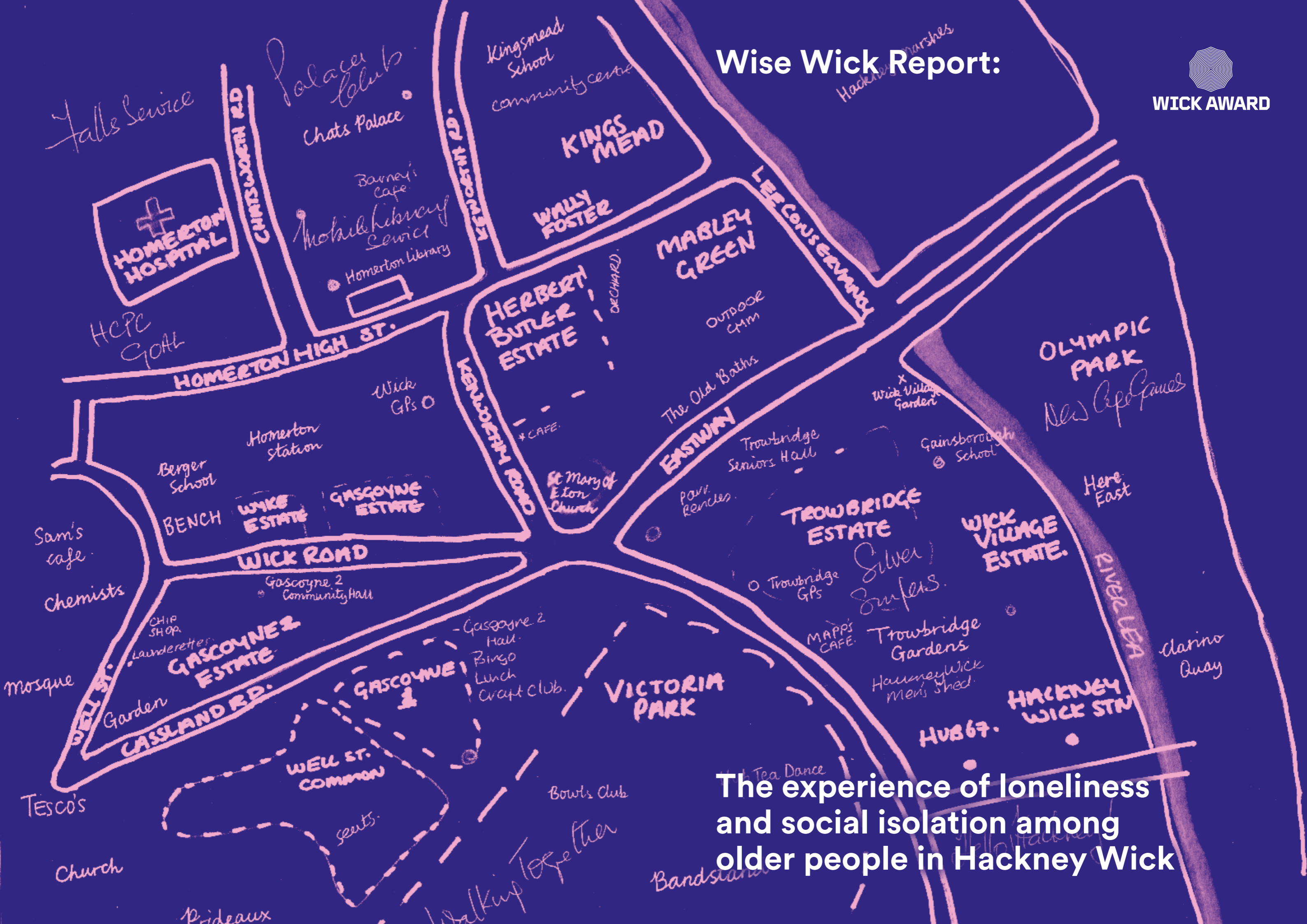


# Wise Wick Report:

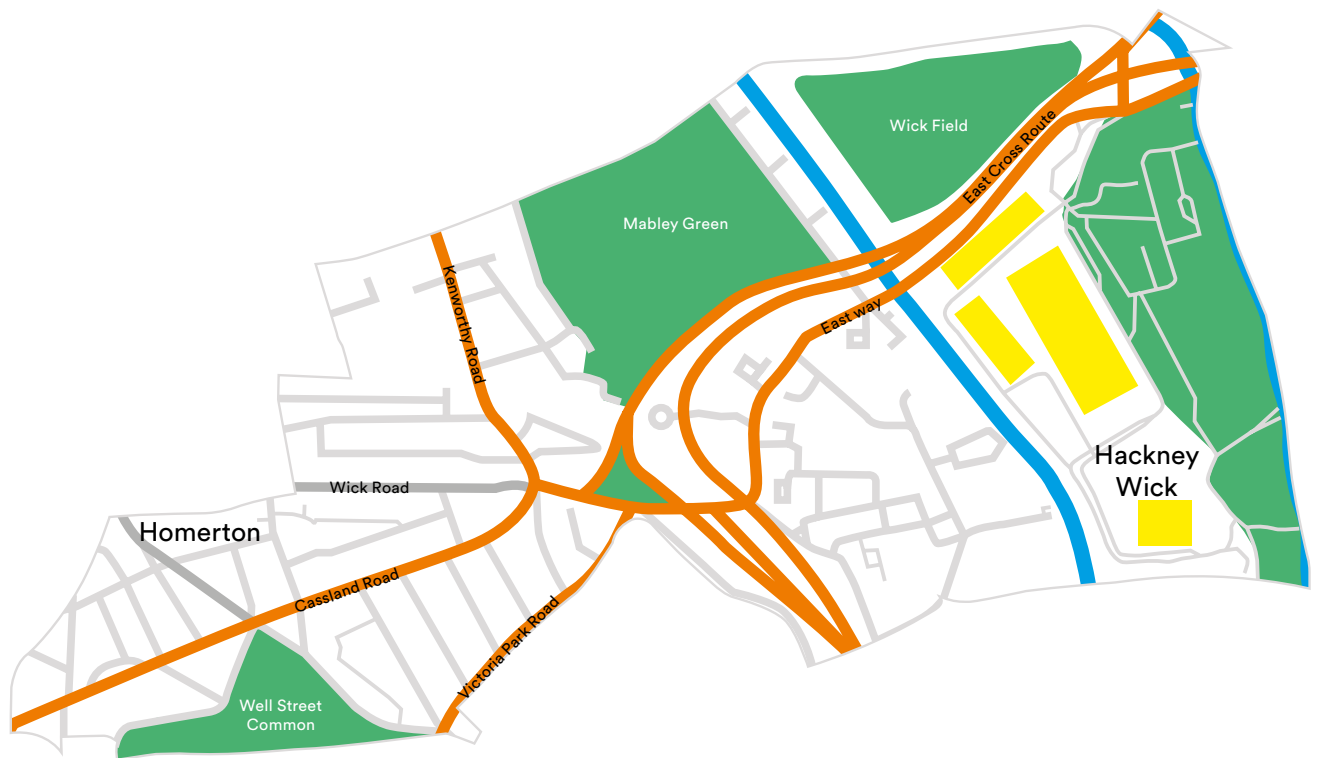


The experience of loneliness and social isolation among older people in Hackney Wick

# Wise Wick Report:

The experience of loneliness and social isolation among older people in Hackney Wick

May 2020



Wick Award is the resident led Big Local project in Hackney Wick funded by money from the National Lottery and administered by Local Trust.

Wickaward.co.uk

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# WICK AWARD

Local Trust | Big Local



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# Executive Summary

This report collates the response of the fifty-eight Hackney Wick residents aged over sixty years interviewed by Wise Wick community researchers between March 2019 and March 2020.

The Wise Wick community research project targeted older people who do not currently participate in Wick Award or other community activities to capture their experiences of social isolation and loneliness. In addition, community researchers interviewed local experts who have particular insights into the experiences of older Hackney Wick residents who may be socially isolated or lonely.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### Is social isolation and loneliness a problem for older people in Hackney Wick?

Social isolation and loneliness is a real and present issue for many older Hackney Wick residents. The stigma attached to social isolation and loneliness means that people may be reluctant to share their personal experiences. Some older people associated the experience of social isolation and loneliness as an inevitable element of ageing.

A minority of participants thought that the recent discussion about social isolation and loneliness has over-played the issue and suggested that some older people chose to isolate themselves in older age.

### Changes in the frequency of social contact

Participants reported a general reduction in the number of social contacts as they age. In particular, social contacts drop significantly for people in their eighties and nineties, often this is concurrent with declining mobility and energy.

Some participants in the younger age group said they had more social contacts after retirement because they had taken up new activities such as child-care or interests that had expanded their social circle.

### Changes in the type and quality of social connections

Participants told us that, as they age, the type and quality of social contact they have changes. For some, retirement opened the possibility to pursue their own interests, for another group, it has been a chance to maintain closer relationships with family and friends. For others, the transition has signified a more restricted social network.

Commonly, every-day ordinary contact with close neighbours and family become more important as people age.

Those interviewed said that as they aged they had become less physically active and tended to travel less to socialise.

Participants in their sixties and seventies were mostly aware of opportunities for getting involved in activities in Hackney Wick or the borough as a whole. Some said that they thought there was plenty going on but they preferred to socialise informally with friends or family rather than get involved in community or organised activities

## Barriers to staying connected in older age

Participants identified barriers to staying connected as they aged which fall into two main groups:

### Those related to life events

- Retirement
- Reduced mobility /Poor health/ Sensory loss
- Becoming a carer
- Bereavement
- Loss of confidence/anxiety
- Loss of motivation

### Those related to external factors

- Information about opportunities
- Experience of discrimination
- The physical environment, a rapidly changing neighbourhood, the street scene, access to places of interest
- Struggle with transport
- Housing related issues including having to move, unsuitable housing and reduced options
- Perception of risk

## Impact of social isolation and loneliness

The experience of social isolation and loneliness by older people in Hackney Wick has a profound and negative impact on individual's health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Some of those interviewed associated the experience of social isolation and loneliness to a decline in health, mobility and wellbeing. They linked the loss of social contact to an on-going decline in hopefulness or wellbeing, described by one participant as "a deepening hole".

Some participants described episodes of loneliness, perhaps in response to a life event, such as bereavement.

Social isolation of older people affects families who miss contact with their older folk and may be concerned for them.

In addition, participants told us that the absence of older people from community life deprives Hackney Wick of their potential to contribute knowledge and skills including their insights into the experience of ageing from which others can learn.

## The experience of loneliness and isolation in Hackney Wick by different groups

It is clear from the conversations with older people that the experience of ageing is different for everyone. Many expect to be alone as they age.

The experience of loneliness among older people in Hackney Wick increases with age and is particularly prevalent among people who are over eighty, live alone, have no family living nearby and whose mobility or confidence to get around are restricted by pain or long-term conditions.

Participants reported that men might be less resilient than women in managing to maintain social connections as they age or to deal well with changes involved in ageing.

Some groups experience loneliness and social isolation more acutely throughout their lives and it could be that this experience extends into older age. In this research, participants identified people who have limited English, LGBT elders and people from black and minority ethnic groups who live away from other members of their community as those more likely to become isolated.

## Enablers of good quality social and community connections in Hackney Wick

Participants and local experts described mechanisms and conditions that support older people to sustain their involvement in community activities as they age.

- Being welcomed to community venues and included in activities is fundamental to sustaining connections into old age. People need to be invited in, consulted and included
- Every-day, ordinary contact, such as saying hello to a neighbour, is a priority for many participants, there is need for a positive response from the community
- Opportunity to meet people informally, being able to spend time in a community environment without having a specific purpose
- Timely and accurate information about activities available avoiding dependence on digital communications
- Assistance to participate including introduction to activities through social prescribing projects and connecting projects
- Housing options and support services enabling people to age well and maintain social connections in Hackney Wick
- Provision of free or low-cost activities in the local area including opportunities to;
- Share meals
- Volunteer, share skills and have a chance to "give back"
- Stay physically active and maintain mobility
- Learn something, for example, local history
- Connect with people from different age-groups
- Connect with others with similar backgrounds or interests
- Participate in arts or cultural activities

You can download a digital copy of this report on the Wick Award website.

[www.wickaward.co.uk](http://www.wickaward.co.uk)

This website also contains more information about Wick Award and activities addressing social isolation in Hackney Wick.

We would be very happy to hear from anyone who has comments on this report, or ideas to increase community connection in our area.

Please contact Polly by email or phone.

