

Community approaches to reducing social isolation – workshop leaders, Tracey Robbins, JRF

The workshop looked at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Housing 'Neighbourhood approaches to loneliness' action research and community development programme.

Currently in year two of a three year programme, working in four different neighbourhoods, two in York and two in Bradford.

Reducing isolation isn't rocket science - the issue is reaching people who haven't been reached.

- To understand the factors that contribute to loneliness, JRF leafleted the areas and spoke to people in the street – using a 'washing line' of issues – to get buy in.
- Trained 45 – 50 local people in participatory action research and 36 of these still involved. This was a Washing line initiative training volunteers in action research to combat loneliness – used mapping and spider diagrams.
- Tools – not a questionnaire - were developed to understand the issues, and targeted different groups (men, elders groups, mental health groups etc). Spoke to over 500 people.
- Themed causes of isolation - 56 and 59 in two areas and 183 in Bradford Moor, the most deprived neighbourhood. The main causes were:
 - Number 1 issue: isolation and being on own but not unique to old people – bullying and unable to mix were key issues for young people
 - Lack of confidence / depression / low self-esteem – key and underpins other issues
 - Lack of human contact (New Earswick)
 - Pride / acceptance of loneliness – how engage with people who are bitter about being lonely?

- A summary of the main issues across all neighbourhoods and in each neighbourhood are available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/neighbourhood-approaches-loneliness>
- 36 of the community researchers have become community connectors – experts and leaders in their neighbourhood. Taking forward ideas to tackle isolation
- Ideas include:
 - Pop up cafe in an area with no facilities
 - Intergenerational work connecting 40 -50 year olds with 60 – 70 year olds, not just the young
 - Buddying;
 - Walking group
 - Intergenerational theatre
 - Social prescribing in GP surgeries
 - film club all ages;
 - green banking – planting;
 - meeting places; prevention of cliques that prevent accessibility
 - All areas want to run a session on depression / low self-esteem
- Need to ‘hand hold’ to get people engaged – use buddy scheme for someone to go with to networks etc
- JRF funded £300,000 for 3 years to do the pilot, but can do cheaply in your own area – can be cost of a salary and tea / coffee.
 - SORN spent £4000 on asset mapping using volunteers – has resulted in health champion and put bids in to continue work.
 - Having little money can ‘fire you up’ and too much money pumped into an area can make people complacent
 - JRF provided £7,000 seed funding for each neighbourhood to take forward the legacy - will evaluate impact

- Need to change the culture - project works at:
 - Individual level – opportunities to meet
 - Network level e.g. befrienders
 - Community level e.g. making building accessible
 - Strategic level e.g. Health & Wellbeing Boards