach seeks a wider objective of building social assets for older people and creating agency for change from them. As such, identifying helping and hindering factors for change, from the perspective of participants and stakeholders, will aim to create a greater understanding of the mechanisms that may bring about this change.

Themes from participants of Cafes

Themes which highlight what helped change:

a) Local History Cafes helped with the 'first steps'

> *"Everybody treats you nicely, you have a nice cup of Coffee or Tea and a piece of cake what's not enjoyable."* Participant Local History Cafe.

Those who attended Local History Cafes had no hesitation in expressing how they had enjoyed the experience. A positive view of the Local History Cafe sessions was that they were welcoming and safe and helped those anxious about attending a 'social group' for the first time. Participants reported hearing about the sessions from the local radio, media, heritage site, and promotional leaflets. Two participants also attended as a result of friends recommending the sessions.

When asked about loneliness and social isolation the focus group highlighted the barriers that lonely people may face with attending the group. They talked about the importance of making people feel welcome and how very frail older people may be excluded due to mobility problems and/or getting transport to attend. The focus group stress the importance of promoting Local History Cafes so that isolated and lonely people could be reached and informed about the sessions if they did want to attend.

A number of participants talked about how difficult it was to attend a group for the first time and the anticipation led to anxiety. In this respect, Local History Cafes offered an important opportunity for the first steps to engage socially and in a way

that shifted the spotlight from the individual and enabled a more gradual engagement. The tea and cake aspect could be seen as 'breaking the ice', as one participant said:

> *"....It's something about that cup of tea isn't it, and the cake, we like to talk over a drink don't we and eating, that's what we do as social beings. It helps somehow doesn't it?"*

Another talked about how participants got started talking while pouring the tea, how it inevitably sparked a conversation or even helped form a bond with people who know little of each other. It was a universal commonality based on drinking and eating. This universality made it easier for people to participate.

Participants could also attend because of their interest in the talk, thus potentially 'hiding' any issues of loneliness that might be felt as a stigma by them. As the sessions evolved, participation could be increased based on the activity and/or talk. As one participant observed,

> *"Well, they can be brought out. Everybody is in a little shell. You have got your own little box, haven't you? You put yourself in your box voluntarily sometimes, thinking no I am not going to talk to them. I am in the doctors. I don't want to talk to anybody. I don't feel very well. But if you can come out of that and interact with people [at the Cafes] and it's got to do you good. It's got to be a feel-good factor in it."*

For some participants who lived alone and had little social interaction, the talk provided the opportunity to *"have something to say"*. As one participant stated, "*it forced them to think"* because the talks were interactive. Another participant felt that having talks gave them something to talk about even when feeling they had nothing interesting to say about themselves.

The talks, therefore, gave participants something to *"hang"* a conversation on, particularly when they may feel vulnerable in talking about themselves. Thus, this potentially helped to rediscover and recover social skills that may have been lost through lack of practice as a result of loneliness and isolation.

> *"I thought they [volunteers] were very friendly. They made it a lot easier because they blended in and they joined in. They were very friendly and there was always the tea and cake there…."*

b) <u>Local History Cafes were inclusive spaces where participants could actively contribute and have a purpose</u>

There was a view from participants that Local History Cafes offered something different from other social activities and groups. There was the aim of increasing support, interests and *"expanding horizons"* by getting together and sharing experiences with other people who were similar in age and situation. It was the

opportunity to learn, find out more about history and place and make connections; increasing the chances of meeting people in the local community.

The social (tea/cake) and activity (local history talk) were seen as a positive combination (although not always easy to balance). The *"social aspect"* was about meeting new people in a safe and welcoming environment (as described above) and the 'local history' was a way to stimulate contact and create discussion.

The sessions, therefore, had the potential to create a sense of self-fulfilment and agency. Knowing more about your local area, the buildings, and street names could *"enlighten"* a person. This *"widening knowledge"* appeared to give purpose and meaning to participants against the backdrop of uncertainty and change associated with older age. Participants, for example, sometimes expressed concerns about their health and not knowing what may happen to them in future. For those with husbands and wives, there was the prospect of bereavement which may leave them lonely and isolated.

The documenting of local history in this way, and sharing life stories through discussion, appeared to enable some participants to create a positive sense of self, a recognition of the importance of *"passing on"* their memories and stories and in doing so, being involved, socially, and keeping the mind occupied. As one participant stated:

> *"It is attracting memories and stories for people maybe like myself and the older sort of generation who are not going to be there forever. It is involving people and it is working the mind, [so] it's going to help other things..."*

The approach was also felt to be inclusive in that everyone could take part and contribute. As the talks were based on local history, they resonated with people's experiences and life, often provoking earlier memories which enabled people to reminisce and reflect on their lives. The focus group highlighted how the sessions had been different and diverse. Participants clearly identified with the Cafe. The focus group talked about a common aim where all could contribute. There were comments at the focus group about the strengths that participants bring to the group with respect to their own knowledge e.g. one person had knowledge of maps.

