Tackling Loneliness & Isolation
Leapfrog Short Project Report

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Summary: Tackling Loneliness & Isolation

Loneliness and social isolation are an increasing issue in society especially within the elderly population of the UK. Being isolated or lonely has far reaching and sometimes devastating effects on individuals and health and care systems. The effects of loneliness and isolation have been linked to other health problems and can have a significant impact on communities. Connecting with people who are lonely can be difficult, often people do not self identify with loneliness and are uncomfortable with having a conversation about their loneliness. Yet the benefits of sucessfully tackling this issue are significant for the individual and society.

This project aimed to develop tools to support community and social enterprises working to tackle the issue of loneliness and isolation in later life to engage with the lonely and social isolated, and improve the sharing of best practice. In this project we explored the current issues community and social enterprises face in connecting with one another to share their practices, their current approaches to social engagements, and their ideas for making improvements that can make a real difference for the future. Our aims were to support our partners to:

1. question what is working in practice,
2. make connections to users
3. share knowledge

The ultimate aim of the project was to co-design tools that community and social enterprises can use to share best practice and develop meaningful social connections that can be instrumental in developing responses that tackle social isolation and loneliness.

The Tackling Loneliness project is a short research project contributing to a larger co-design research project called Leapfrog. Leapfrog is a 3 Year AHRC funded research project working with the public and third sectors to co-design simple and effective engagement tools. We are a collaborative project between Imagination at Lancaster University and the Innovation School at The Glasgow School of Art. The ultimate aim of our project is to co-design simple tools that give as many people as possible a say in the decisions that matter to them. We do this by working with communities and enterprises to co-design tools that make positive changes to citizen engagement.

Introduction

The project presented in this report aimed to collaborate with community and social enterprises working to tackle loneliness and isolation to co-design tools to engage with their users and share their practice. The project brought together the experiences and perspectives of service providers and third sector partners involved in providing services that help lonely and social isolated people. The partners were instrumental in the creative thinking behind the co-design of some simple tools to share practice and improve engagements. Our objectives for this project were to engage with service providers, front line service deliverers, and third sector partners to share their knowledge and expertise to co-design the new tools.

Following scoping workshops with social and community enterprises from the Highlands area we ran two co-design workshops with service providers from a Moray social enterprise group and health and social care professionals. The participants from the two workshops designed two news tools to help and support them to help their service users make social connections. After the two co-design workshops the Leapfrog team user tested the new tools with service providers and service users from the region. The user testing uncovered some valuable insights about the tools that led to some final improvements before the tools were published to the Leapfrog website. The two tools from this project, named Stick With It and Common cards, plus tools from other Leapfrog projects are free to download from leapfrog.tools

This report details the activities and outcomes of the project at each stage and presents the final tools that were co-designed with our partners.
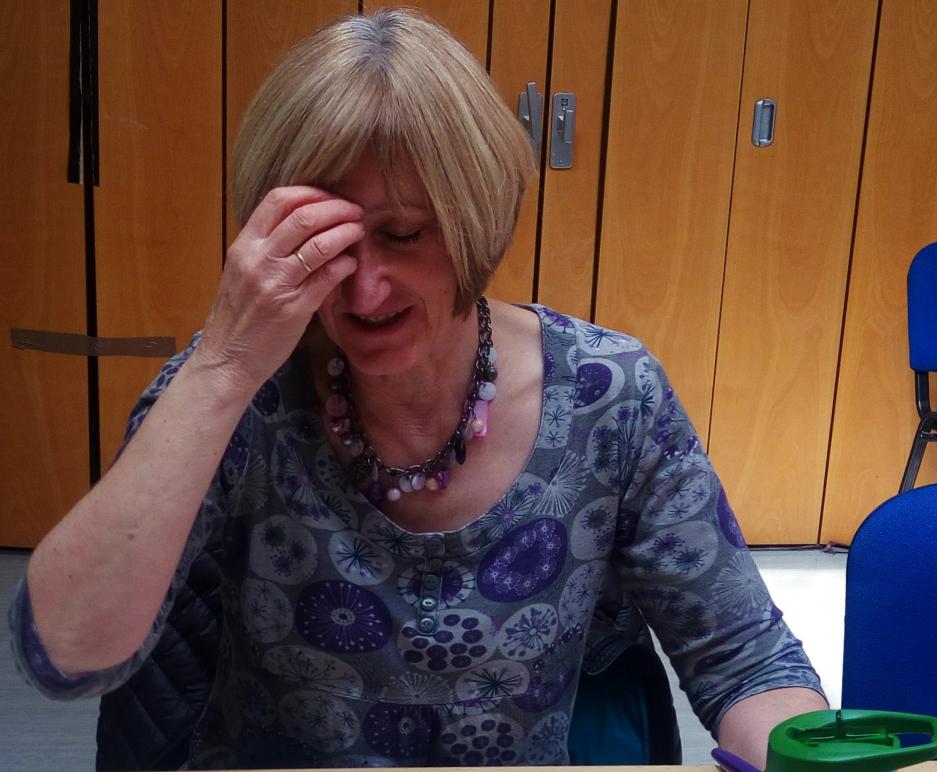
Scoping