[polly.mann@wickaward.co.uk](mailto:polly.mann@wickaward.co.uk)  
07482320992



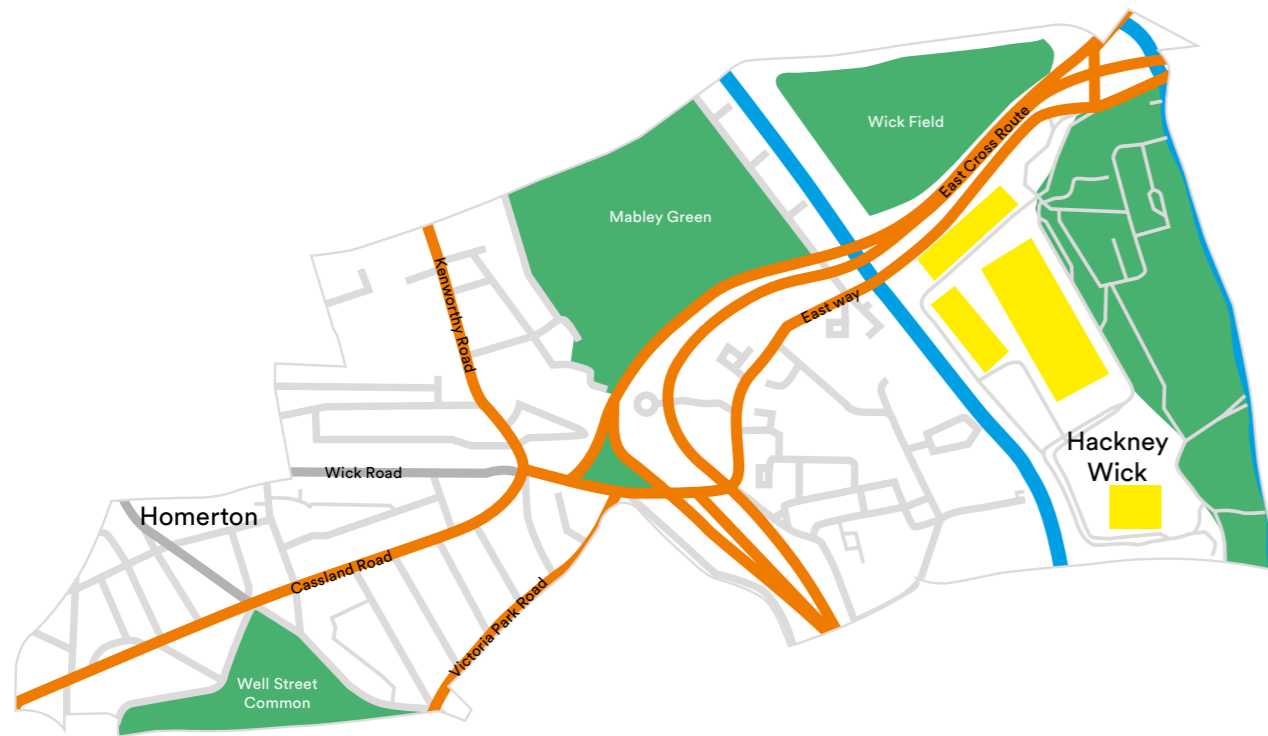
Big Local is a Lottery funded programme putting communities in the driving seat to achieve lasting change in local areas across England. Big Local is based on the idea that communities have the skills to identify local issues and develop solutions to them. Big Local supports, challenges, trains and encourages people and groups to develop and take ownership of the programme in their local area. It is a locally driven approach to help communities fulfill their ambitions and make their local areas better places to live.

Wick Award is the Big Local Project Hackney Wick managed by partnership board made up of local residents and stakeholders.

Wick Award Priorities:

- Promote wellbeing for all
- Create opportunities for young people.
- Build community connections in the Big Local area

Find out more about our activities at [www.wickaward.co.uk](http://www.wickaward.co.uk)



## Introduction

Hackney Wick residents shared their concerns that many older people living in the area feel lonely and have little or no sense of belonging to their community.

Wick Award wanted to have better understanding of loneliness and social isolation among older people in our community enabling the Big Local to become a catalyst in addressing the complex interlocking issues underlying social isolation and loneliness.

Wick Award believes that community has a big role in making a difference to the quality of our later lives by supporting social connections across generations, promoting healthy activity and valuing the contribution of older people.

At the end of 2018, the Big Local commissioned Wise Wick Community Research Project to collect information about these experiences as well as ideas on how our community can make it easier to stay active and connected.

## Aims of the project

To understand:

- The experience and impact of social isolation and loneliness among older people in Hackney Wick
- The barriers and enablers for older people to be socially connected
- How older people can be supported to become and remain socially connected and participate in community life as they age in Hackney Wick

To share:

- Information about formal and informal opportunities for different groups of older people

To identify:

- Clear recommendations using insight gained through the research about how to work with local partners to develop a culture of inclusion
- How to stimulate opportunities
- Routes to action – thinking about how recommendations can be taken forward



# The Wise Wick Community Researchers



Polly Mann, community development worker at Wick Award, led Wise Wick project.

Professor Gargi Bhattacharyya, School of Social Sciences, University of East London provided guidance in designing the approach to the project and developing the survey questions.

## Wise Wick Community Researchers

Debbie Bowden  
Sharon Gammack  
Rowena McCarthy  
Julia Makuza  
Julie Mold  
Martin Sadler

The Community Researchers brought significant advantages to the research because of their personal connections and familiarity with local places, groups and people, which helped them to pick up on themes during the interviews.

[Hackney Wick is my home. I've been here all my life. Everything that is important to me has happened here.](#)

Community researchers were able to add their insights to help contextualise and explain interview findings.

The community research roles were promoted via Hackney CVS, Hackney Older People's Reference Group, and Age UK and through flyers inviting applications from Hackney Wick residents over 50. The roles were promoted at a wide range of community events.

## Local Experts

Ten local experts were interviewed as part of this research to add to our understanding of the experience of social isolation and loneliness among older people in the ward.

The steering group selected local experts because of their practical knowledge of the area and insights into the experience of loneliness and social isolation for groups which other research has shown are likely to be at higher risk.

Seven of the Local Experts live in the ward and two of these live in supported housing schemes.

Sadie Alleyne, Community Connections Coordinator, Shoreditch Trust

Sandra Bernard, Hanover Anchor Estate Manager

Nurul Chowdhury, Family Action Social Prescriber

Caroline Cornwall, Mobile hairdresser

Ken Flaherty, Hackney Carers, Men of Hackney

Gordon Fryer, Chair Trowbridge Seniors' Club

Sue Makin, Vicar St Mary of Eton Church

Julia Makuza, Retired psychiatric nurse and community gardener

Paula Shaw, Elders' Activist

Rowena McCarthy, LGBT Elders' activist

## Wise Wick Steering Group

The project was overseen by a steering group including

- four local residents aged over 50 who are Wick Award Partnership Board members
- expert advisor from NHS national Patient Voice Team



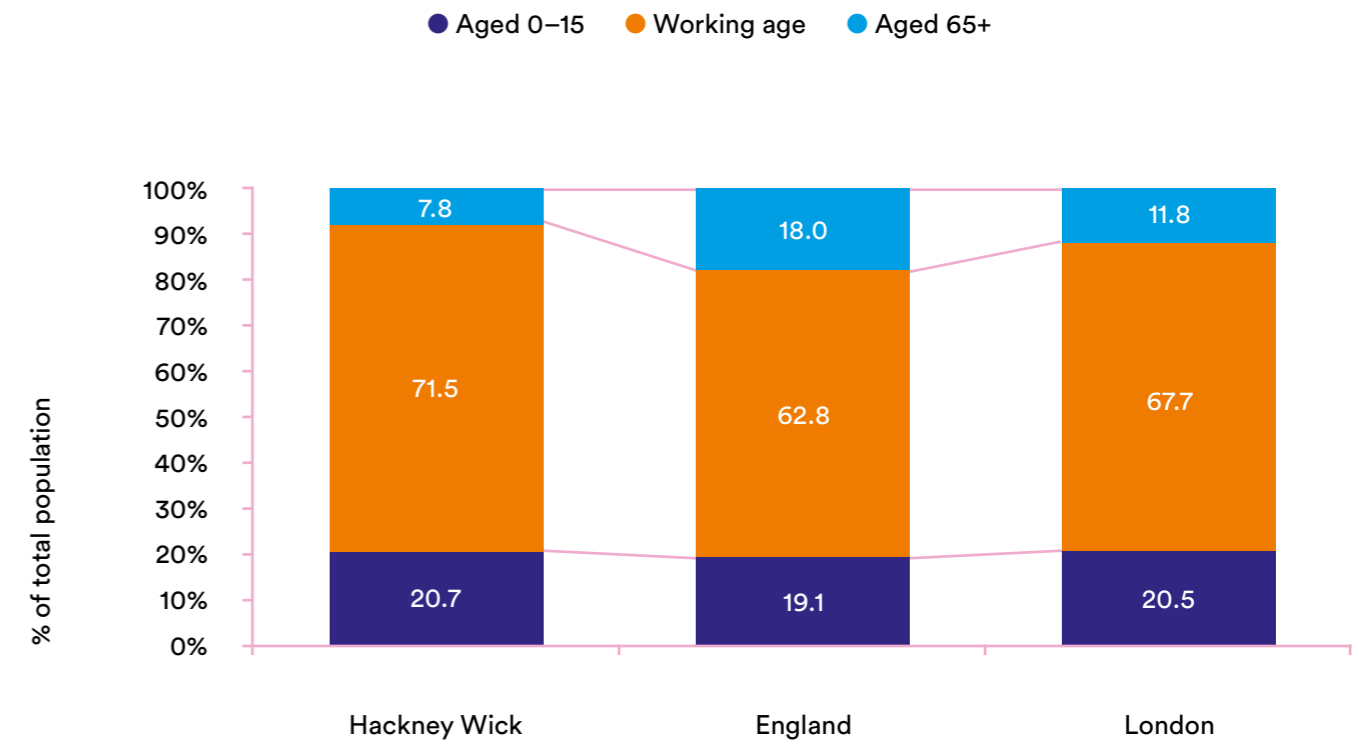
# Hackney Wick and its older people: an overview



# Age Profile Hackney Wick

Hackney Wick has one of the lowest proportions of older people in London, as its population is heavily weighted towards working age people, particularly those in their twenties and thirties, and young people.

7.8% of the Hackney Wick population is aged over 65 which is lower than the London and national averages (ONS 2015).



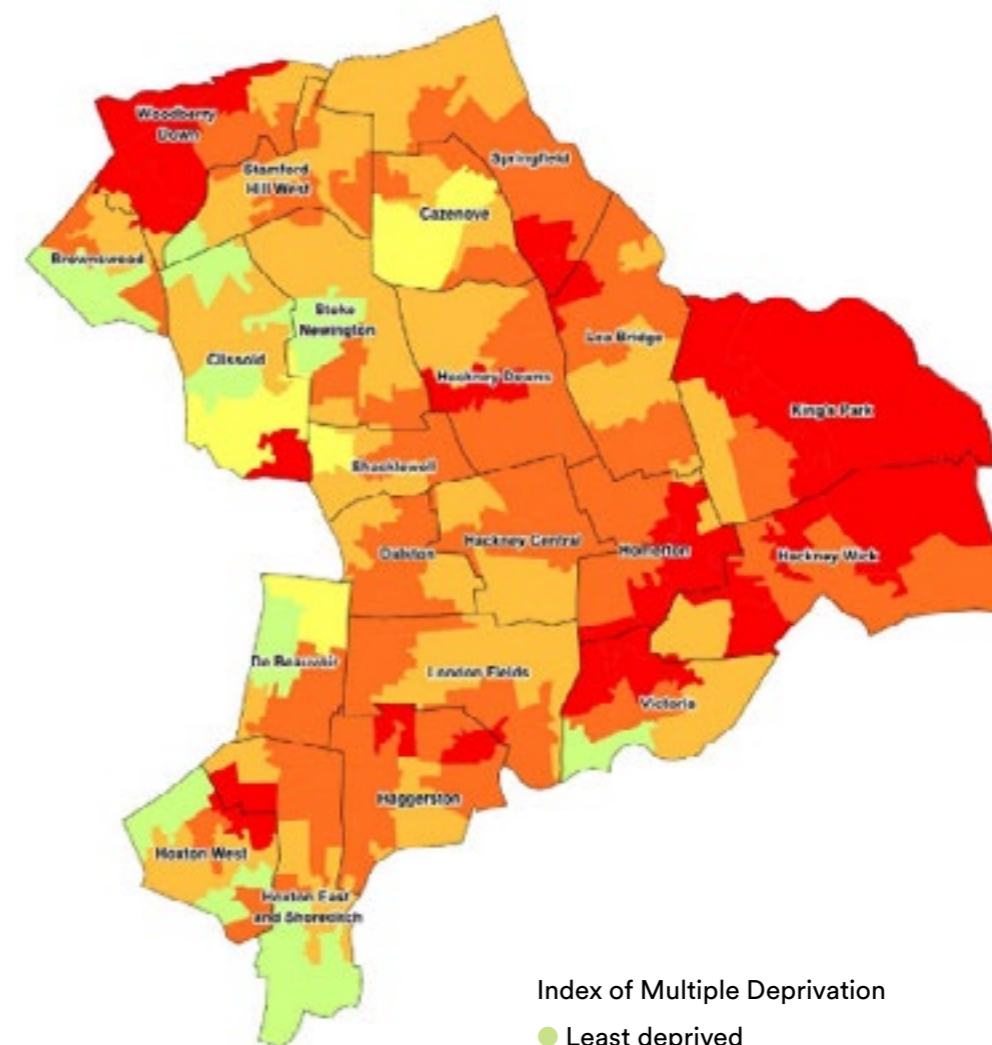
# Ethnicity Profile Hackney Wick

# Hackney Wick is among the most deprived areas in the country.

## Overall deprivation levels in Hackney Wick

The map below shows that most of Hackney Wick is in the bottom 10% or 20% of areas in the country in terms of Multiple Deprivation in 2015.