Participants could attend talks and bring their own experiences and memories into the discussion. As the talks often involved local knowledge, a participant's knowledge could be grounded in lived experience. As a result, the participants felt they were giving to the group, as well as receiving support from the group. A participant of the focus group talked about how the group helped them to maintain skills – writing and research - things they felt may be lost once they finished work. There was discussion in the focus group about learning new skills, like computer skills. One participant of the group, who didn't like public talks, agreed to do a talk on a local subject causing her to positively come *"out of her comfort zone"*. Another participant in the focus group talked about learning new things as a group.

> *"You always go away with thoughts in your mind about what has been talked about and that is very positive."*

A poster advertising the Melton Local History Café

The approach was also seen as gender-neutral in that both men and women may be attracted to local history. One woman participant, for example, was specifically looking for a different *"mix"* of people to include both men and women. Other social groups she attended tended to involve mainly women. The approach was also felt to be inclusive across all ages and not just the aged. The potential for intergenerational involvement is also possible. Local History Cafes were therefore about *"like-minded"* people coming together to discuss a topic. People, regardless of characteristics, could talk about history in a non-intimidating and enabling way.

These positive aspects of interaction appeared to have the potential to help with isolation and loneliness. Social groups, in and of themselves, may not always provide this opportunity and the 'lonely in a crowd' aspect can exist. However, Local History Cafes potentially mitigate this aspect by creating an ethos where people felt able to participate and contribute. One participant stated:

> *"There is no point in coming out of four walls and sitting here and being lonely in a room full of people which is easy and a very common thing to do. Especially in families. You've got to open your mouth, you've got to embrace what's going off and you've then got this rapport with people...I'm here for the same reason....that's what I've got out of it [LHC]...that's what I find."*

   c) <u>The 'local' was positive for making sustainable connections</u>

Another positive aspect of the approach for many participants was that the sessions were *"local"*. Links to previous occupations and childhood memories could reconnect. As one participant put it, it was *"recognising what is good about what is on your doorstep"*. This was not only convenient, less travel and easily accessible, but also useful for people to get to know a new area or simply rediscover and find out more about the place where they lived. This enabled people to feel part of something wider than the group and look beyond it at community assets. As one participant said:

> *"I was really hooked, if you like, having lived here a long time, you realise there's a lot you don't know about a place..."*

Situated in a locality on a heritage site, held the potential for Local History Cafes to become part of a wider network of resources that local people could draw on. The link to a heritage site saw the Cafes embedded in established and familiar structures. At the same time, the Cafes offered increased social contact and the potential to meet new people and have new experiences. As one participant stated, a positive aspect was:

> *" …seeing some people I know slightly and getting to know them, their work better and to meet people for the first time, and to find that we've got this common interest in being there."*

One participant talked about *"bumping"* into other participants who had been involved in the Local History Cafe in the town. The 'local' aspects potentially provided the opportunity for these incidental contacts to become deeper. The same person described seeing another participant at the bus stop and walking home with her, only to discover they lived in the same neighbourhood. They have since become friends. She described this as the *"ripple effect"* suggesting that Local History Cafes had helped develop this social connection and had the potential to continue to support other connections beyond its existence.

The interaction between members of the Cafe was seen as a mechanism for well-being during a discussion in the focus group. Many of those attending the cafe were retired and attending was said to *"force people to get out"*, providing the incentive to interact with other people when perhaps they would not have on their own. Living locally and learning about local heritage brought 'history alive' for them enabling them to talk to other people about something that was of interest to them. As two participants commented:

"It is that social interaction between two people or a group of people which is good for the mind and soul and good for everything."

"The more contacts you've got, hopefully, you're building up a platform where you will be supported."

Themes which highlight barriers to change:

    a) <u>It is difficult to keep it 'local' in all cases</u>

Being a local asset and drawing on local assets is one of the potential benefits of the Local History Cafe. A big challenge, in this context, was defining what is 'local' and what community assets involved. A challenge was that some locations were rural and required people to travel, others more urban and/or located in residential places which were easily accessible and convenient. This could mean a diverse set of people attending. As one participant noted…

> *"It's a totally different mix of personalities, backgrounds and foibles and we are all different. We have got funny quirky looking ways. It is a challenge for the people who are organising it."*

One participant noted that one talk had lost the local affinity becoming too *"highbrow"* or academic. Some participants wanted history to be accessible and related to them. Without this aspect, the Cafes may be seen as just another social group which could lose its specificity in supporting older people interested in attending the Cafes. The difficulty of booking different relevant and 'local' talks was highlighted as a problem for the sessions.