To scope the project the Leapfrog team met with seven different social enterprises from across the Highlands region to uncover the challnges they face in their current practice and frame the issue that could be addressed together in future workshops. The aim was to begin our project by mapping the tacit and often unspoken knowledge that exists in a network of practitioners working to tackle social isolation and loneliness and then explore potential key points in their existing processes where tools could make a meaningful contribution to what they already do.

The scoping workshop began with an activity where we answered three questions focussed on the experiences of loneliness and isolation. Instead of writing them down we drew answers on cards designed especially for this workshop. Followed by a discussion of what we drew. The intention was to get to know each other, to share some reflections about tackling loneliness as a community or social enterprise, as well as warming up for the workshop ahead by engaging in a creative activity. The three questions explored: the most important lessons learned about tackling loneliness; key resources and networks; and approaches to effective communication between peers. The responses to the questions were placed onto a large wall map as a record for future use.

'If people are isolated and we put a person just to chat with them, telling what is happening in the outside world, it is actually quite good. And if you do this in a regular basis, it is something for them to look forward to"

After the initial activity the team moved everyone on to an individual reflective activity aimed at sharing tacit knowledge through the use of an engagement tool that consisted of five different prompts. Responses to the prompts were written onto individual response cards and then the cards were placed onto the large wall map so that we could cluster the information together visually and later find linkages and themes. The prompts stimulated reflections about five topics:

- Activity: what do you do to engage with lonely people?
- Motivations: what motivates you to engage with them? Why do you do what you do?
- Approach: how do you go about engaging lonely people? What type of tools do you use?
- Value: what do you value about the work you do?
- Challenges/frustrations: what are the challenges/frustrations do you face when engaging with lonely people?

After a short coffee break the participants reflected individually about their networks and resources. This activity was suported by a 'me-mapping' tool, consisting of a map with three categories (people, places and things). The 'me-map' recorded the most important people, places and things the participants use for their services. Once individual maps were complete participants mapped their networks and resources in connection to one to another, developing a bigger picture and visualising the whole network together.

What should be shared?

IDENTITY

Co-Design Workshop

BEST PRACTICE
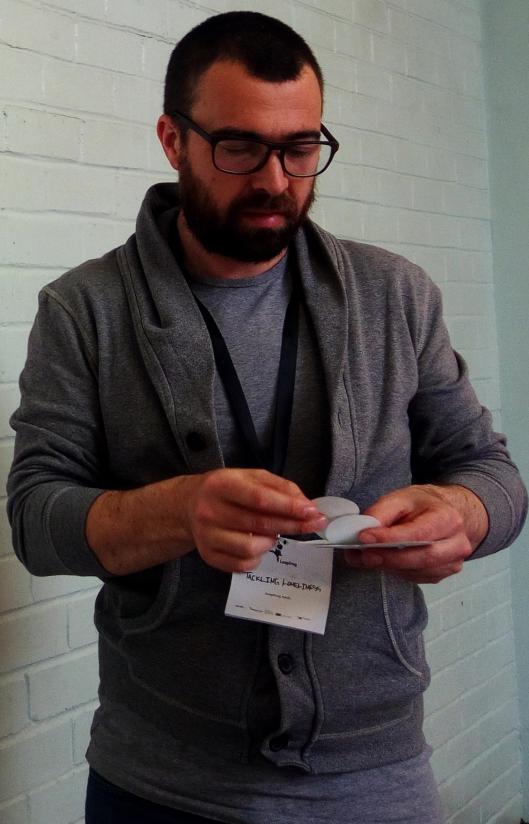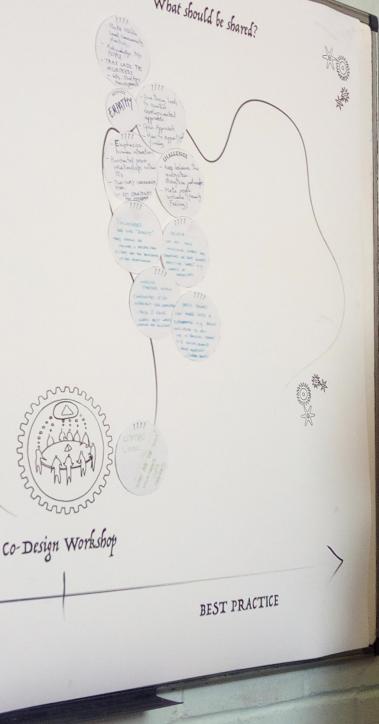
Initial thoughts