	Hackney Wick	Hackney	London	England
White; English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	34.8%	36.2%	44.9%	79.6%
White; Irish	2%	2.1%	2.2%	1%
White; Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%
White; Other White	11.1%	16.2%	12.7%	4.6%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups; White and Black Caribbean	2.9%	2%	1.5%	0.8%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups; White and Black African	1.2%	1.2%	0.8%	0.3%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups; White and Asian	0.9%	1.2%	1.2%	0.6%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups; Other Mixed	1.8%	2%	1.5%	0.5%
Asian/Asian British; Indian	1.5%	3.1%	6.6%	2.6%
Asian/Asian British; Pakistani	0.6%	0.8%	2.7%	2.1%
Asian/Asian British; Bangladeshi	2.6%	2.5%	2.7%	0.8%
Asian/Asian British; Chinese	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%	0.7%
Asian/Asian British; Other Asian	2.8%	2.7%	4.9%	1.6%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; African	16.1%	11.4%	7%	1.8%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; Caribbean	10.4%	7.8%	4.2%	1.1%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; Other Black	5.2%	3.9%	2.1%	0.5%
Other Ethnic Group; Arab	0.9%	0.7%	1.3%	0.4%
Other ethnic Group; Any other Group	3.4%	4.6%	2.1%	0.6%

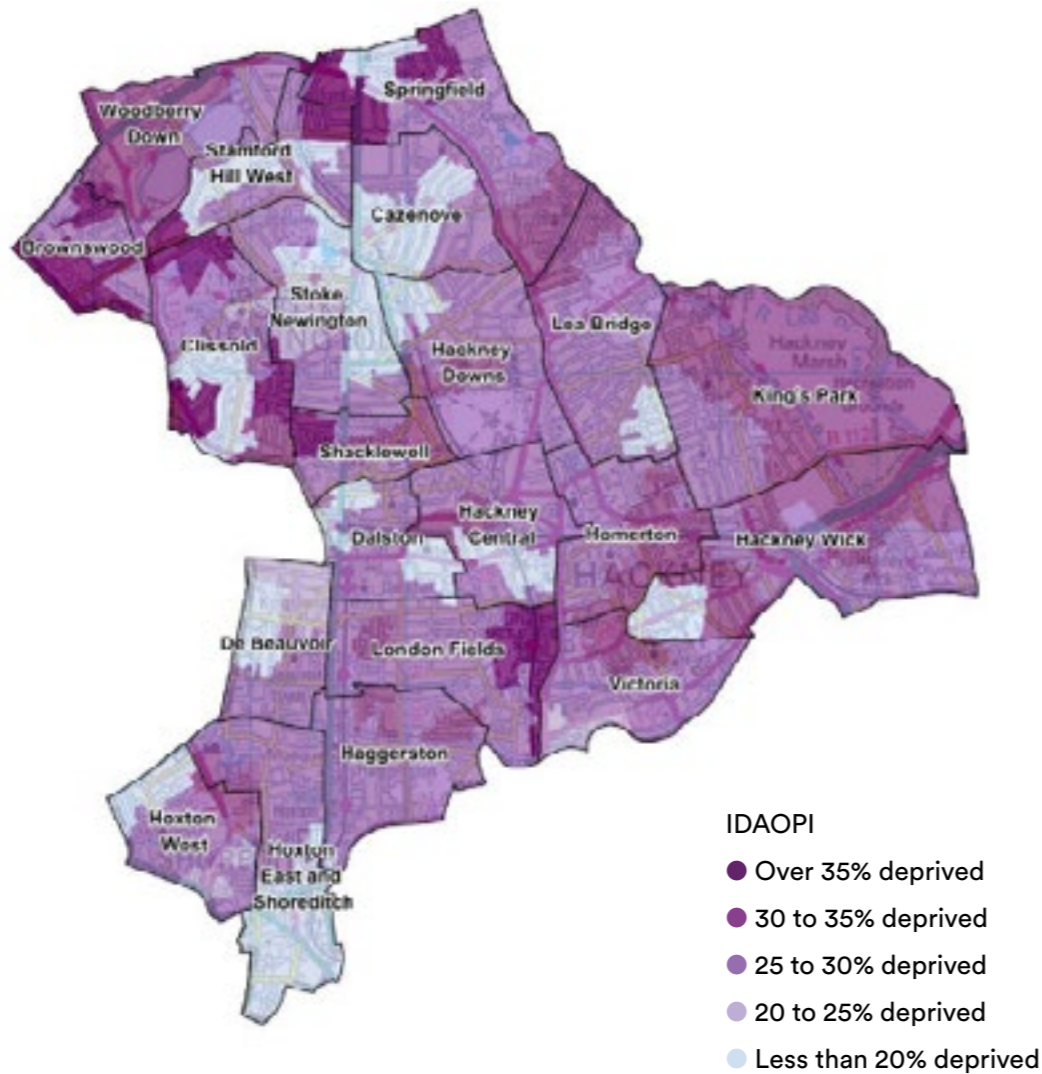


Index of Multiple Deprivation

- Least deprived
- Top 40% most deprived
- Top 30% most deprived
- Top 20% most deprived
- Top 10% most deprived

## Income Deprivation Affecting Older People

This domain is calculated using the percentage of older people living in income deprived households. Hackney ranks as the 2nd most deprived local authority in England. Hackney Wick is within the 30-35% most deprived nationally for this measure.



30-35% of people over sixty-five in Hackney Wick claim Pension Credit, Income Support or income based JSA.

Pensioners in poverty are those in receipt of Pension Credit. Pension Credit provides financial help for people aged sixty or over whose income is below a certain level set by the law.

The proportion of people receiving Pension Credit in Hackney Wick is 44.5% against a London average of 19.7% (DWP 2019)

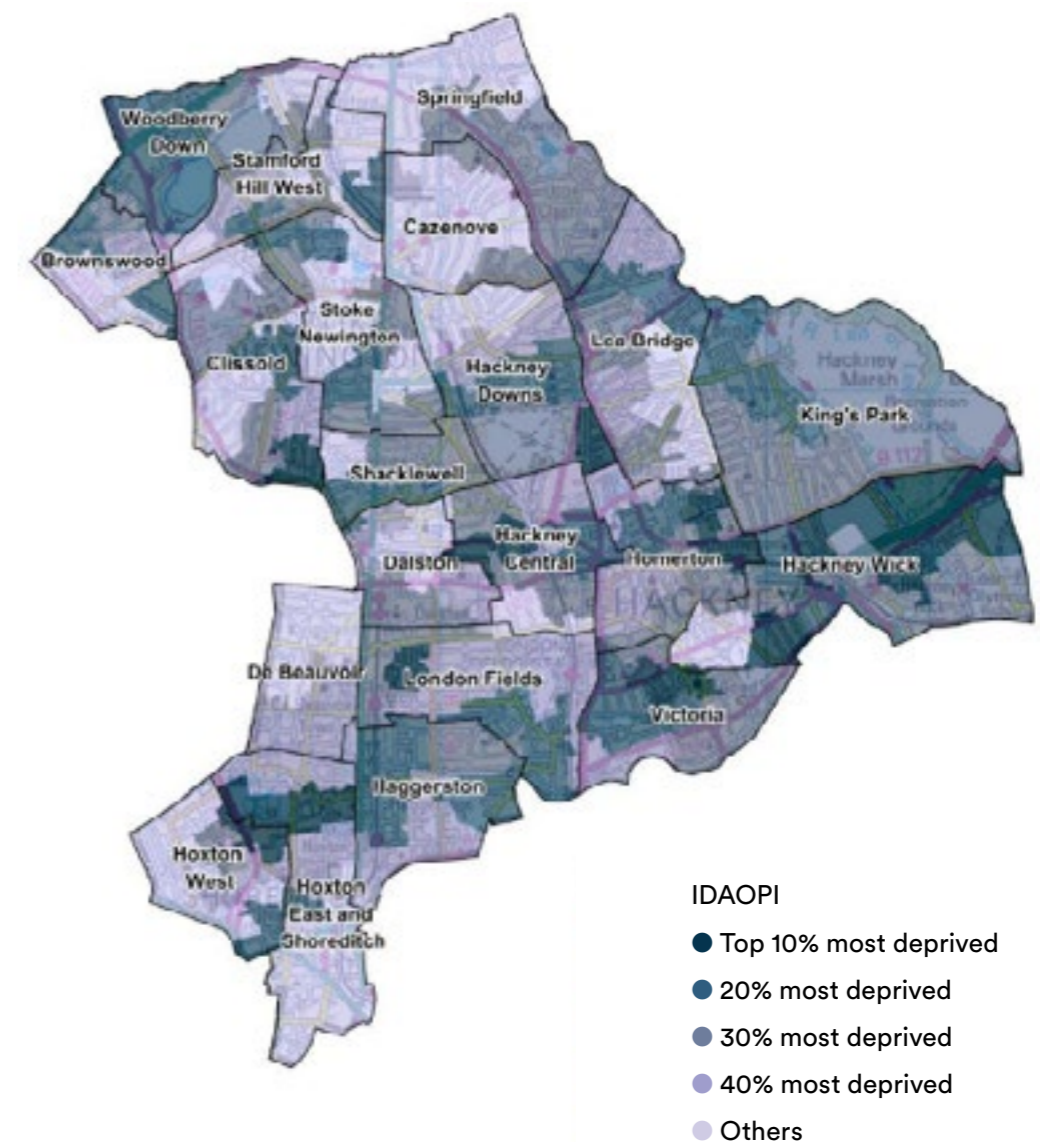
## Health deprivation and disability

The Health Deprivation and Disability Domain measures the risk of premature death and the impairment of quality of life through poor physical or mental health.

In the health domain Hackney Wick is the top most deprived 10% nationally.

17% of Hackney Wick residents over sixty have a limiting long-term illness compared with 14% across London.

Attendance Allowance, payable to people over the age of 65 who are so severely disabled and need help with personal care or supervision, is claimed by 20.2% in Hackney Wick compared to 13.1% across London.





## Life expectancy

Life expectancy for men and women is comparatively lower in Hackney Wick against London and national averages. (ONS 2013-2017)

	Hackney Wick	London	England
Men	78	80	79
Women	81	85	83

## Disability-free life expectancy

Disability-free life expectancy for men and women is comparatively lower in Hackney Wick against London and national averages. (ONS 2009-2013)

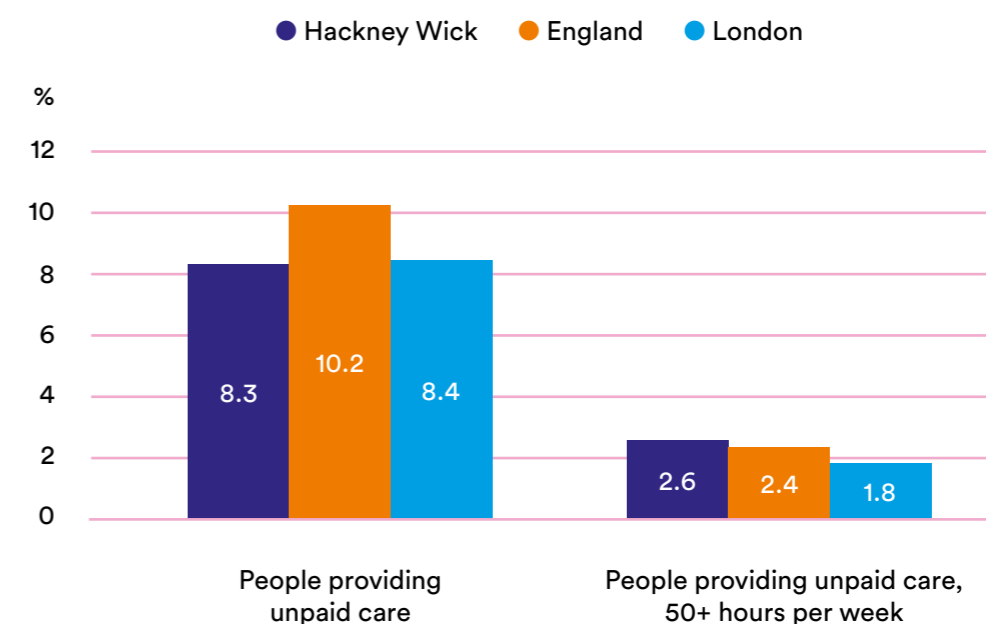
	Hackney Wick	London	England
Men	57	64	64
Women	58	65	65

## Carers in Hackney Wick

People in Hackney Wick provide significantly higher levels of unpaid care, usually taking care of a partner or family member with long-term physical or mental health or disability, or problems related to old age. A large number of unpaid carers in Hackney Wick are over sixty.

Carers might be more likely to experience loneliness and social isolation because they may not have time to participate in social activities.

Carers are more likely to live on a low income which could restrict their opportunities to socialise.



## Sense of belonging to the community

A good deal of research shows that people's perception of belonging to the community where they live is closely related to their experience of loneliness and social isolation.

In 2015 the Hackney Council Adult social care carried out a survey in which 11.4% of older people questioned said they have little social contact and feel socially isolated. This was the the highest rate for any council in England.

## Satisfaction with neighbourhood and local participation among people over sixty-five (Place Survey 2008)

Hackney Wick	71.8%
London	76.4%
England	83.0%

The Percentage of Hackney Wick people who are “satisfied with their neighbourhood is lower than the average across London.

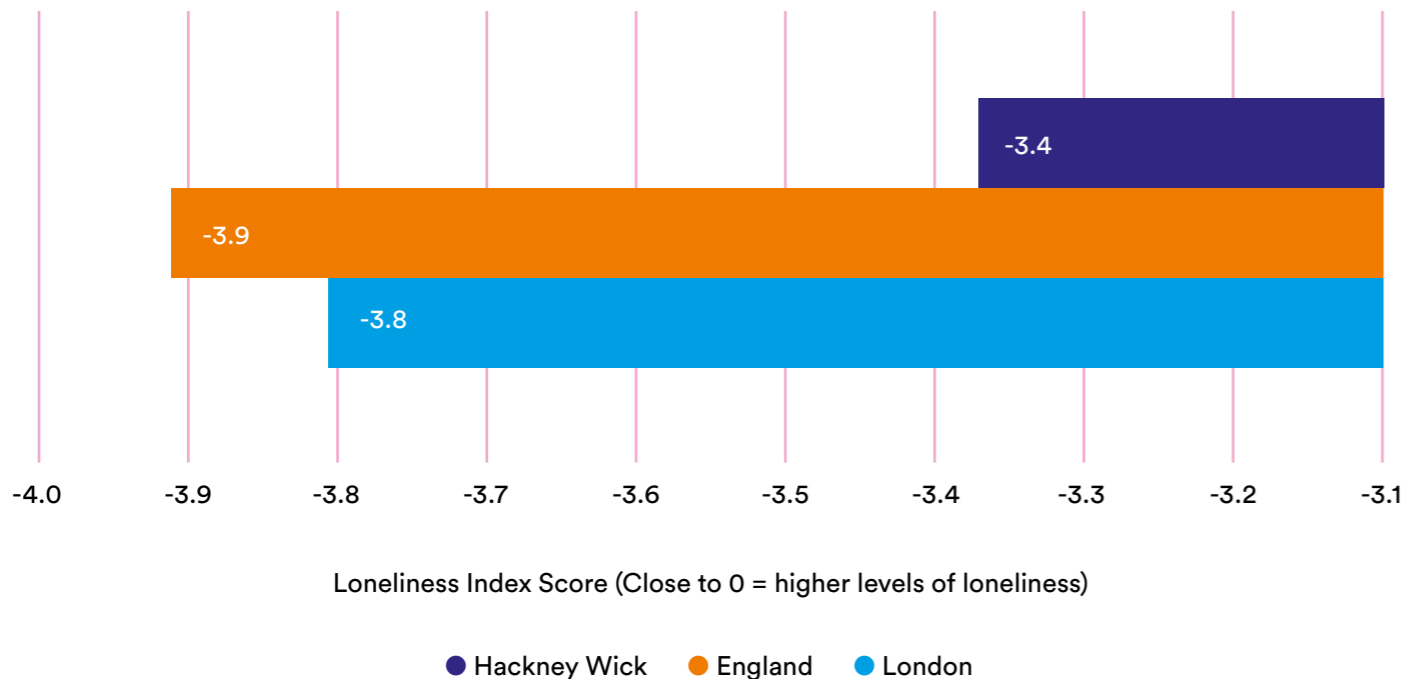
Age UK research in 2011 found a direct relationship between people’s sense of belonging to a place and levels of social contact.