    b) <u>Attendance and limited sessions made it difficult for participants to meet new people</u>

Some participants were disappointed when Local History Cafes ended and what was happening next was not made clear. Some participants knew that the approach was time-limited but struggled to know what to do instead or did not feel able to make new friendships. The length of time between sessions and having a limited number of sessions were not always able to deal with loneliness effectively. Although there was a potential that friends would continue, there were no guarantees given the limited time people may have spent together. As one participant suggested…

> *"….I probably would have been surprised if I had met somebody who I think I must be a lifelong friend with now; I must have her email and phone number and they are on Twitter and Facebook and all that sort of thing."*

On one hand, there was also tension with some people committing to all sessions, which did not help. The approach was perceived to lack some flexibility about attending the sessions. As one participant argued:

"Initially, life is busy for me. I thought yeah I've got to go for eight months, that could be tricky, but in actual fact, it hasn't been tricky because it's worked out that I've been available. So it's hard for people to make that sort of commitment. So I think when it's done again, it should be pointed out that the Gestapo won't come and collect you and take you down there, if you enjoy it, you'll go back."

On the other hand, there was some disappointment that the changes in people attending made it difficult to make new friendships. One participant talked about the "*rapid dropping off*" of people attending which they found *"rather annoying because I'd waited about 6 months to get on the course"*. Another reported different people attended each time, reducing the motivation for making links with others. For those in the focus group, it was felt sessions should not be too large, but what happens in them could be advertised and promoted widely, *"spreading the word"*, in newspapers and over the Internet. An example of a resident of the local village who now lived abroad but *had reconnected over* the Internet was something valuable to the Cafe. There was a sense in which the Cafes may continue and become a community asset but leadership, planning and support for this next step where needed.

Participants at Sir John Moore Foundation's Local History Cafe

c) <u>Session dynamics needed to be managed carefully to get the best outcomes</u>

For the approach to be beneficial, session and group dynamics needed to be considered. A safe environment may easily turn into one that participants are not comfortable in. There were some tensions around contributing and how participants were expected to contribute. Some participants, for example, came expecting to learn and contribute less. This may not be what was expected by organisations who felt that the idea was for participants to contribute more.

As described, above, the sessions can be a mix in terms of gender. This may lead to particular dynamics. Some of the women participants felt that women tended to be more social. One man felt what he said could be taken in the wrong way in groups involving women and from his conversation allegations may have been made against him in the past of possible sexist nature. Safeguarding is, therefore, an important part of managing group dynamics.

A common concern of participants was not to let some people dominate the conversations, making it difficult for others to speak. This may be because they are enthusiastic but stop others wishing to attend if they feel unable to contribute. Although there may be a perception that *"you cannot please everyone"*, it was important to recognise, there may be hidden disabilities that either prevent people from participating fully or lead to *"difficult"* behaviours. Sight loss, hearing impairment and cognitive impairment were examples given.

Thus, venues, the shape of rooms and accessibility all impacted on the dynamic of the session and need to be taken into account. One participant felt that an optimal number of people for the sessions was about 10 people and this created a better dynamic. It enabled people to contribute or *"butt in"* without offence. Speakers also need to be aware of these dynamics and make reasonable adjustments to ensure that their talks are inclusive.

It is important to recognise that groups evolve and change dynamics. Some participants talked about holding back and being quiet at the beginning of the Cafes but them becoming more vocal and participatory over time. Such dynamics need to be carefully managed if the Cafes are to continue to be safe places and provide a space where loneliness can be helped.

The focus group highlighted that the Cafe was more than just a simple get together; they had a purpose, an aim. The leadership of the Cafe was therefore seen as an important aspect of setting up the group; coordinating the speakers, calling to remind them of the session (which one participant said, "*made them feel wanted*"), being a *"good chair"* and making sure people can be involved. The focus group also suggested the importance of the Cafes developing organically and ensuring there is an ability for interests to develop and grow away from the initial sessions.

   d) Local History Cafes were not attracting the hard to reach or most lonely

> *"Having social interaction is really important, and having interests that you can talk to people about. I felt encouraged to go to the Local History Cafes by members of staff, they were always very welcoming and friendly. Although I didn't myself feel isolated or lonely, I felt it had added to my network, and being able to talk about something I have an interest in is really important."*

There were some doubts expressed that the Cafes had not been able to reach those who are most lonely and disadvantaged. Transport, which is offered to all who need it, was often mentioned to include those who lacked mobility. Some participants felt lack of mobility contributed greater to isolation. One concern was that the Cafes may

not be reaching those hardest to reach and most lonely. Many of those who attended the Cafes were not perceived as either lonely or socially isolated. Some were already members of other social groups and had good support networks and social capital. Some people who attended described themselves as having lots of friends, family support and undertook to volunteer. One participant noted …

> *"I think in some ways it is a shame that the people that tend to come tend to be quite outgoing, anyway don't they? They're involved with different groups. This particular one doesn't really seem to have tapped into people who would be very isolated."*

One participant highlighted that they liked to *"keep busy"* and undertook a range of other activities and groups which included crafts, jewellery, sewing, gardening, and choirs. Equally, other participant's highlighted good family support and regularly seeing their families and looking after grandchildren. In this sense, it appeared Local History Cafes were simply another place to attend along with their other social groups. There was a risk, therefore, that the approach just became another social group rather than reaching those that are lonely and could benefit the most.