After the scoping workshop the Leapfrog team spent some time reflecting and pulling out some key themes and observations to take forward in the project. The themes ranged from the value of volunteers in community and social enterprises, to the importance of building relationships over time and how this contributes to positive outcomes. Of all the themes two struck as particular salient with all the partners and repeatedly came up in conversations. These were the importance of building meaningful relationships with and between service users, and the value of good engagement with service users by front line workers.

It was decided that the oportunities in this project lay in tools to support dialogue between user and provider and build connections and relatiionships. This was the basis on which we took the project forward.

Co-Design workshop 1

In this first co-design workshop the team worked with a group of 12 social enterprise professionals, offering community services based in the Highlands of Scotland. In this workshop we wanted to focus on tools that could support the two key themes that we had already explored in the two scoping workshops. We used the idea of co-designing card-based games, a concept that came from the scoping, as a basis for a design brief for the workshop.

As a warm-up activity for the workshop, the team used a set of 'High Five' playing cards specifically designed for this session. The tool amed to instigate a conversation about current processes and prompt discussion about advice on best practice. Five cards were given out to each participant and on each card they were asked to write a piece of advice for tackling loneliness and isolation.

Once their High Five cards had been filled in the participants gathered to play the first activity: 'Put your Cards on the Table', a casino-style Roulette game. As the High Five cards were randomly numbered on the back, numbers were picked from a hat and the participant with the corresponding numbered card read out their piece of advice to the group and then placed it on the board. Between each card being placed there was time for questions, comments and debate, and thematic chips were used as a way of grouping insights together. The activity uncovered some more themes that were shared by the group, these included: dealing with transitions in life; the pragmatic and logistical nature of service providers' practices; and the highly empathetic dimension of their practice.

For the second activity participants got together into groups of 3 or 4 and spent time playing different kinds of existing card games. The aim here was to think about each set of cards beyond simply the rules, and to question the design, attributes and principles of the cards.

Remaining in the same groups, the final activity, 'Gamify', asked the participants to design their own set of cards based on the insights collected in the first and second activities. From this, 2 interesting tool ideas were generated, which were each presented back to the group at the end.

The tool ideas

Top Prompts Tool Story
This tool was based on the participants playing Pontoon and examining Tarrot Cards. Originally called 'Star Cards'. The tool was a set of cards developed to prompt a dialogue around difficult conversations. The aim of the cards was to build trust around discussing issues and potentially relate these to a player's own life. The insights the team drew on for prototyping this tool included having an awareness for different types of issues people have, a sensibility when having difficult conversations, and helping someone understand their own situation and needs. The idea underpinning this tool was that it would help make connections between people and build trusting relationships.

Stick with It Tool Story
This tool was developed after playing Uno and Happy Families but was also based on the game Snakes and Ladders (or Slides and Ladders as the participants preferred). Originally called 'The Game of Moans', this group's tool idea aimed to challenge the perception of risk in planning for an upcoming event or activity through identifying potential barriers and obstacles. The idea was that the tool would support the dialogue between workers and lonely and isolated people around their anxieties related to social situations.

Next Steps

Following the first co-design workshop, the next steps for the Leapfrog team was to produce the physical tools based on the two tool concepts and return them to the participants for a second workshop and some live testing and feedback.