People who report low “neighbourliness” where they live have nearly three fewer contacts per month than those who say they live in a friendly area (Age UK 2011).

**People who don’t feel they belong to their neighbourhood are three times more likely to be often lonely. (Age UK 2011)**

### Age UK Loneliness Heatmap 2018

Age UK research identifies Hackney Wick as an area with one of the highest levels of loneliness in the country.



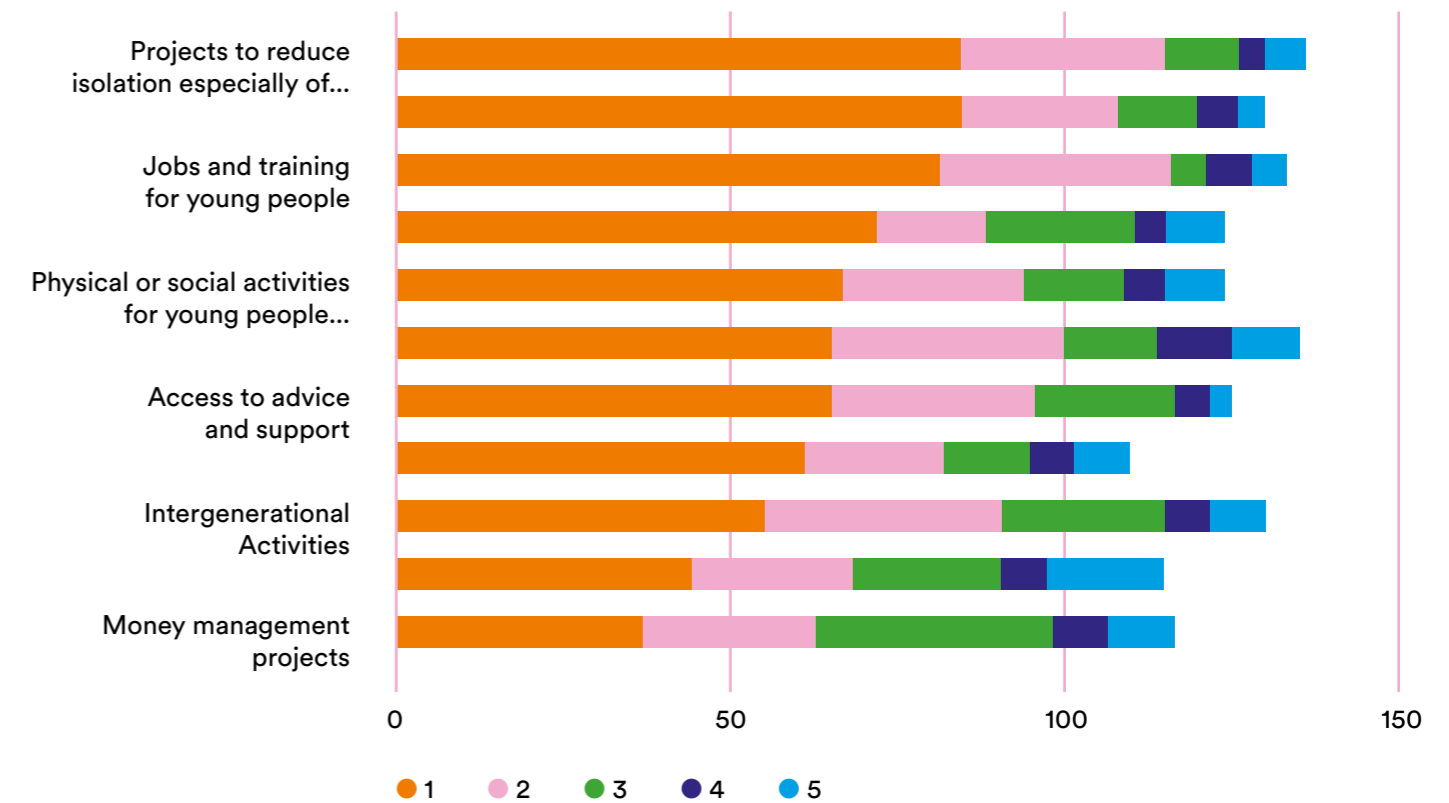
## Findings from previous research carried out by Wick Award

### Community consultation 2017

Wick Award undertook an extensive community research project in Hackney Wick in 2015-16, and produced a report in March 2016. Part of this research looked at the concerns and needs of local young people. Young people were consulted in local schools, youth clubs, and in public places.

**Many of our older neighbours live lonely lives. It is our job as a community to get our heads together to end this misery**

### What are the biggest needs for the local community? (1 is the most important – 5 is the least important)



### Hackney Wick through Young Eyes

In 2017 Wick Award commissioned Hackney Quest to support young people in Hackney Wick to engage with their peers to find out more about their experience of growing up and living in Hackney Wick.

The project successfully engaged over four hundred 8-20 year olds. The main findings and recommendations of the report were shared widely with residents and policy makers and have influenced local change to benefit young people and the wider community in Hackney Wick.

# Approach to Wise Wick Community Research Project

## Wise Wick project activities

- Developed project principles, scope, ethics and guidelines
- Defined and explored the experience of social isolation and loneliness
- Mapped resources of interest to older people in Hackney Wick and neighbouring areas
- Developed and shared a directory of local resources
- Contacted local experts who have insight into the experience of isolation and older people in Hackney Wick
- Developed, tested and refined surveys
- Participated in workshops on collecting information using conversation method
- Conducted interviews with fifty-eight Hackney Wick residents over sixty targeting those who are not involved in community projects older
- Invited participants to Wick Award activities and signposted to local projects and activities
- Conducted interviews with ten local experts
- Co-analysis workshop to discuss findings with community researchers
- Routes to action exploration by
- Shared learning with Wick Award Partnership Board to identify routes to action and recommendations to make sure the research will have a lasting effect



## Wise Wick Principles

Wise Wick community researchers shared their values in approaching the project, in some cases, using their experience of contributing to surveys or local campaigns, to develop an approach that was comfortable for them. These values underpin the integrity of the project.

## Older residents at the heart of the project

The project was led, developed and delivered by older residents from Hackney Wick. Community researchers learnt new skills and made new contacts in their roles. The researchers were committed to developing a project that, in itself, could be a model for increasing the involvement of older residents in community activities. Researchers hope that this project will be a mechanism for developing the voice of older people in the ward.

## Contributors benefit from their involvement

The community researchers prioritised the principle of giving back to participants.

Researchers made sure that the contact participants have with the project is positive for them and they feel that their opinions and experiences are heard and valued. Community researchers allowed sufficient time to chat beyond the remit of the survey.

All participants were invited to become more involved in the project or to take part in social events that took place during the research period that were organised as informal forums to develop and widen conversations addressing social isolation.

The Wise Wick directory of local resources was designed to be of practical use to participants to support their involvement in activities.

Researchers asked participants about any areas of interest they like to explore. In some cases, participants were referred to activities of interest or local agencies offering relevant support.

## Respect for people's experience, privacy and dignity.

Community researchers developed and signed up to Wise Wick ethics. The purpose of the research and confidentiality conditions were explained to all participants and provided in written format.

The issues addressed in the survey might be painful or difficult for some participants. Researchers explained to participants that they should only address the questions that felt comfortable to them. Questions were framed in a way in which participants could equally offer an opinion or choose to share their personal experience.

## Reaching the most isolated people

The project avoided relying on voices that are more often heard by reaching older people who were not known to Wick Award or active in other community networks.

Researchers asked Wick Award trusted local contacts to introduce Wise Wick to their neighbours over sixty who they knew were not particularly socially active. Where appropriate, contacts arranged a meet up with the researcher.



## Sharing the learning

The aim of the project is to share learning from the research to make sure that the voices older residents are heard by local policy-makers and influence positive change in Hackney Wick. Researchers are committed to updating participants about the impact of the research and to invite them to participate in activities to promote issues arising from the research.

Community researchers prioritise sharing the learning from the project with participants, Wick Award Partnership Board, local partners and interested parties including Hackney Older People's Reference Group throughout the research period and beyond.

## Mapping Hackney Wick

Community researchers identified resources of interest to local residents including;

- welcoming cafes, accessible pubs
- nice toilets
- Healthcare providers, GPs, chiropody, community pharmacies, NHS services, wellbeing providers
- shops or market stalls offering good value or friendly service
- friendly hairdressers
- faith venues
- reliable taxi services
- community centres, libraries, information access points and routes to advice, advocacy and support
- resources of interest to specific groups including people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds or LGBT elders
- resources of interest to people who have specific experiences, for example, carers, people with specific long-term conditions,
- cultural resources including museums and galleries
- accessible leisure and sports opportunities
- parks, gardens and open space
- community groups



## Directory of local resources

The community researchers used the information collected in the mapping exercise to develop a directory of local resources that was shared with participants, Wick Award partners.

The directory is used by the Family Action social prescribing team and contributed to the resource directory compiled as part of the Well Street Neighbourhoods Project.

## Reaching the most isolated

Researchers designed the project to reach out to older residents not engaged in regular community activities and invite them to share their thoughts, find out more about local opportunities or get involved in the project establishing new community connections themselves.

This is how we did it

- Wise Wick asked trusted residents to identify their neighbours and contacts who are not engaged in community activities and are rarely seen out
- Trusted residents shared Wise Wick aims and approach with their neighbours and asked if they were interested in finding out more about the project
- Trusted residents introduced interested older people to community researchers in a shared lounge or comfortable place or at home when this was preferred by participants
- Community researcher shared the purpose of research and what happens to the information invited participant to share their ideas
- Community researchers collect project consent forms and complete a conversation-based questionnaire with each participant
- Invited participants to get involved in project or local activities and connected participants with a range of activities and information sources when requested.

## Defining Loneliness and Social Isolation

Community researchers considered their own experience of loneliness and social isolation and explored available information about these issues in the local area before agreeing on the definitions below.

### Loneliness

Loneliness is something anyone can face; it is an unwelcome feeling of a lack or loss of companionship. Different people have different experiences of loneliness, for example, the loneliness of losing a partner. Social loneliness is the lack of a wider social network of friends, neighbours or colleagues. Loneliness might be not knowing your neighbours, living alone or having no family support

### Social Isolation

is having few social contacts and lacking connection with others, it is part of a web of social exclusion experienced by vulnerable residents. A mix of disadvantage including living alone, poor health, unsuitable housing and low income can build up over time to have a devastating impact on individuals and harm communities by depriving them of the contribution of those affected.

You can be lonely without being socially isolated and you can be isolated without being lonely. However, the two states are closely connected. Loneliness can lead to isolation and isolation can cause loneliness.

## What we knew about loneliness and social isolation in the UK

Almost a fifth of the population in the UK say they are always or often lonely and almost two thirds feel uncomfortable admitting to it (British Red Cross and Co-op, 2016).

Everyone experiences loneliness and social isolation but as people age, risk factors are likely to increase and converge.

The experience of loneliness and isolation is much more common among people over sixty-five who are:

- Over five times more likely to be often lonely if they have lost their partner (Age UK, 2014)
- Over half people aged seventy-five and over live alone (ONS, 2010)
- Three times more likely to be often lonely if they don't feel they belong to their neighbourhood and people who report low "neighbourliness" where they live have nearly three fewer contacts per month than those who say they live in a friendly area (Age UK 2011)
- Over five times more likely to report contact with family, friends and neighbours less than once a week (Age UK, 2014)
- Twice as likely to say the television is their main company (Age UK, 2014)

## What we knew about loneliness and social isolation among older people in our area

2018 Connect Hackney Research

Ageing Better Programme research evaluators interviewed 363 over sixties in Hackney and found that they were less likely than people of similar ages in other areas of England to see someone other than a family member on every or most days. 47% in Hackney compared to 63% nationally.

## Key findings of Hackney Connect Community Conversations carried out by Wick Award 2018

People over sixty engaged in the community conversations in Hackney Wick reported that;

- age-related disability and ill health as the one of the most significant reasons for a reduced levels of social contact
- as they aged the logistics involved in getting out and about, travelling on public transport or the risk a difficult journey was a deterrent to getting involved
- they had lost confidence to socialise or travel as they aged
- transitional life phases such as losing a job, retirement, bereavement was a significant contributing factor to being lonely and isolated
- people who experience discrimination and challenges because of who they are have a more acute experience of isolation and loneliness
- they find out about activities through word of mouth, posters, local paper and newsletters
- they prioritise activities and opportunities close to where they live or within an easy bus-ride

## Impact of social isolation and loneliness

The impact of loneliness and social isolation, especially among older people has been neglected for a long time but has recently been recognised as a serious public health issue.

Different studies have highlighted the damage to health and wellbeing caused by social isolation and loneliness and comparison that loneliness is more damaging to health than smoking a pack of cigarettes a day has been widely shared.

Loneliness is harmful to health increasing the likelihood of mortality by 26%, risk of heart disease, increased blood pressure and early onset of disability (Holt-Lunstad 2015)

Loneliness and social isolation is widely associated with increases risk of cognitive decline, the chance of developing dementia and depression.