However, a person may not display visible signs of loneliness or isolation to others. Furthermore, despite good family support, for some older people, friends may be lacking, creating a reliance on those family relationships for social contact and risk of future isolation and loneliness. One male participant said…
 I am happy with my own company but my wife said you really need to get out and meet people.

Another talked about being *"lost to death"* when their son had recently been unwell. Others how they had moved to be close to their families and lacked any support outside of their family network. In some circumstances, participants had become unwell and lost confidence becoming more dependent on family for support. Some participants spoke about preparing themselves for the future, when they may be on their own. Existing friends may have already died. Local History Cafes, therefore, appeared to offer an opportunity to socialise with other people beyond the families and potentially find friendships to prevent future loneliness in this respect.
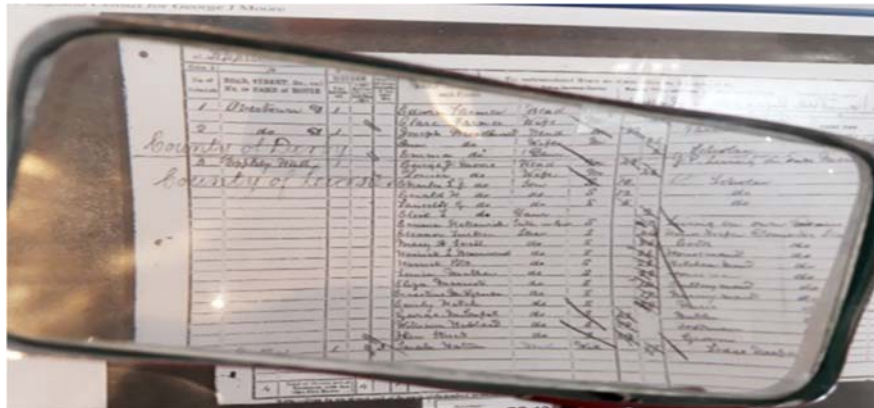
Sir John Moore Foundation's Local History Cafe, exploring the local village census

Themes from stakeholders running and organising Cafes

Themes which highlight what helped change.

a) <u>There were benefits for both individuals and organisations</u>

Stakeholders could see the benefits of Local History Cafes for both individuals and the heritage organisation they were involved in. Like participants, they felt Local History Cafes offered the potential for individuals to socially connect in ways that were different from other social activities. Those organising and running the groups observed beneficiaries growing in confidence as sessions progressed; at first appearing introverted, anxious and nervous but then contributing and enjoying attending the Cafes.

The small size of the groups and the interactive aspects of the talks were recognised as mechanisms that could ease anxieties about attending and help to promote confidence. The fact that beneficiaries started in the *"same place"*, was important and enabled those who attended a better chance of developing new friendships. This was recognised as important for those that may be lonely and socially isolated and uncomfortable attending a group for the first time. Local History Cafes were, therefore, a useful way to welcome people with social activities. Stakeholders could see how people with less confidence could interact, *"jump I'"* and contribute without feeling uncomfortable or self-conscious. One stakeholder observed:

> *"I am not a sociable person and quite introverted. To me there is nothing worse than walking into a room of people that you don't know and if you think they know each other and then the small group talk. I hate it. So, I could really empathize with the ones who were like actually, this is a bit out of my comfort zone. But they have been fine with it."*

The focus on history talks and giving people the opportunity to participate and share experiences was recognised as different from usual Museum activities which saw passive engagement with beneficiaries. The Cafes could provide an active focus for organisations to build on and involve those already attending their site; placing themselves at the centre of the community. Furthermore, they would be supporting well-being and providing a way of developing networks between the community and the local organisation that hosted Local History Cafes. Accordingly, along with benefiting individuals, and targeting loneliness and social isolation, it was an opportunity for organisations to increase the contribution people may make to a heritage site. For example, one stakeholder talked about how the Local History Cafe *"fitted"* with what they wanted to achieve in the future. The Cafe acted as a vehicle to support involvement and their aim was to embed the approach further in their organisational activities in the future.

b) <u>Good Planning was central to good outcomes</u>

Central to acquiring the benefits that Local History Cafes could provide, was the task of organising and running the sessions. Stakeholders highlighted there were many aspects for ensuring the Cafes worked well:

- Promotion in the first instance
- Planning and organising speakers
- Phone reminders for people to attend
- Setting up rooms and managing the groups on the day
- Managing volunteers
- Ensuring refreshments were available
- Completing the forms and paperwork required for Crafting Relationships

A common theme from stakeholders was the importance of good planning and creating a *"buzz"* around the Local History Cafe. As one stakeholder stated…

> *"I do not think it is something you can put on and it will just run itself. Some people do not need ringing up every month but you do feel that this may make the difference for some people coming or not coming."*

Good planning involved supporting participants in deciding who to invite and what talks were booked, informing beneficiaries in advance of the sessions and proactively being involved in managing the dynamics of the group.

Stakeholders highlighted that sessions worked better when planned and may include tactile exercises; bringing in objectives or designing activities to do. Different needs had to be considered, for example, transport needs were highlighted as important.

c) <u>Committed and competent volunteers could help overcome the challenges</u>

Organising and running Local History Cafes could present challenges for those responsible for this task (see below). In this context, the support of volunteers was a benefit. However, for various reasons, this support was not always available or worked well. Where it worked well, it contributed significantly to the success of the Cafe. Volunteers were important because, as noted above, there were many aspects to organising and running the Cafes. Enthusiastic and competent additional support from volunteers was likely to add to their success, particularly in the context of limited resources and time for a stakeholder within the host organisation.

The relationship and roles of those who were paid and those who volunteered were therefore important. Discussions with stakeholders, however, highlighted variations in the experiences of using volunteers. For example, the availability of a good volunteer, the lack of skills and/or confidence to undertake the majority of tasks to organise and run the Cafes. This could see additional challenges of managing/developing volunteer and dealing with complaints if any mistakes were made.

A participant at Erewash Museum's Local History Cafe

What appeared to work particularly well was where volunteers were part of the overall team and took on a substantial amount of the tasks to support the Cafes. This arguably required volunteers to have the appropriate skills, enabling paid workers to *"step back"* and consequently make real the possibility of Cafes existing beyond the initial five sessions and current funding arrangements.

Themes which highlight the barriers to change

a) <u>Challenges of Cafe practicalities</u>

This themes that emerged from stakeholders presented as a series of challenges to be reviewed and addressed:

Finding reliable and interesting speakers for the sessions

As history talks were an important mechanism for Cafes to work, the task of finding speakers could cause some anxiety. One stakeholder felt that organising an unreliable speaker may reflect badly on them. Local contacts could become exhausted, making it difficult to find appropriate *'local'* topics and there was the

possibility of speakers not showing up or not being appropriate (e.g. not supporting the interaction of beneficiaries which was so central to the Cafes success). A stakeholder suggested the dynamic of the group may change depending on the attitude of the speaker.

Managing group dynamics and dominant participants

Managing group dynamics and dominant participants was important to ensure those lacking confident felt welcomed and comfortable. However, stakeholders felt this was not always easy. A diversity of different older people within a session was seen as positive providing the session remained inclusion. As one stakeholder observed, it was difficult for those organising and running the groups to know if they were getting this right and what the impact was on those that attended….

> *"The cafes are so predicated on group dynamics and personality that it is very hard to apply any of the experience I've learnt to the next one. Each cafe is a completely new entity that has got to be managed and it takes a lot of emotional and practical work to get them right. You just never know if you are getting them right until almost before it's over. So I can see instances where things are not going well and not really working for the participants and again I can see glimmers of things where it's working really well for us. But in the main, I just can't tell how good the outcomes are for any of them."*

Ensuring attendance and commitment to the groups was difficult

Like participants, stakeholders found it challenging that the Cafes were time-limited. There was a feeling that perhaps their good work may be undone once beneficiaries were not attending the Cafes. These concerns were intensified in the context of participants not attending when there were limited spaces. There may be a core group of beneficiaries who recognised the importance of committing to and attending all the sessions of the Cafes but the nature of the client group also meant regular attendance could not be guaranteed e.g. due to illness and hospital appointments. Not seeing the same people at each session was seen as a barrier to making friendships and undermining one of the main mechanisms for ensuring the Cafes success. For the stakeholders, working to ensure regular attendance e.g. by promoting talks and reminding participants provided a significant challenge and raised concerns about the ability to meet the outcomes of the project. One stakeholder, for example, argued that recruiting and retaining members was a *"drain"* on their time and if not successful would be demotivating for both them and the volunteers helping to organise and run the group.