Co-design workshop 2

Prior to the second co-design workshop the produced tools were sent to the participants for testing and evaluation, to get them ready for the next steps of development.

The Leapfrog team then returned to the Highlands for the second co-design workshop aimed at refining the tools from the first workshop. The Leapfrog team had developed the tool concepts to prototypes that were presented back to the participants for feedback and refinement. To begin the workshop each tool was presented to the group followed by a detailed group discussion about the potential uses and users of the tools; how, why and when the tools would be put into practice; and the look and feel of both tools. During the discussion the team captured all the participant feedback onto two large feedback sheets before moving on to begin some tool hacking. Each group selected different tools and spent some time trying them out together and making some changes.

One group selected the 'Top Prompts' tool, a set of cards that can help start a conversation around issues and challenges relating to loneliness and isolation. The aim of this tool was to help someone recognise and acknowledge challenges in their own lives and to build trust around discussing these with a service provider during early intervention.

The second group selected the 'Stick with It' tool, a planning sheet with stickers that helps someone plan for an upcoming event, activity or journey by breaking it down into steps, encouraging discussion about any concerns they may have about each step (such as perceived risks and obstacles), and then coming up with practical ways and recommendations to overcome these concerns.

The participants tested and 'hacked' the tools up unitl lunch, then following a quick break spilt back into two teams to keep developing each tool in response to the discussion and their insights from the testing so far. This involved more role-playing activity, hacking, and finding more ways to make improvements and to generate tool instructions. Towards the end of the workshop, the participants were brought back together as group to report back on and demonstrate their updated tool ideas. Both tools had undergone rapid adjustments and enhancements in a short space of time, with the participants moving the first prototype tools into much more refined artefacts. One of the key issues was the language used on the tools, particpants thought it was a bit 'clinical' and that the tools needed to use language that would be more familiar to the users and this was worked into the refined tools. In the course of the session the functions of the tools developed beyond the original intent as new applications and benefits were realised by the groups.

In the case of 'Top Prompts', a name change to 'Common Cards' was suggested, as well as giving the set of cards a range of new possible applications. Whilst this tool was initially designed for one-to-one conversations it was recommended that it could be adaptable in order to be used with bigger groups in team games and informally with smaller groups to make friendly connections and find out things members of the group may have in common with each other.

For the 'Stick With It' tool, the participants suggested changing the format of tool to have additional sections so to account for agreed upon actions and emotions surrounding the event being planned for. The language for this tool was again very important and so was amended to reflect the friendly nature of the tool

Next Steps

The next steps for the Leapfrog team were: to implement these changes into the existing tools; and to then bring these new tools to the users of the services and the professionals who would use them to further test out the tools for final development before they were launched.

Tool testing

Following the tool development phase the Leapfrog team met with some of the project partners and some potential users of the tools for two final tool testing sessions to get any final feedback. One seesion focussed on the Common Cards tool and the other on the Stick With It tool. At each session we presented the tool to potential users who had not been involved in the project as well as some exisiting project partners.

Common Cards

Formally known as 'Top Prompts', the 'Common Cards' tool had been redesigned to be more visual, with photographic images and without the use of keywords. To support facilitators and encourage users to instigate a game on their own, the Leapfrog team devised different ways of playing with the cards and included these in a pack on instruction cards. These were tested with a group of members and facilitators from one of the participant's 'Be Active Life Long' (BALL) groups
.
The previous workshop had highlighted the need for the cards to be flexible, adaptable, and custom. In the case of this tool testing workshop, the team created a set of cards based on famous geographical and historical landmarks in the surrounding areas around Morayshire (where the participants live). The ability to customise the images will be built into the final tool template so users can make,download, and print their own version.

During the session participants played a couple of games, the clear favourite by far being 'Steal a Story'. In this game the Leapfrog team encouraged one of the BALL group facilitators to run the game and handed over the pack of cards and the instruction card. To play, all the cards were spread out face down on the table. Each player took it in turns to turn a card over. If they could tell a story about that image then they kept the card. In the game if another player could add more to the story or tell a different story about the image then they could steal that card, and so on until no one else could tell a story about that card. The last person to tell a story kept the card and then turned over a new card. The winner was the player with the most cards at the end. It was great to see how organically and easily the participants picked up the game and just how much they seemed to enjoy it. Very quickly conversations were built up on one another based on the card images, and connections between players were made through a chain of story-telling. This way of using the Common Cards seemed a really effective way for people to get to know each other, and at times brought about lots of fun and personal stories. It was suggested by one of the BALL group facilitators that, when used in this way, the cards would be a great ice-breaker for bringing new people together. The tool was a big success with the participants and did a great job at starting engaging conversations, described by one BALL group member as a brilliant game and the most they've laughed in years.