*Last winter I was ill for a long time. I felt so cut off and helpless. Being alone all that time did me more damage than the cancer.*



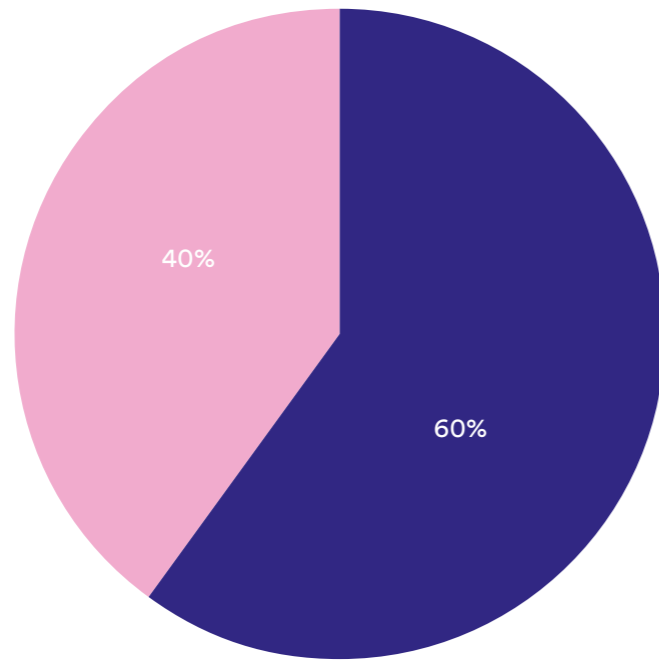


# Breakdown of participants

Wise Wick Community Research  
into Social Isolation among  
Older People in Hackney Wick

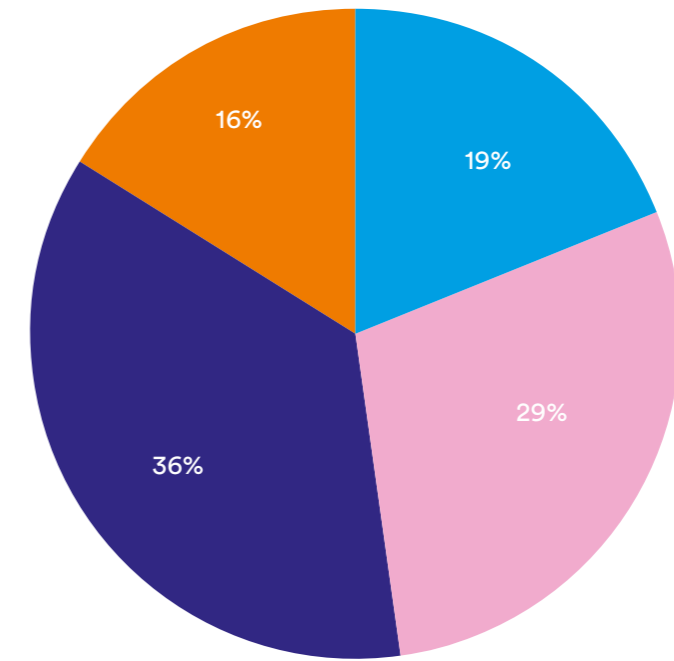
## Gender Split

- Female
- Male



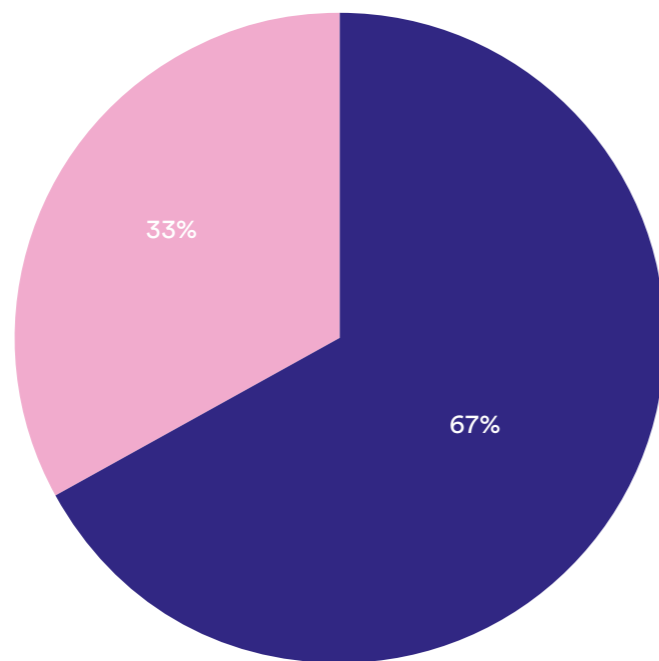
## Age Groups

- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80-89
- 90-99



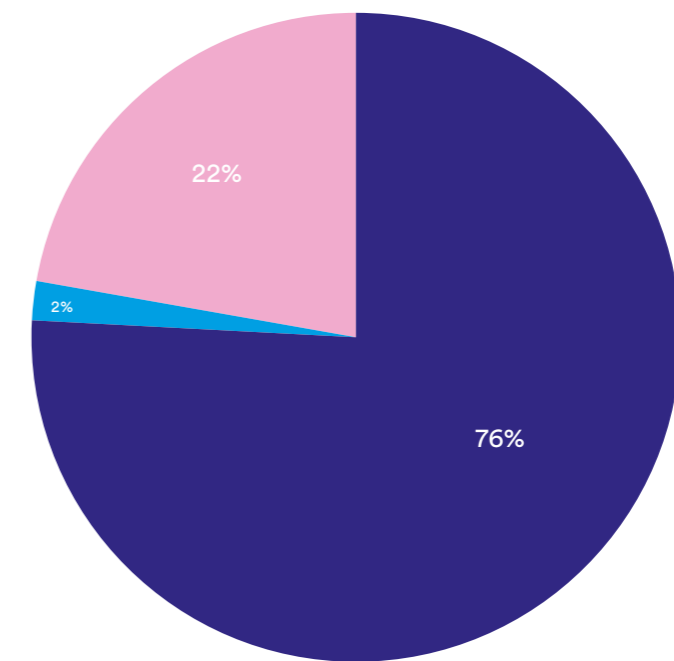
## Disability

- Disabled
- Not disabled



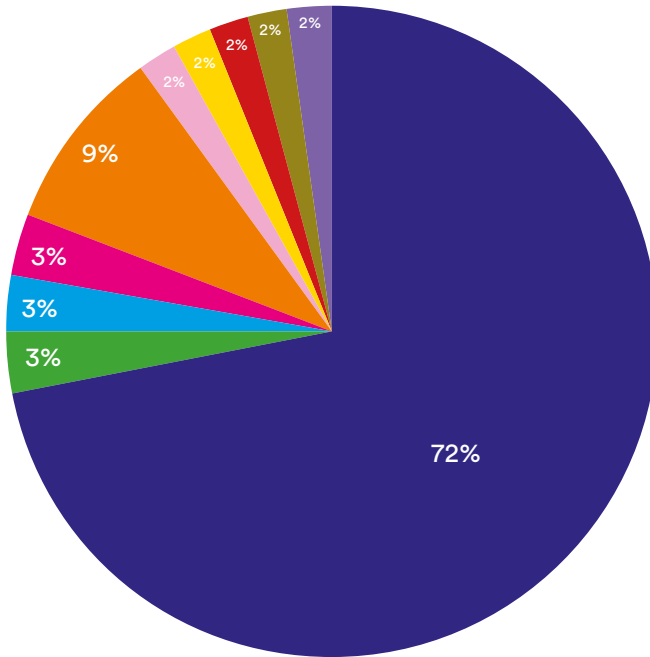
## Sexual Orientation

- Heterosexual
- Lesbian
- Not shared

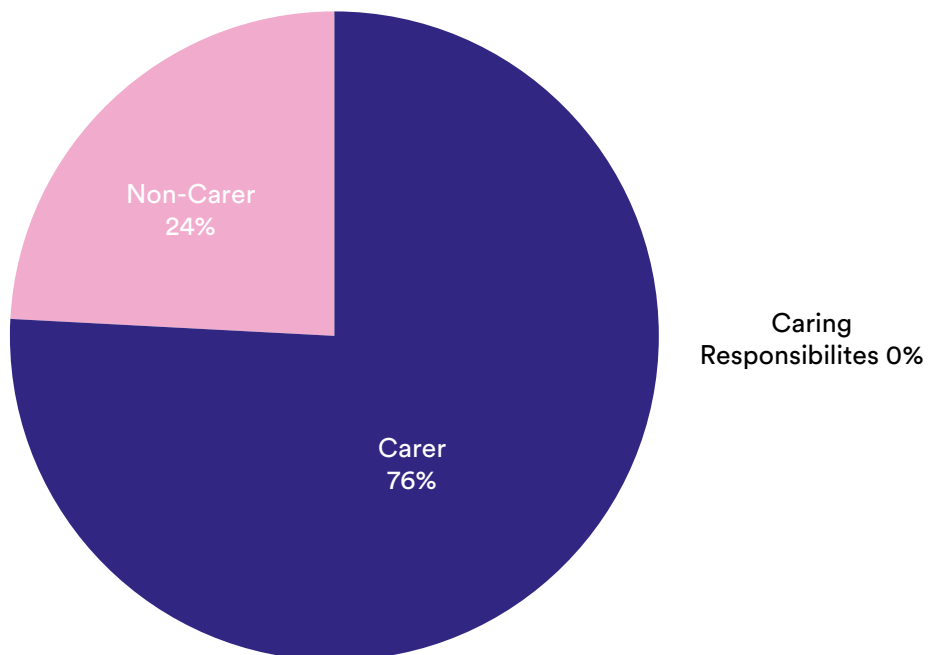


# Ethnic Background

- White British
- Irish
- Other White
- African
- Caribbean
- Other Black
- Indian
- Chinese
- Turkish speaking
- Not shared



# Caring Responsibilites



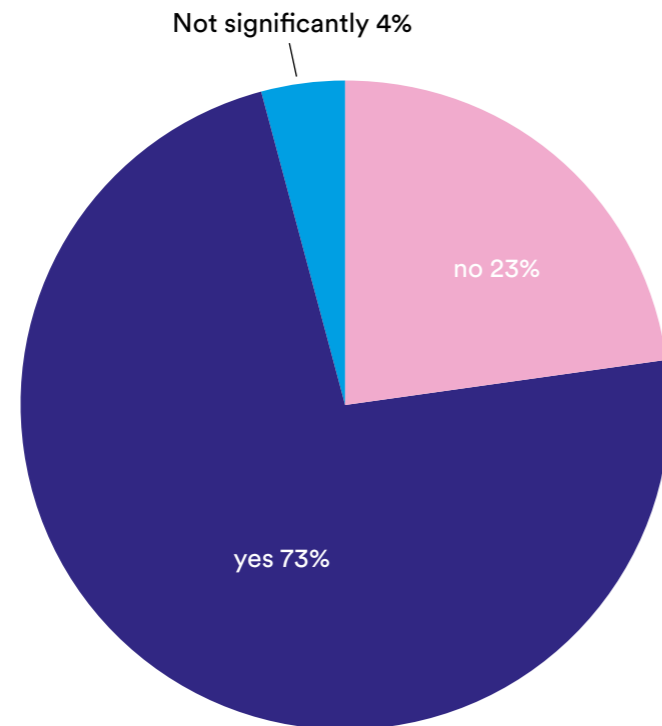
# Main Findings

Text colours: ● Participant ● Local experts



## Responses to Survey Questions

Is social isolation a problem for older people in Hackney Wick?



**Social isolation is not an issue in Hackney Wick. People are very friendly and have time for each other.**

(Male 70s)

About a quarter of participants said that social isolation is not a problem for older people and talked about the many and good connections and activities they enjoy locally.

I feel connected, I have good friends and neighbours, my son is nearby and this is my home.

I do alright. I've got my family and the church and some good old friends. I can get out and about.

Social isolation is not an issue in Hackney Wick. People are very friendly and have time for each other.

Most older people are sociable round here, there are some who want to be alone and that's all right. You can do what you want.

Many people interviewed said that Hackney Wick is a good place for them to age.

My friends want to come here. We go to Westfield. In summer, there is Victoria Park and the river.

People used to say that Hackney Wick was stuck out on the edge of things. Not anymore. It is the place to be. Now people come here because there's so much going on.

The area has always been nice. You can get around. The transport has got much better. It's not a place where you are stuck indoors.

There are plenty of nice things for old people to do. I feel like I've got friends from all over the place. Young people here are interested in you. My neighbours are so kind and will always help.

About three quarters of participants said that they thought that social isolation is a problem for older people in Hackney Wick.

There are people who literally have no one around. No family, no friends. The door never opens. You only know there's someone inside because the curtains open and close.

**There are people who literally have no one around. No family, no friends. The door never opens. You only know there's someone inside because the curtains open and close.**

(Female 70s)

**Many older people are well connected, enjoy what's going, have their network of friends, get out every day, see their family regularly and have a great quality of life. But I know that there are people who sit alone all day, every day. They might talk to the cleaner.**

**(PS, Older People's Activist)**

Having said that the problem exists, many people added that they did not feel that they were isolated themselves. Some referred to people they know of who struggle without friends or family around, or who are in poor health and compare their own experience positively.

*I'm lucky. I have everything I need. My daughters in Kent and visits every month. I talk to my son every week. We have coffee downstairs on Mondays. The woman in the flat next door gets shopping for me.*

Some participants initially hesitated in responding to this question and shared their thoughts after exploring what social isolation might mean with the Community Researcher.

Several said that generally social isolation does not become a problem until people reach over 80/85, lose a partner or their mobility.

Some participants said that the problem of social isolation among older people has been exaggerated recently or that the issue is no worse for older people than other groups.

*That's all you hear about now. Poor, moany old people with nothing going on. Like being old has just been invented.*

*I think it is much worse for the young people now. When I look back I used to have so many friends at work. We always went out together in a crowd and I had my two best friends who lived in the same road. You don't get that now. Young people work all God's hours. The only fun they have is yacking at their mobile phones.*

All ten Local Experts were clear that social isolation is an issue for older people in the area.

*Many older people are well connected, enjoy what's going, have their network of friends, get out every day, see their family regularly and have a great quality of life. But I know that there are people who sit alone all day, every day. They might talk to the cleaner.*

**The problem, like the people themselves, is hidden. Once people are not seen about they can just fade away. People forget they are there. It is shockingly easy to become completely isolated with no-one noticing.**

**(Female 80s)**

Local experts that, in general, the problem of social isolation among the elderly is getting worse, perhaps due to austerity, cuts in funding for activities and reduced personal incomes and changes brought about by gentrification which has resulted in younger generations having to move out of the area as it becomes unaffordable.