Within this context, stakeholders had also observed they were not always recruiting those who lacked social networks and/or at risk of loneliness. Several stakeholders reported how couples would attend or several friends who came together (an issue

which highlighted the need to further manage group dynamics as noted above). A challenge existed in reaching those to reach. As one stakeholder stated:

> *"I think the outcomes for me where I get people who keep coming back to the museum and keep working with me and more likely to happen with those who already quite engaged".*

There was a perception from one stakeholder that the range of activities on offer in their area made it difficult for them to attract lonely participants. Furthermore, some people who may be at risk of loneliness (e.g. those between 40-50 years old going through a relationship breakdown), were not able to attend.

A presentation on preserve making at Melton Local History Cafe

b) Uncertainty about outcomes in the longer term

Those organising and running the Local History Cafes were unsure if the Cafes were making a difference to beneficiaries in the long term. One stakeholder, for example, expressed scepticism about what difference Cafes could make to the Loneliness.

> *"I am not sure you can measure people over a few months. I'm sceptical about the differences you are going to find. Not that I do not believe in the project or the concept. I believe it will take much longer than that and will need to be sustained".*

Stakeholders appeared unsure about what longer-term outcomes they were supporting for participants or if they were creating any legacy at all.

> *"The fact that local history is that hook to get people out and into a venue is really good. I think one of the things that we have really been thinking about more recently as a legacy, is what happens next. We haven't moved on two different groups each time. We are coming to a point where actually potentially something has got to give. Over 10 people have attended, enjoy themselves and it makes a difference to them but we have only helped 10 people. We have not helped 30 people. We don't get 10 new people every time. So actually if you're measuring success by the number of different people we have reached, we are not doing a very good job".*

Within some Cafes, stakeholders could see the potential for the programme to have an enabling role, it was less clear what this meant beyond the life of the Cafes. Some Cafes appeared to manage the components of the programme and stakeholder roles and responsibilities better than others. At some Cafes, more time than was anticipated was spent on the basics of the programme each month, for example, lengthy discussions around room layout, setting refreshments out on tables and generally being prepared for the cafe. This meant deeper level conversations about next steps for participants were delayed or did not happen. The response had therefore been varied, with only one site developing continuation Cafes to provide further support. Another reason for this was because the beneficiaries had not reached the point where they could move on successfully. An issue for stakeholders, therefore, was when to judge the Local History Cafes as a short-term mechanism to enable beneficiaries to move beyond their support or to develop the Cafe for the longer term to enable those who attended to maintain an existing support.

c) Disempowering culture of the host organisation

The ability to shape Local History Cafes to suit different cohorts was important. However, being flexible and responsive may be a problem for some stakeholders who were employed by larger authorities rather than smaller trusts. Local History Cafes were located in a number of Museums which included those owned and run by different authorities. Accordingly, the culture of an organisation may contribute to the organising and running of Local History Cafes. For example, one stakeholder highlighted that the lack of policy regarding volunteering compromised their ability to effectively utilise volunteers to help the project. Such issues, in turn, may contribute to a wider issue of limited time. Thus, for example, responsibility for Local History Cafes may be in addition to other job responsibilities restricting time to focus on the work of the Cafes.

One stakeholder, for example, felt different demands on their time-limited the depth of involvement with beneficiaries to simply running and organising the Cafes, rather than, for example, being able to offer more tailored and personalised support for individuals e.g. to move onto to other activities or enable them to make the most of their existing strengths and assets. Smaller and more autonomous organisations appeared to be able to offer more flexibility and respond to the needs of those who attended. They were able to provide more focused interventions which arguably saw the Local History Cafes becoming more embedded within their organisation.

Understanding 'agency' of participants was often challenging for stakeholders. Local History Cafes are not designed to be like other groups, for example, a case of sending out a poster, presenting to a group and then clearing it away again. They aim to offer an initiative that will support participants to become part of the Local History Cafe programme in a meaningful, non-passive way. At some Cafes, therefore, a lack of preparation for the monthly Cafe inevitably meant sessions were spent on the 'busyness' of the session, rather than on having more in-depth conversations.

Participants at Calke Abbey Local History Cafe

Discussion of findings

The aim of this report has been to present the findings of the evaluation of the initial Local History Cafe Programmet.

The findings suggest Cafes appear an effective way to engage older people in social and educational activities which can encourage agency and may help with loneliness. The type of loneliness most positively impacted on is social rather than Emotional Loneliness, indicating the programme can support people lacking social contact from peers or the community rather than issues like bereavement related to intimate relationships. Findings have also indicated that the current approach does not impact on higher satisfaction with health or increased quality of life. However, those who completed pre and post questionnaires already reported 'good quality of life' and were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their health'.

Those older people who attend the Cafes tend to be white/British women, who are better educated, in good health and report a good quality of life. These are characteristics not associated with groups who are at risk of loneliness. However, the Cafes also attracted older people with characteristics of living alone and were widowed and divorced. Accordingly, Cafes attract a mix of people who may or may not be lonely and/or are at risk both now and in the future.

