



## Evaluation Support Scotland

### Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee

### Call for written evidence on age and social isolation

March 2015

#### Who we are and what we do

1. Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) is a third sector organisation. We think that better evaluation, and learning from evaluation results in more effective services for people and communities
2. We work with other third sector organisations and funders so that they can measure the impact of their projects and programmes; improve their services, and report on the difference they make.
3. We also work with funders to improve their monitoring and evaluation systems, helping funders to more easily gather evidence about the difference their funds make and not waste resources on ineffective reporting.
4. Finally, we take action to build evaluation and learning into policy and decision-making processes. This involves:
  - a. Working closely with Scottish Government both to build evaluation skills in the third sector and to increase skills and understanding of evaluation good practice within Government.
  - b. Promoting the use of (self-) evaluation evidence to help inform decision and policy-making processes.

Our response to the evidence call was drafted taking into account evidence from working with the third sector and public sector on our **thematic learning programmes** (TLPs) (i.e. structured programmes to explain, measure and demonstrate the contribution of the third sector to specific policy areas).

This paper provides evidence of:

- 1) Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings
- 2) Impacts of social isolation, for instance loneliness, ill-health
- 3) Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy
- 4) Best practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland
- 5) Effective awareness-raising within communities

#### **Evidence from A Stitch in Time? (2013-2015)**



[A Stitch in Time?](#) is a partnership project facilitated by Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) and supported by the Scottish Government Third Sector Unit and the Joint Improvement Team (JIT).

This programme supports the third sector to demonstrate its contribution to Reshaping Care for Older People (RCOP) and maximising older people's independence and wellbeing. The programme has:

- Explained what the third sector does, the difference they make and their contribution to RCOP
- Developed appropriate evaluation methods
- Collected and presented relevant evidence

*A Stitch in Time?* evidenced<sup>1</sup> that:

- **Older people and carers can be at risk of becoming isolated because of a life event** (retirement, or bereavement), their own ill health, the need to care for another person or low income. Risk factors identified include: living alone; **living in a rural area**; and small and homogeneous social network.
- Being isolated and lonely **can affect both physical and mental health and wellbeing**. It can also affect the motivation to look after ourselves. Poor physical and mental health can lead to greater use of health and social services. For example, we know that social connections play a part in eating well. The absence of other people to eat with **can affect appetite and motivation to eat**.
- Improved social connections between individuals and across communities is key **territory for third sector organisations**, particularly for those organisations supporting local communities or people with similar issues.
- If older people and carers are to thrive, their physical and social environment needs to be physically and socially age friendly.
- Isolated people may be less likely to know what support they can access. The third sector as part of their everyday work often **link people to services and opportunities**. Volunteers play a key role in many third sector organisations, providing benefits both to service users and to volunteers themselves.

Effective interventions are flexible, involve participants in planning and are community based. They are often low cost and involve volunteers.

ESS's *A Stitch in Time?* programme identified **specific outcomes from third sector interventions**<sup>2</sup> that ensure that older people and carers:

- Can enjoy a **healthy and active life**<sup>3</sup> and keep or become more **socially connected** with family and friends. Third sector interventions offer: up to date information and signposting services, cafes, day and lunch clubs, activity and hobby groups, outings, community events, reminiscence groups; opportunities to volunteer or share skills and views (time banks, volunteer opportunities, consultation events); intergenerational work, community

<sup>1</sup> A Stitch in Time? Focus on third sector interventions that enable older people and carers to keep or be more socially connected, Evaluation Support Scotland (2014)

<sup>2</sup> A Stitch in Time? A model to explain the third sector contribution to Reshaping Care for Older People, Evaluation Support Scotland (2014)

<sup>3</sup> A Stitch in Time? Focus on third sector interventions that ensure healthy and active ageing, Evaluation Support Scotland (2014)

events, initiatives to link people to opportunities e.g. local area coordinators or networking for practitioners: *"I really enjoyed the outings and looked forward to them. My confidence really improved and when I was able to get to the group on the bus 'on my own' it was great. I started to feel good about myself. Now I plan to see what else I can go to."* (Befriending service user). For example, volunteering can help both the volunteer and the person receiving help to stay active and healthy: *"I still have depression but it is not as bad. I feel other people's pain and that makes you feel better and helps to put things into perspective. Doing something for others gives me satisfaction. If you can get people laughing it's so much better than pills."* (Extract from [Volunteer Centre Edinburgh](#)'s case study about their service user, Margaret). On the other hand, community transport operators provide individual and group transport to help people to get out and about, to access social opportunities and attend medical appointments.

- Live in an age **friendly environment**<sup>4</sup> in which to thrive. For example, community transport operators provide individual and group transport to help people to get out and about, to access social opportunities and attend medical appointments: *"After she contacted us, our visiting service worker visited Ann. She was offered places at various day-care clubs and the Weekend Resource service. One of the major benefits to Ann was that transport was available to get to and from club venues."* (Extract from [Pilton Equalities Project](#)'s case study about their service user, Ann)
- Feel a sense of **financial security**<sup>5</sup>. There is anecdotal evidence from third sector organisations that income is a central factor in the choices and quality of life older people can make. For example, projects funded through the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland 'Time of your life' projects report that worry about meeting fuel bills makes older people careful about spending money on social activities.

A Stitch in Time? also evidenced the role that the third sector play in **ensuring that the systems works better** for older people<sup>6</sup> by:

- Undertaking activities that reach out to people, by responding flexibly to people's needs and by identifying and encouraging people to use other supports and services.
- Providing services in areas where there are gaps in the system of support.
- Sharing their knowledge and experience of what works for particular groups and communities, and
- Supporting older people and carers to have a voice (in relation to their own case or services more generally).

The report showcases a [case study of how a third sector project helped to give one individual the confidence to take a lead role in speaking out on LGBT issues](#).

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<sup>4</sup> A Stitch in Time? Focus on third sector interventions that make the physical and social environment more age friendly, Evaluation Support Scotland (2014)

<sup>5</sup> A Stitch in Time? Focus on third sector interventions to enable older people to keep or be more financially and materially secure, Evaluation Support Scotland (2014)

<sup>6</sup> A Stitch in Time? Focus on third sector interventions that make the system work better for older people, Evaluation Support Scotland (2014)



Other evidence supporting the statements above, all available from [ESS website](#), include:

- The benefits of volunteering ["Better than Pills" Evidence of the benefits of volunteering](#)
- ["Getting There"](#) - Older people telling their stories of the role of community transport in their lives, May 2014, Community Transport Association
- The role played by informal third sector in offering activities for fit older people. [Informal Community Action](#), March 2013
- Case studies that look at the needs and key pressures on informal groups. [Informal Community Action and Reshaping Care for Older People Case studies, Midlothian Voluntary Action, March 2014](#) - This research used case studies to look at older people's information needs, the key pressures on informal groups and how mainstream groups support older people
- *A Stitch in Time?* has commissioned a number of [mapping exercises](#) to identify the range and scope of third sector interventions in Lothian

For further information about *A Stitch in Time?* and/ or other Evaluation Support Scotland's work please contact:

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