In addition, Local Experts said that the impact of social isolation may be much worse than apparent because older people are often reluctant to share a real account of their experience for fear of being judged as not coping, needing help or being a burden.

Local Experts highlighted the fact that many older people are protective of their privacy as well as highly alert to any perceived criticism of their families.

Several Local Experts said they believed that the older people they know tend to be uncomplaining and quick to say that the problem of social isolation and loneliness is more of a struggle for other people.

People may be worried about being seen to "make a fuss" for themselves.

Participants and Local Experts referred to the impact of social isolation as being hard to assess. There was consensus that it is common for social isolation to snowball.

Some people get cut off. People get used to being alone and simply give up. I know of several people in my block who hardly ever go out and maybe have visitors before Christmas, never on Christmas day, or maybe a few times in the summer.

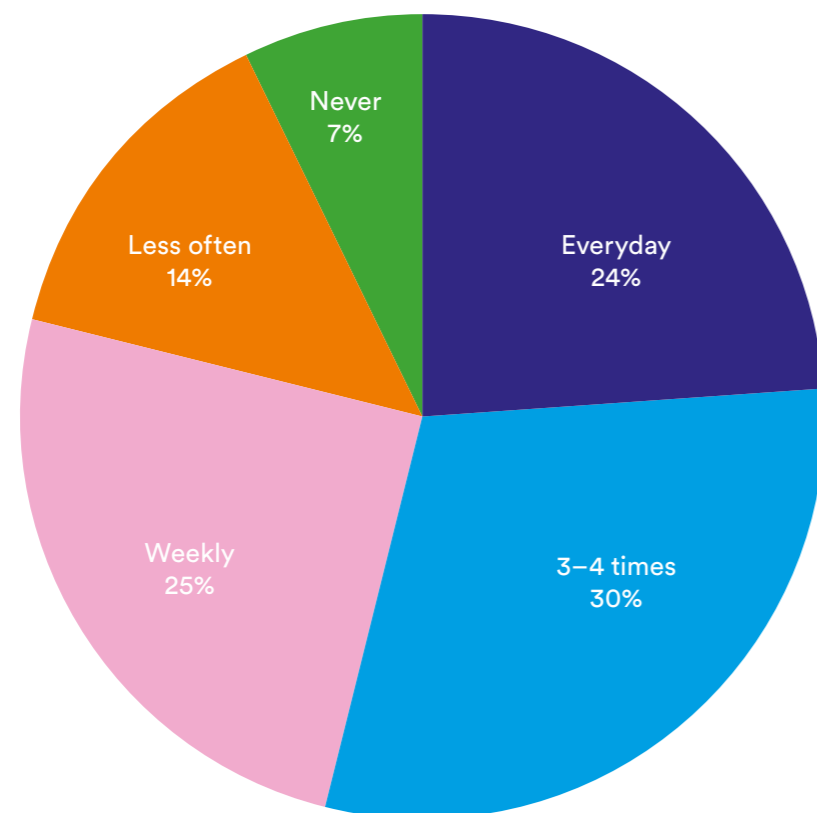
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**People may be worried about being seen to "make a fuss" for themselves.**

**(SB, Housing Manager)**

## Frequency of social contact

1. Every day -14
2. 3-4 times a week 18
3. Weekly- 15
4. Less frequently 8 said they never went out and 4 said they only go out for medical appointments.



More than half the people interviewed meet others up to four times a week in an activity that might not be planned or regular.

This might be chatting to neighbours or people they know, seeing people out and about locally or having contact with a family member.

For many, this level of contact is sufficient for them to feel connected and happy.

*Even though I'm on my own now I'm on the go every day. There's always something. I volunteer in a shop twice a week and go to church. In the summer, I go out with the walking club. I go to bingo with my friend in Stratford. I love getting about.*

*We get to Tesco's most days. I do Bingo twice a week, see my daughter once a week and go round my friend's once a week.*

Participants who meet others on a weekly basis or less frequently were typically over eighty-five and several said that they missed the every-day, unplanned contact involved in being out and about. Mostly this reduction of contact with people they know was related to reduced mobility, poor health and declining interest in getting involved.

Participants, particularly those in their mid-eighties and upwards, said that they were less active and connected than before but that this was their

preference and they were content with being less active as they age. Some said that they enjoyed being less busy.

*When I first packed up work I used to be out every day and often the evenings too, I'd go to the pub with my husband and our friends. I don't go out so often now and hardly ever in the evenings but I'm happy with that. I enjoy being at home and seeing my friends when I want to.*

Many of the group who said they usually met up with others once a week were happy with this level of contact as long as they were confident that this could be maintained. For many, socialising has become less of a priority with age.

*It doesn't seem to matter as much*

In general, when regular contacts drop below the level of once a week, this begins to be an amber warning.

*I'd go out a lot. Shopping every day but I can't do that now. My carer brings the shopping in. My niece comes about four times a year.*

*These days I only go out if I have an appointment at the doctor's or hospital. My daughter visits about once a month from Hoddesdon.*

*I don't really go out much. My family are in Tobago. I have a daughter in Birmingham. I don't get up there anymore. At my age most of my friends have gone.*

*I used go to physio once a week but that stopped. Now I don't go out at all. In summer I'm more inclined to get to the park (Well Street Common) with my neighbour who has a dog but I can't go out by myself and there's no-one to take me*

## Every day social contact

Both participant and Local Expert groups highlighted the importance of everyday informal contact in supporting older people to maintain their social contacts and feel connected within their community.

Examples include;

- Talking to neighbours, scheme manager, cleaner, bus driver, bin collectors
- Keeping keys for a neighbour, taking in parcels, looking after plants and pets
- Connecting with others outdoors: chatting at the bus-stop, sitting on a park bench, watching children play
- Sharing a concern about a local issue - such as participating in consultation about local traffic planning

Every day social encounters improve the wellbeing of individuals.

*Just being out and about does it for me. I make sure I say hello to the people I know. I feel better and I nearly always get a smile.*

*You get what you give out. I try to make an effort.*

An Expert pointed out that connections with neighbours increase the resilience in ageing at times when close friends and families may be lost and as people become less mobile.

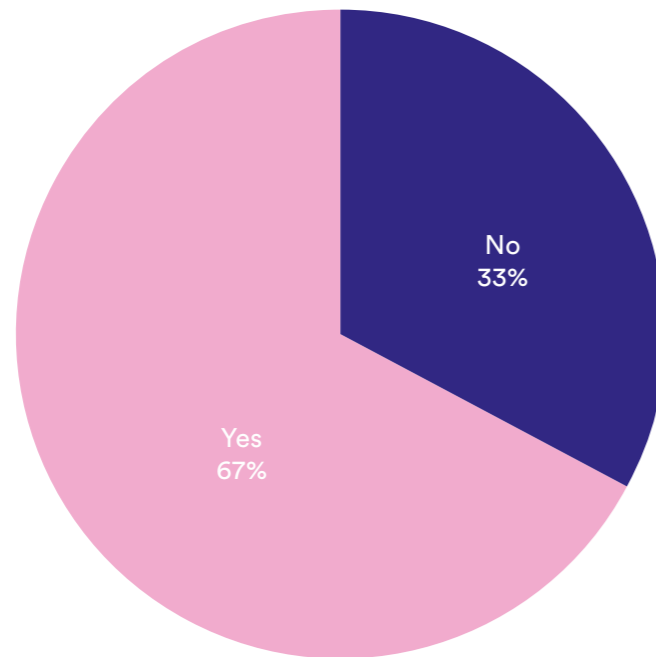
The casual connections we have with our neighbours are so important. They link you to the real world. If you don't interact beyond the bubble of your family and close friends you can get very stuck.

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(SA, Shoreditch Trust)

## Need for increased opportunities to meet people at community events or social activities

Would you like more opportunities to meet people?



two-thirds the participants said that they would welcome an increased offer of opportunities to meet people at community events or social activities. Although four people clarified they would appreciate knowing opportunities exist even if they could not imagine taking them up themselves.

*It feels good to know that there is something there if you want it.*

Five people said that it was too late for them to take up any offers even if they existed.

*I think more opportunities would be nice for other people but no good for me. I'd never get to anything because of the CPOD. I can't leave this flat.*

## Types of activities people are interested in



**Lunch club** More than half the participants said that they would like the opportunity to attend a local lunch club on a regular basis.

*I cook for myself most days but it would be nice to go to a club for something different. Not just for the food but to meet people.*

*There were always lunch clubs for the old people. My mum used to go and it was lovely. We need to get those back.*

*The man who lives next door to me does not cook for himself. Everyone needs one hot meal a day. A lunch club would be good.*

Lunch clubs are a great way to bring isolated people together. It is easy to invite people to join in. There is no stigma about it. Everyone loves food. If a weekly lunch club is, the only activity someone gets involved in- that might be enough to keep those connections going.

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(NC, Social Prescriber)



## Community hubs

More than half of the participants identified the need for a welcoming community venue close to home where people can meet informally and get involved with different groups including younger people.

**A community centre where you find out what is going on, pick up leaflets, chat to people you don't know or get help with repairs.**

**It would be nice to have somewhere the doors are open every day and you get to know the people there.**

**You need a place where you can spend time reading the paper or people watching maybe get a cup of tea. Nothing fancy.**

**I'd like a community centre where different things happen. Not just for old people but a place that is lively and used by teenagers and toddlers as well as old people.**

People were clear that the venue needs to be close to home and easy to access which means a minimum of two hubs within the ward, one either side of the A12.

People identified elements of the community centres that they would like to see.

The venues should be well known and accessible and be a place where local residents can:

- Spend time comfortably without having a specific purpose
- Meet others informally
- Find out about local activities and events
- Access information and advice
- Have a say on local issues
- Try out a new activity without having to make a commitment
- Contribute as a volunteer

**A community centre where you find out what is going on, pick up leaflets, chat to people you don't know or get help with repairs.**

(Male 70s)

## Outdoor activities

People talked about the benefits of outdoor activities from their own experiences and identified the need for older people to have access to activities that get them outdoors, moving more, enjoying nature as well as the opportunity to meet new people.

**Anything that gets people outdoors is a good idea. We need fresh air and to get moving to stay well.**

Participants shared their positive experience of being part of estate-based community gardening projects, conservation work in Victoria Park or volunteering with the Canal and Rivers Trust to maintain the bankside path along the River Lea.

Two participants specifically said that they would like raised beds to be built in their shared gardens so that older residents can participate in growing activities easily.

## Access to learning opportunities

Both participants and Local Experts said that it would be beneficial to people at risk of social isolation to have access to local classes for example in IT, photography, art, languages.

**Older need IT classes to get online and stay a part of things and stay in touch.**

**We should be able to use local schools for classes in the evening that could be open to different groups of residents- not just old people.**

**I used to go to classes laid on by Worker's Educational. They were great. We did local history and art. It was good to try something I'd never done before.**

## Friendly cafes

Nearly two thirds of the participants interviewed talked about enjoying going to cafes either alone to enjoy a drink, listen to music, read the paper or perhaps meet someone new or to meet up with friends.

People said that they would like to be able to visit cafes that are close to home, accessible and where they feel welcomed.

People suggested that local pubs and cafes could run specific activities including older people at times when business may be quiet as a way of welcoming new customers.

Several participants identified cafés in the area, which they found to be welcoming. These were added to the directory of local opportunities.

**I miss the old cafés where you could get a bacon roll and be sure of a welcome.**

**Sam's Café is always friendly and cheap. He goes out of his way to look after old people.**

**I feel like an alien when I go into these new places. I don't think they even do a cup of tea any more - it's a dozen types of coffee all costing a fortune and a mini bite of something.**

**My friend goes to a Carer's Drop-in hosted by a café. She loves it and its break from being stuck at home.**

There should be a list of friendly and accessible cafes which are affordable and offer plain food perhaps offering targeted sessions of interest to different groups, for example Chatty Café, Windrush generation memory groups, opportunity to try different food.

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(PS, Older People's Activist)

## Activities in communal spaces in sheltered housing schemes

Participants living in sheltered housing schemes highlighted the fact communal space in sheltered housing is largely under-used and that they would welcome an increased offer of activities based in these communal areas.

**We have a huge lounge. It is very comfortable, light and bright. It is hardly used except for funerals. What a waste!**

Coffee mornings and summer parties are held at most blocks. Both participants and experts pointed out that there is scope for more activities including: gardening sessions, barbecues, and craft clubs, events like bonfire parties where family and neighbours can be invited in.

Many older people said that they would like to share the space in their sheltered accommodation with children, for example opening access to shared gardens and communal space to nurseries.

Anchor Hanover Housing are developing a model of opening up estates designed for older people for use by children's groups. This initiative was welcomed by Local Experts and those participants aware of the plans.

Activities in communal lounges, which have been initiated by Wick Award or funded through the Wick Award Community Chest, have been popular and well attended by residents.

## Opportunities to keep moving

Most participants identified exercise and physical activities as a welcome offer. Participants identified a need for chair-based exercise, yoga, stretching, tai chi, darts, tennis, walking netball, dance and table tennis.

Walking groups, including walking with aids, wheelchairs and mobility scooters were highlighted as a need.

*A dance class is a great pick-up. I love the music. You feel energised at the end.*

## Activities targeting specific groups

Participants identified the local need for opportunities targeting specific groups, for example those living with a particular conditions. These might include:

Dementia friendly events, sessions for people in different languages, Carer's Drop in, Men's group, support group for people dealing with hearing loss.

*I take my husband to the Dementia Tea Dances – it's a lovely way to meet new people who understand what you're going through and just have a bit of fun.*

## Activities for men

One male participant identified the need for activities targeting men.

*I'd like to be able to get involved in activities of interest to men – say local history or research.*

However, all Local Experts and seven women said that there should be activities of interest available for men.

Some women said that their partners or men they know have very limited social lives after retirement. Two women said their partners were reluctant to take up local opportunities that they enjoy such as bingo, coffee mornings or exercise classes. Men might feel like opportunities for socialising are targeted at women and not relevant to them.