Stick With It

Following it's development the Stick With It tool's focus was on making a joint plan of action between a person in need of a little help and a person, like a key worker, who is providing that help. The aim was

to connect people in need of some social opportunities with local clubs, services and activities, and to have a conversation about any anxieties they might have about engaging with them.

The Leapfrog team met with one of the project partners and a key worker and health and social care professional to garner some experienced feedback and input.

Over a rapid lunch session the Leapfrog team presented the story of the tool and how it had been co-designed with a group of social activity providers, service providers, and health and social care professionals working across the remote and rural areas of Scotland. The team then gave a quick run through of how the tool should function before handing over to the key worker for some scrutiny and feedback. What was discussed was that the function of the tool, that is what the tool actually did, worked really well and could be really useful in connecting people with social opportunities and helping to include family and friends in the process. The big insight was around the language the tool used, both the written and the visual language. Due to time restrictions in the co-design workshops, the language used on the tool and the look and feel of the tool had not been given as much attention as its underlying function. The result was something that looked to too 'determined' and 'clinical'. The language used had a very formal and almost negative feel to it and, as was pointed out in the user testing, could put people off from using the tool. The partners felt that the tool should feel more like 'a phone call with a friend, rather than a phone call with your GP'. Terms used like 'issue' and 'concern' had the negative connotations the tool should have been avoiding. Using the word 'steps' and 'process' when talking about how to get to activities was too prescriptive and needed to be changed.

Following this session the Leapfrog team set about making some final changes to the tools before publication.

Final Designs

The project drew to a close and the Leapfrog team made some finishing touches to the tool designs and spent some time assembling the instructions for each of the tools, Stick With It and Common Cards. With Stick With It the major changes were around the language of the tool. Based on the feedback from the final user testing the look of the tool was changed, moving away from a uniform very rigid aesthetic to a more playful look. Terms like 'process' and 'activity' were removed and replaced with 'how' and 'what's on'. The result was a tool much better suited to the needs of the user and one that conveyed the right connotation rather than feeling like a 'business and usual' form they are using already. The Common Cards tool had much less work needed in terms of it's development. The real key point picked up from the feedabck was the clarity of the instructions. As the tool was created using powerpoint there were specific steps and tools needed to edit and create a custom set of cards. These steps were not completley clear in the first instructions and so changes were made based on the feedback to make the final improvements.

The tools from this project worked really well at building crucial meaningful relationships between people who are lonley or isolated. They helped to build trust and overcome barriers to social interactions that are symptomatic of the issues.

Both of the tools have been published to the website and are available for download at: leapfrog.tools

Stick with It

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
WHAT'S ON	am / pm	am / pm	am / pm	am / pm	am / pm
HOW					
INFO					

What's New

The Stick With It tool helps to connect people with activities and groups that are right for them. It helps to discuss any concerns they may have about taking part in activities (such as how to get there), and then come up with practical ways and recommendations to overcome these concerns. The key objective is to develop a plan of action that covers the people and supports that will be in place for them, which can be kept and pinned up on the wall or on the fridge to refer back to. The aim of the tool is to give the person a sense of reassurance and confidence, knowing that future plans have been considered and are in place.

Key to building good relationships between people is finding things in common. Getting a conversation going by sharing stories is a great way to get to know someone and start to build that relationship. Common Cards helps to make starting a conversation and building relationships fun.

Common Cards are a set of customisable playing cards co-designed and tested with social enterprises working to tackle isolation and loneliness to help them reach out and connect with their service users and build good relationships.

With this tool you can add pictures or text to the blank card template to make your own set of prompt cards.You might use pictures of your local area to stimulate a converstaion about local history or some key words you want to use to spark a one-to-one discussion.

The aim of the tool is to use the cards to find some common ground and start to build an engaging conversation.

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