The focus on history and learning within the Cafes may arguably be more appealing to those with higher levels of education rather than those who are disadvantaged and most at risk of loneliness. However, the specific feature of Local History Cafe is the combination of social interaction and education. Traditional education formats often see people attending but not socialising e.g. once the talk is complete, people leave. Local History Cafes subvert this tendency and put social interaction driven by a passion for local history and heritage centre stage. This can have a wider appeal.

Local History Cafes, therefore, have the potential to help *all* older people even for those who may not be lonely and socially isolated, to extend their social networks and so prevent future loneliness and social isolation. Cafes are advertised for anyone experiencing, or at risk of or looking to keep at bay social isolation and loneliness. Whatever someone's reason for attending, they were welcomed. In this sense, the programme is offering a preventative approach.

For heritage organisations, Cafes can help *'hook'* people into their heritage site, encourage greater participation and involvement and so create mutual benefits. This can see heritage activities put at the heart of the community. Good planning and leadership are required for Cafes to run effectively and this is greatly enhanced where part of the team is a committed and competent volunteer. This is particularly important in the context of the forces that hinder the organising and running of the groups e.g. the practicalities of getting the good speakers and ensuring the groups are welcoming and inclusive.

For the model to work best, it requires embedding within a supportive organisational culture. Accordingly, the ability to make a real commitment to the organising and running of the Cafes is necessary. Having an environment where Cafes can evolve

and respond is important to their success. Being able to spend time to shape the Cafes, in line with the vision and aims of the organisation (within which Cafes take place), and within the support of the wider programme, will empower those that run and organised the Cafes.

The themes identified in the valuation have highlighted what has helped or hindered the work of Local History Cafes. These suggest both supportive and non-supportive aspects to Local History Cafes achieving their objectives described below:

Supportive aspects

- The approach marks a shift away from traditional 'social groups' based on professional gift models which see services delivered by 'professionals' who retain control over the person in need. Instead, it has the potential to support the agency of the older person as welcoming and inclusive spaces, tackling issues of loneliness and social isolation for older people.
- Cafes ignited an interest in local history which see participants welcome the opportunity to meet with others and reduce their social isolation. The combination of social interaction, combined with local history, offers a different way to engage older people and support loneliness and socially isolated.
- Where sessions involved lonely people, they appeared to help with Social Loneliness and making a connection with peers and communities.
- Where Local History Cafes appeared to work best and were meaningful for participants, is where those running and organising the groups are proactive with their approach and showed good leadership.
- The factors that support Local History Cafes' Ethos and help change, highlight the importance of team and partnership working e.g. with volunteers.

Non-supportive aspects

- Although Cafes have the potential to appeal to all older people, they tend to appeal to a particular cohort. Those attending the initial programme have tended to be white, women and better educated. This may not be surprising given the location of the Cafes[8].
- Cafes may therefore not always help improve satisfaction with health, quality of life for this group or reach those most lonely. Not all participants needed help with loneliness but Cafes do offer involvement and enjoyment for everyone.
- Cafes appear less effective in supporting Emotional Loneliness or types of loneliness resulting from psychological issues and bereavement.
- The ability to make a real commitment to the organising and running of the Cafes is necessary but presents particular challenges in some organisations for those given this task if not fully supported by the organisation.

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[8] For example, located in county rural locations with less BME members.

- Greater certainty over the long term outcomes of the Cafes, including who to target in the first instance and managing attendance with respect to the outcomes needs to be considered.

What's next?

Crafting Relationships is now interested in taking findings from the initial phase of the Local History Cafe programme and developing practicable actions, in partnership with Cafes, participants, and wider stakeholders. The next iteration of the Local History Cafe programme begins in early Summer 2019 with two new Leicestershire based cafes funded by Leicestershire County Council. Some areas of development are recommended to help develop the ethos of the Cafes:

- **Identifying creative evaluation and feedback tools to further develop the evidence around active ageing outcomes**

Introducing agreed outcomes and (short and long term) outcomes indicators, whilst respecting the resources of each partner. One possibility is to have a set of standard programme outcomes and outcome indicators and another set, more personalised to each partner, linking in with wider organisational outcomes. This approach complements the Local History Cafe ethos of embedding the programme into existing work, rather than seeing it as a bolt-on.

- **Increased use of Cafes for social prescribing**

To date, Crafting Relationships have liaised with GP practices but have had a poor response. All surgeries within the vicinity of Cafes have been approached via email and face to face visits. Posters and programme details were also shared. Only one surgery has interacted so far with the programme and so there is more work to be done. This could include developing partnership working with organisations who can help target hard to reach participants who are lonely and developing the approach to be more adaptable and flexible to suit different 'localities' and across a greater diversity of localities to include BAME groups. The model could also be extended to involve other vulnerable groups who could benefit like those with mental health issues, young mothers and members of younger generations.