*Organised activities might suit ladies but not really for me. I get tired of small talk.*

Activities suggested by participants specifically for men include walking, pub visits, volunteering, darts and sharing skills with younger people for example, fixing cars.

## Opportunities to meet up with others from a specific community group

Some participants who are part of community groups, which are not significantly represented in Hackney Wick, said that they would like to be able to participate in cultural activities and socialise with others from their background communities, those mentioned were Portuguese, Ghanaian and Iranian.

*My people are in West London. If there is a party or a special mass, I always have to go there.*

Participants from black and minority ethnic groups more represented in the area do not share the same concerns. However, one participant said that she has to travel to the weekly lunch provided for African and Caribbean Elders and would welcome a more local offer.

## Socialising within LGBT community

Two participants identified the need for opportunities for LGBT people to have access to opportunities for socialising within their own communities.

*I dream about there being a friendly café round here where older lesbians are welcome.*

LGBT participants pointed out that the need for older LGBT people to be able to meet people from their own community near to home in an environment that feels safe and comfortable.

*I'd just like to be in a place where people know who I am and it's not an issue in any way.*

## Intergenerational activities

Nearly all participants and Local Experts interviewed flagged the importance of creating opportunities for different generations to get together to share projects and ideas.

Some people identified local projects, either informal or formal, that have successfully brought together different age groups within a local area. Participants referenced the successful Build Up project, in which older residents supported an initiative by young people to improve a patch of open space on Wick Road as well as the intergenerational school holiday project organised by Gascoyne Over 50s Club.

Many people mentioned the benefits of making opportunities for older people to support young children and families, perhaps through skills sharing, story-telling and cooking projects.

*I was a teacher for nearly thirty years and now I volunteer every week with Bean Stalk, a charity helping children learn to read. I love going into the school and spending time with the children.*

*I used to take care of the Sunday School and I loved doing that. I have no grand-children of my own and I enjoyed hearing what the children used to say and being a part of their lives.*

**We have a huge lounge. It is very comfortable, light and bright. It is hardly used except for funerals. What a waste!**

(Female 80s)

**I dream about there being a friendly café round here where older lesbians are welcome.**

(Female 80s)

Several participants living in sheltered accommodation mentioned the potential of opening shared space up for children's activities. Residents at Chigwell Court said they enjoyed the Christmas carol sessions performed by St Dominic's School in their lounge and would welcome increased use of the garden and inside space by children's groups.

Others said that they would like the opportunity to be able to help young people.

Old people should use their experience to help young people stay on track. Oldies have the long-term view. We are not so caught up in the everyday battles as their parents.

I would love the chance of helping out young people, especially the boys round here. They need to have men in their lives

Intergenerational opportunities should not focus solely on bringing together children and older people. Participants said that they had enjoyed the Silver Surfer sessions at Trowbridge Senior's which matched older local residents with volunteers, many of whom were newly arrived to the area and typically in their twenties and thirties for one-to-one support to get on line.

**Old people should use their experience to help young people stay on track. Oldies have the long-term view. We are not so caught up in the everyday battles as their parents.**

(Male 60s)

### Volunteering

Nearly all participants and all Local Experts identified the need for opportunities to volunteer locally. Areas of volunteering specifically referred to include; helping others, working with children, cooking for community events, gardening, being part of a community show/production.

We have all got so much to give.

### Culture and arts based activities

Participants identified a range of activities that they would like to be able to access locally including; Art groups- painting and drawing classes, printmaking, visits to local galleries and museums as part of a group.

There should be a local history club.

I'd like to join a choir where you don't have to be too good. Singing makes you happy.

Sometimes I go to the Silver Screenings and it is almost empty. I think more people would go if they knew about it.

Nine participants said that they were deterred from going to the cinema or concerts because they had no one to go with and did not enjoy or feel confident to go alone.

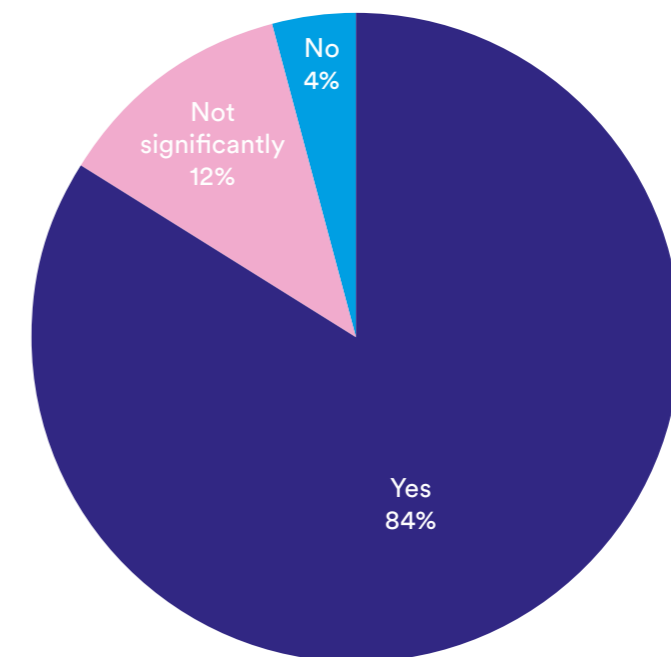
A couple of people suggested that there should be a local organisation to help people with similar interests get together and plan visits.

I used to love going to concerts and the theatre but would not go by myself. It would be nice to have a local club to organise trips out with others who are on their own.

## Changes in the way people socialise

### Has your social life changed as you get older?

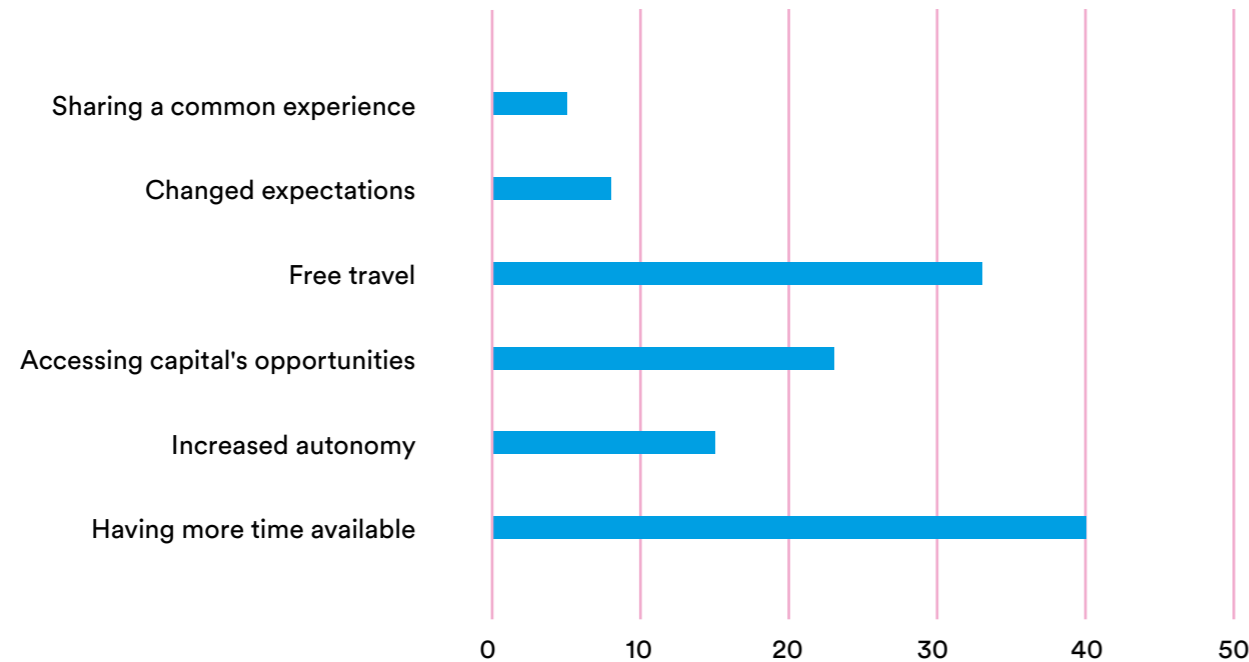
Nearly all participants interviewed said that their social life had changed, as they get older. Some a few participants pointed out that age has made it easier for them to socialise.



**As you get older, you find that you have more in common with other people than you might have thought. We all know the aches and pains.**

(Female 90s)

## What makes it easier to socialise?



Participants pointed out that to some degree, socialising has become easier with age, not just because people generally have more time available but because their life experiences have supported them to identify common links.

*As you get older, you find that you have more in common with other people than you might have thought. We all know the aches and pains.*

*You have more time for other people*

*Freedom Pass- It is in the name!*

Over half the participants identified access to free travel as being very significant to their ability to stay connected and socialise.

*I feel like I can do exactly what I want for the first time in my life.*

For many, giving up work and caring responsibilities offers more time to pursue interests and to socialise. Several participants said they took up new hobbies when they retired.

Many people referred to their different experience of socialising at different ages. Commonly, participants said they were most active in their sixties and seventies when they were fitter and perhaps, newly retired and were less active, although not necessarily less connected, in their eighties and nineties.

One participant shared that she had felt more lonely and isolated in her mid-sixties when she was taking care of her sick husband than she currently does in her mid-eighties now that she has moved into sheltered accommodation and has found new friends and support.

## What makes it harder to socialise or connect?

Participants and Local Experts identified two broad groups of issues which get in the way of staying active and maintaining social contacts;

1. Issues related to life events like loss of mobility, energy, bereavement or becoming a carer
2. Issues related to external factors like having to move, being short of money, having to get around a changing environments

### Issues related to life events

- Going out without a partner when you have been used to socialising together
- Needing extra motivation
- Travel problems
- Mobility
- Concerns about safety
- Cost

### Reduction of mobility

Getting about may become challenging as people age.

*It is such a struggle to get out. I use sticks and always wear flat shoes-, which I hate. Walking is a huge effort and sometimes the struggle beats me.*

*I go out most days but I was always dependent on my car because of arthritis. Now you cannot park anywhere in Hackney. I've got a Blue Badge but the disabled bays are always taken. There are not as many as they used to be.*

### Constraints of a condition

Participants identified the constraints to opportunities to socialise due to particular conditions including pain, the need to access a toilet, anxiety about travelling, the impact of memory loss and, perhaps, bad experiences of getting lost or muddling meeting arrangements.

*If I have something that I just cannot miss, I have to plan my journey always thinking about where and how I'll get to the toilet if I need to.*

*I can never make definite plans. Any kind of outing depends on whether my arthritis flares up.*

Participants talked about being embarrassed about the impact of their conditions or worrying that they are unwelcome or a burden to others.

*I worry that I'll get in the way or stop others having a good time.*

*I think to myself- what if I feel out of sorts and I'll let people down?*

**I can never make definite plans. Any kind of outing depends on whether my arthritis flares up.**

**(Female 80s)**



# Some people have gone so long without sitting down and having a chat, they have forgotten how to do it.

(SA, Shoreditch Trust)

## Visual or hearing impairment

Participants identified hearing and sight loss as a challenge to getting involved in or maintaining social activities.

I used to go out at night but would not dream of that now my sight is so poor.

I had a go with hearing aids but I could never get them to work for me.

## Loss of confidence

Loss of confidence was identified as a barrier to maintaining social connections.

Hearing loss has made a big dent in my confidence to go out and meet people. My friends are kind but they must get sick of shouting or trying to include me. More and more I'm finding excuses not to go out.

Participants reported reduced interest or enthusiasm to be active as they get older.

It takes more to get me going and sometimes I wonder if it's worth the effort.

A Local Expert shared her experience that some older people who become socially isolated lose the skills to socialise and therefore become even more cut off.

Some people have gone so long without sitting down and having a chat, they have forgotten how to do it.

## Losing friends and family members

Participants said that losing friends and family members through bereavement or moving away changed their priorities and experience of socialising.

We used to be a group – when we lost Frankie it didn't feel the same and things fell apart.

## Losing a partner

Struggling to adjust to being single after being used to socialising with a partner was identified by eighteen participants as a common reason for declining social interaction.

We were married for almost sixty years. We grew up together. Did everything together. I don't know how to go out by myself, even when it's a family do.

Losing my wife knocked me for six. I was so down I didn't want to talk to anyone for months. When I started to get used to being on my own I found that I had got used to my own company and it was hard to get going again.

## Caring responsibilities

Eleven participants said that when they were caring for a partner or in one case an adult child with learning disabilities, their caring activities took up most of their time leaving no time left to socialise or pursue their own interests.

Four participants said that they could never leave the house because of their caring responsibilities

While my husband was alive, I just didn't see anyone. There was no time. He had dementia. I couldn't leave him alone or with anyone else, not even my daughter. He would get too upset.

Some participants said that caring for a relative is exhausting and there is minimal or no help available to them. Even where help is available, the caring partner has to spend time organising support and overseeing that it is delivered and for some, the experience of being let down by the services providing respite has made them reluctant to trust the care of their loved ones to anyone beyond a family member.

Two Carers said that if they did go out alone they spent time worrying about the situation at home and this deterred them from planning to see friends.

If I do go out, I cannot say I always enjoy it. I'm always looking at my phone expecting trouble.

**While my husband was alive, I just didn't see anyone. There was no time. He had dementia. I couldn't leave him alone or with anyone else, not even my daughter. He would get too upset.**

(Female 80s)

## Money worries

For many, saving for a rainy day or hoping to have some money to leave to family is a priority over spending money to socialise.

*I think a lot of old people worry about money. They think they ought to save what they have so they don't get into trouble or can help their family out if needed.*

Only four people said that concerns about money prevented them from spending money on going out but many referred to being "careful" about spending money and talked about prioritising bills and savings.

Some people said that they knew people who restricted their socialising to the minimum because they did not have money to get out.

Many older people are used to "making do" and even when money is available are cautious about spending money on what they consider non-essential.

*I know my mum has the money for a cab to get her to Westfield but she won't use it. She'll make excuses to her friends not to go*

Local Experts were much more emphatic about the impact of lack of money has on limiting options for older people in Hackney Wick to stay socially connected.

Personal finances can have a knock-on effect which often increases social isolation

Losing PIP, often the result of an inadequate assessment, means loss of income, stops people going out, damages confidence and has serious health implications.

