

Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund

2016 – 2017

Summary

End of year report



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VAF would like to thank the following:

The organisations funded through the Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund for their work through the year in delivering funded activity and for sharing their learning, achievements and suggestions.

Nikki Bell at FMR Research for working on the analysis of applications to the Fund.

Heart & Sound staff and volunteers for filming and editing the short film based on the Learning & Networking event <https://youtu.be/bjqJt0P8Xr0>.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the evaluation report on the Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund (July 2016 – June 2017). The full report was submitted to Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government established the Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund (SIALF) in response to the Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee Inquiry into Age and Isolation (published October 2015). A one year Fund of £500,000 was set up which could make awards of up to £20,000 and was managed by Voluntary Action Fund (VAF). The Fund received a high response rate: 278 applications and 127 enquiries, with the fund being nearly ten times over-subscribed.

The methodology for the full evaluation report involved five key elements:

- Project end of year reports;
- Social Network Analysis mapping;
- Review of applications received (FMR Research);
- Online survey of project leads; and
- Evaluation of events.

Overview

The Fund has reduced feelings of isolation and loneliness, increased social connections, empowered funded projects to develop and use new skills, and brought different communities and generations together. At project level, there are now new partnerships, shared learning and increased capacity. The Fund has generated improved understanding about 'what works' in tackling social isolation and loneliness within specific communities, and the diversity of the funded projects proved critical to generating this learning.

Fund Outcomes

1. An increase in social connectedness of people experiencing disadvantage; and
2. A reduction in the effects of social isolation in people experiencing disadvantage.

Key results

- 36 organisations received a grant of between £2,236 and £20,000. More information on funded projects is available at <http://www.voluntaryactionfund.org.uk/funding-and-support/social-isolation-and-loneliness-fund/> ;
- 6829 people (6069 beneficiaries and 760 volunteers) benefitted from opportunities to increase their social networks and to tackle other issues relating to their social isolation;

- 42% of projects were specifically targeting older people (some alongside other characteristics);
- 92% of funded organisations reported outcomes for the Fund;
- 33 projects (92%) reported an increase in social connections/ friendships and many also describe a reduction in the negative effects of social isolation for service users including:
 - Increased confidence
 - Increased self-esteem
 - Increased/new skills
 - Better mental health
 - Improved social skills
 - Happier
- 6 organisations participated in a social network analysis which showed an overall increase in trusted connections of 245%;
- 53% of funded organisations have secured funding to continue their project activity or some element of this.

Learning

Learning has been at the forefront of the Fund's implementation and the following learning is important to note:

- It is clear from the breadth of applications received that social isolation and loneliness is an issue which affects all of society although it is recognised that certain characteristics may place you at higher risk.
- Working with people who are socially isolated is challenging in itself and there are issues around engagement which can mean delays to the start of projects and the unanticipated need for more resources to maintain engagement.
- A large number of organisations commented on the importance of small groups' and one to one support when working with socially isolated people who are vulnerable and are more likely to have other support needs.
- Some common themes emerged regarding successful methods of engaging with people who are socially isolated. These included:
 - food as a means of bringing people together
 - offering men only activities
 - ensuring a high level of one to one support/small group work to address any underlying issues and provide support until the person felt more confident to engage in a bigger group or other activities.
- Use of the internet and social media can be an essential method of helping reduce social isolation and loneliness, but mainly if used alongside face to face activity. Technology can help augment existing service delivery.

- Encouraging men to engage in projects which reduce social isolation and loneliness is particularly challenging. Projects need to build in intensive promotion and support to encourage participation.
- Volunteers are an essential element of project delivery and resourcing of projects. Projects need to be aware of the support needs of this group and, also of the role of volunteering in reducing social isolation and loneliness.
- There are issues associated with one year funding. Delays in recruitment of staff and volunteers, and engagement of service users can impact on achieving outcomes. Relationship building, partnership development, referral routes, joint working and community development are all big outcomes which are tough to achieve in one year.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, this has been a highly successful and effective pilot, especially given that this was the first Fund of its type in Scotland and that it was a one year fund. Clear outcomes have been achieved for funded projects and there will be an ongoing legacy in these organisations, communities and with the people they have supported.

The learning highlighted above and the following recommendations should be taken into consideration regarding any future funding initiative:

Funding Recommendations

- There is a need for continued and increased funding to tackle social isolation and loneliness in Scotland. This is demonstrated by the large volume of applications to the fund, the highest number received in response to a new Fund in VAF's 35 year history.
- The recommendation is that a three year fund is established taking account of the evidence and learning in the full evaluation report.