- **Further training and support for staff and volunteers at Local History Cafe partner sites**

Training to ensure volunteers and staff have appropriate skills and competence organising and running of Local History Cafes including what is expected of paid workers and the extent to which volunteers are supported to organise and run Local History Cafes. Training is also required to provide guidance/ground rules for participants, speakers and facilitators relating to group dynamics/reasonable adjustments and anti-discriminatory practice and thus ensuring the involvement of participants in all aspects of the Cafes including their aims/objectives. This should include training for those not directly involved with the programme e.g. front of house and management, around understanding ageing and agency, quality of interactions

at all points of contact, and a non-judgemental approach to participants identifying as interested in attending.

Sir John Moore School opened in 1897

- **Increased development of support, resources and networks across different Local History Cafes**

These should be tailored to local affinities and increase co-production across the programme. These may help increase partner confidence with approaches to Cafes as well as developing or signposting participants to follow on opportunities. This could be developed to provide support for museum professionals in considering funding to ensure programmes are sustainable and not 'one-offs' which will include understanding and navigating the health/social care/commissioning landscape.

- **Making better use of existing strategies to move forward**

There are currently a number of key documents relating to social isolation and loneliness, for example, DCMS (2018), *A connected society. A strategy for tackling loneliness - laying the foundations for change.* Locally, Leicestershire County Council's *Communities Strategy* (2017) highlights a priority to support and develop the voluntary and community sector to ensure it is in an optimum position to provide relevant services for Leicestershire communities. This includes providing support to town and parish councils and encouraging greater partnership working and collaboration between these and voluntary and community sector organisations. As part of marketing the programme wider, Crafting Relationships intend to work with Parish Councils, detailing the programme and asking for their support to reach community members. Findings from this evaluation can now be further discussed against these national and local strategies and open up further networks of support for the programme. In order for the Local History Cafe programme to continue and positively impact on social isolation and loneliness, it is important that commitments detailed within these strategies are part of the programme.

Limitations of the analysis

Survey data was useful to outline the characteristics of those who have participated in the Local History Cafes evaluation but the findings were limited by the small numbers of participants who took part. Furthermore, not all the pre and post surveys were fully completed limiting this analysis even further.

The model of the Local History Cafes was supposed to be five sessions, which arguably may not be long enough to quantify their impact on loneliness. Developing follow on opportunities is part of the model but scales and measures of quality and life and loneliness, although robust, may not always identify individual changes in how people are feeling over the short term.

Those who participated in the surveys represent beneficiaries who continued to attend the Local History Cafes for all or most sessions, and one assumes gained benefits. No data exist on those that attended fewer sessions and exited the programme and may have a different view of the programme. The data represents those who completed questionnaires/interviews. It is difficult to assess how representative they are of others who attended the Cafes given limited data exists (only attendance and gender) about those attending the Cafes overall.

The qualitative analysis was limited to ten interviews. Some of the interviews with participants were undertaken by Crafting Relationships which may have biased what was said.

Closing statement from Crafting Relationships

First of all, my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has been a part of the Local History Cafe programme.

What has been achieved to date is as a result of every individual's involvement. Thank-yous go to all those who attended cafes, volunteers, museum staff teams, MDEM, Leicestershire County Council, our DMU evaluation team (Particularly Wendy and David), Dr Mike Rennoldson and Psychology students at Nottingham Trent University, our gang of Twitter supporters and helpers and every other person along the way.

Together, we have created a space for people to meet, contribute, be heard, be inspired, learn and share. At every one of the Cafes I have attended, personal stories have been shared about how the programme positively impacts lives. There have also been some suggestions for improvement.

The future of the Local History Cafe programme is again a joint concern. I have always said you 'get out of Local History Cafes what you put in' and of the existing Cafes, there are some shining examples of where that ethos can take you.

That sentiment also applies to management teams across Museums, Public Health, local authorities, GP surgeries and writers of strategies and policies. Take the time to read this report. If you've been impressed by what's taking place in your local Museum, pick up the phone or arrange a visit. If you can make some quick, small actions to help us reach the harder to reach, get in touch.

A reality is, not all Museums will be right for Local History Cafe, and Local History Cafe will not be right for all Museums. There is no failure in that. What is absolutely crucial though, is that proper consideration is given to involvement in the programme, and adequate time is given to regularly reflecting and deciding on next steps. After all, we are dealing with people's lives.

The simplicity of the Local History Cafe programme belies its depth, and I know we have more to do and more to achieve. I look forward to taking the programme forward, with you, learning all the way.

Katherine - CEO, Crafting Relationships

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Further information

Read more about each Local History Café at www.localhistorycafe.tumblr.com

Read more about Crafting Relationships at www.craftingrelationships.co.uk