Local experts said that the introduction of Direct Payments has had a negative impact and may be an element in increasing anxiety, financial hardship and contributing to older people becoming more cut off.

Local experts told us that many older people are not aware of the benefits they entitled to, are not able to complete the applications for benefits which are increasingly, only available online and are not aware of or unable to access the help available to make claims.

There is limited help to claim benefits locally. The services available often have a long waiting list. Often people, say those with dementia, cannot find the supporting evidence they need to make the claims.

*The only place I could get help to apply was at the CAB in Mare Street. It's a struggle for me to get there. When I got there, I had to wait a long time. Then I was told that I didn't have all the paperwork I needed.*

More fundamentally, participants and especially Local Experts described how the experience of long-term inequality affects people's chances of ageing well and enjoying good social connections.

*It's always going to be harder for people who have had it tough all their lives.*

We know that people who have lived their lives on low incomes and benefits are likely to struggle in older age. The impact of inequality builds over a lifetime and there is no escaping the impact in old age.

**We know that people who have lived their lives on low incomes and benefits are likely to struggle in older age. The impact of inequality builds over a lifetime and there is no escaping the impact in old age.**

(SA, Shoreditch Trust)

## Language barriers

Two participants reported that their neighbours were isolated because they could not speak English and there were no people around who spoke their languages. One of these women also had dementia, which meant it was even harder for her to communicate. The participant interviewed said hearing her neighbour crying and shouting in frustration made her feel helpless and depressed.

The two participants interviewed who had limited English have said that this restricted their social life.

*My neighbours are not interested in me. They think I have nothing to say or don't like them. Some are kind and try to speak to me, at least to say good morning.*

## Lack of motivation/energy

Over half of the participants specifically referred to loss of motivation or energy as a barrier to involvement

*I just don't have the energy. I can't be bothered to struggle out and keep on the go. I know I would feel better if I could get out more often but it's just so hard to get going.*

*You get to a point where it's too much.*

*I don't go out at night. It's not like I'm worried about getting into trouble but sometimes I just can't be bothered.*

A local expert said that they are aware that individuals' perceived lack of enthusiasm to participate acts to deter others from reaching out to engage people at risk of social isolation.

Residents who try to initiate activities or connections sometimes feel discouraged by others' lack of interest. Sometimes this stops them from floating new ideas.

*I try to get activities going round here but its hard work. Often old people just don't want to know. They moan and watch telly then complain that there's nothing for them.*

**I try to get activities going round here but its hard work. Often old people just don't want to know. They moan and watch telly then complain that there's nothing for them.**

(Female 70s)

## What stops people from staying connected in relation to external factors

### Retiring

Seventeen participants identified their retirement as a life change, which reduced their social network and opportunities for socialising.

People said that they missed the structures of work which make it easier to connect including being with the same group of people every day. The workplace provides opportunities to chat comfortably about common issues, be in shared space and have the opportunity to eat lunch together as well as the more formal social activities related to working together such as celebrating team successes or holidays.

When my husband left work, he stopped going to the pub with his mates.

I kept in touch with colleagues for a while but gradually contact petered out. Now we only send a card at Christmas.

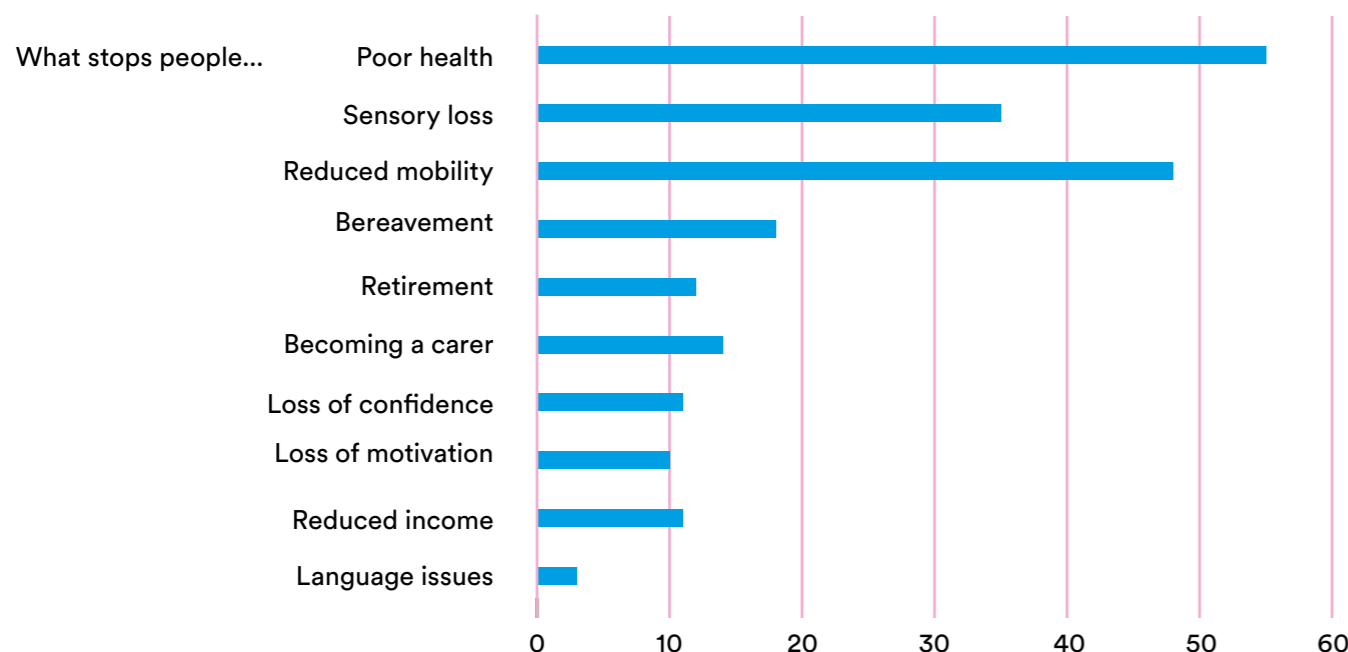
I took it for granted that the chat at work was just to pass time til we could go home. I really miss those little stories – nothing special- but just knowing what's going on in other people's lives and feeling connected.

Participants talked about using free transport to stay connected visiting friends and family.

**I took it for granted that the chat at work was just to pass time til we could go home. I really miss those little stories – nothing special- but just knowing what's going on in other people's lives and feeling connected.**

(Male 60s)

### What stops people socialising – Life events



### Getting around

When I first retired and was still very nippy I went all over on my Freedom Pass. Now I find I use it to get to my daughter's and that's about it.

Many participants reported problems using public transport including:

- Struggling to walk to the bus-stop
- Drivers failing to prioritise wheelchair users over families with buggies even when this is a requirement
- Trouble getting on and off buses
- Poor transport connections including no underground. Hackney Wick and Homerton Stations are not directly linked to many places people want to get to
- Poor attitude by drivers was widely reported including:
  - failing to stop, particularly when they see wheelchair users
  - driving too fast, accelerating before passengers are seated and braking suddenly

I've had bad experiences on the buses. Sometimes they just go by. I need someone to travel with. They just slam on the brakes. I'm frightened I'll go flying.

People often not aware of the Taxicard scheme or struggle with the application.

We get lots of requests to help people with applications for Dialaride and Taxicards. The forms are a nightmare for most people and have to be done online. On top of that, many people who need the helps are unaware that the schemes are available to them.

Several participants as well as local experts identified problems with Dial-a Ride and Taxi-Card services.

Dialaride was reported to be unreliable, often arriving late or failing to arrive at all. Many people are frustrated by the service and only use it because they think it is their only option.

I can't walk far or use buses so I am dependent on Dial-a-ride. Often they can't help you. I've been let down so many times.

I use Dial-a-ride for the essentials to get to hospital appointments but it is hard to make plans. You have to book the transport much earlier than you'll need it to allow for mishaps.

**We get lots of requests to help people with applications for Dialaride and Taxicards. The forms are a nightmare for most people and have to be done online. On top of that, many people who need the helps are unaware that the schemes are available to them.**

(SA, Shoreditch Trust)

## Driving

Three participants said having to give up driving or struggling to find parking space has made getting out and about more difficult for them.

*It is getting harder to use disabled parking bay. There are far fewer of them and more drivers with Blue Badges.*

*Old people often don't know about resident parking vouchers. You can only buy them online.*

Two participants spoke positively about their experience of the Get Out And About (GOAL) project delivered by Hackney Community Transport.

## Navigating pavements

Two thirds of participants mentioned struggles to walk around the area as a potential restriction on getting around to socialise.

*I'm not so good on walking any more. That holds me back from going to new places.*

Pavements can be uneven and sometimes obstructed, for example, hire bikes are commonly left obstructing pavements. Because they are a relatively new phenomenon, many older people do not expect to see them. This is particularly dangerous for people with failing sight.

Participants reported that changes to road and pavement areas on Wick Road has confused them and other older people.

*Bikes travel too fast and cut across the pedestrian paths.*

Shared space on pavements and on paths through Victoria Park means some older people do not feel safe.

*I don't feel safe on the pavements at night. I can't see properly and the bikes fly up and down.*

*On Wick Road, you do not even know whether you are on the pavement or the bike-path. I'm terrified of being hit. You don't know where they are coming from.*

Two participants reported incidents where they were hurt or badly shaken by cyclists. Another five said that they were scared that they could be hit by bikes.

One participant highlighted the emerging issue of high-speed scooters, which are becoming more common and a nuisance on roads and pavements.

In addition, one participant said that gangs on bikes gathered on her estate and might attempt to snatch bags or could collide with pedestrians.

Two reported problems using mobility scooters because of a lack of dropped kerbs although participants reported that this is improving.

*The pavements have got better. I can get around on my scooter but I can't get to Mare Street any more.*

## Problems walking

Nine people said that they had lost confidence walking, especially outdoors because of hearing or sight loss or becoming frailer.

*I was worried about walking because my balance was poor but I have to get out with my dog. I went to the Falls Prevention Project at Homerton. It was great and has given me back my confidence.*

## Losing the way

Some participants said they had experience of getting lost while travelling locally and that deterred them from going out. Another three people said they were fearful about their partners getting lost because of memory loss.

## Housing issues

Over half of the participants and all Local Experts indicated that housing related issues could have a significant impact on their ability to remain socially connected.

## Moving home

About a quarter of participants said that they had needed to move relatively recently and for some this was a reluctant transition from a well-loved family home.

Some had chosen or felt under pressure to relinquish two or three bedroom homes to move into smaller, more accessible flats, very often in sheltered blocks.

Seven participants said they lost social contact, especially with old neighbours they had known for a long time when they moved into new homes.

Four participants said that they had moved into the area in the last few years and did not know people in Hackney Wick.

*While my husband was alive, all my time was spent looking after him. When he died I moved here. I don't know anyone.*

Without having connections that help you establish in a new area, such as friends, attachment to a school or community, it can be very challenging to establish a new life.

**I'm not so good on walking any more. That holds me back from going to new places.**

(Female 80s)

**While my husband was alive, all my time was spent looking after him. When he died I moved here. I don't know anyone.**

(Female 70s)



## The right kind of housing

Because of the great pressure on available housing, participants reported having very limited choice about the homes they moved into. Often choice about location is trumped by a need to select a property that best suits people's access needs even if the move might take people further away from the supportive network of family, friends and old neighbours.

Moving into new housing or unfamiliar areas also has additional impact on the connections and wellbeing of people experiencing memory loss and may be less able to adapt to a new environment.

*My husband never really settled here when we moved. He'd get lost then packed up going out altogether. I lost contact with my old friends and neighbours just when I needed them most.*

Some participants said that housing-related issues such as problems with neighbours and anti-social behaviour had increased their anxiety, created anxiety about leaving home or contributed to a feeling that they do not belong in the area.

Two participants said they did not always feel safe at home because of anti-social behaviour caused by neighbours with mental health issues who did not receive the help they needed.

## Housing support

Fourteen participants and nearly all local experts raised issues about the impact of housing services on social isolation and loneliness among older people.

Seven participants expressed frustration with repairs processes and struggled to report and following up repairs. In particular, the impact of lift breakdowns has a damaging impact on older people who cannot manage stairs.

*I live on the eighth floor – when the lift's out I'm stranded. Even my neighbours can't get shopping up eight floors. The worst thing is that you have no idea how long it will take to get repaired.*

Four local experts pointed out that there is scope for housing providers to help reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people by knowing more about their tenants and providing services that respond to the specific needs of this group as well as facilitating neighbourly connections.

*There is so much potential for housing providers to do more to prevent older people feeling cut off and lonely. Housing providers should step up and take on the role of supporting social connections between their tenants as their core business*

TRAs and residents groups have a big role to play. They need to be able to flag up people who are not seen about or need help especially older people.

Residents who take things into their own hands by trying to help out people in need are not always encouraged in their efforts to look out for old people.

*We've been told by housing officers that it's not our job to get involved in trying to help older people. They tell us to leave it to them and then disappear.*

**My husband never really settled here when we moved. He'd get lost then packed up going out altogether. I lost contact with my old friends and neighbours just when I needed them most.**

(Female 80s)

## Impact of younger generations moving out of the area

Nearly all the participants contacted as part of the research live in social housing.

About half the participants reported that their children had moved out of Hackney, many of them long distances away or even to another country because social housing was not available to them and they were unable to afford the sharply rising private rental rates or buy a property in Hackney.

The impact of not having family nearby has reduced the contact that many people expected to have with their families as they age. In addition, older people who do not have family help available locally may lose confidence about their ability to cope.

*Yes, it does worry me that all three of our kids are so far away. I'm ok now but if anything happened I don't know what I'd do.*

## Challenges of a changing environment

Participants reported loss of familiar venues such as shops, libraries, post offices, pubs and cafés new road layouts, changes to bus routes, noisy venues as challenge to feeling comfortable in the local area.

Some participants reported feeling unwelcome, or even irrelevant, in Hackney Wick because the area is a changing so rapidly.

*You can hardly recognise the place. I've lived here all my life and find myself wondering where I am.*

*Lots of the old places have gone. I miss the pet shop.*

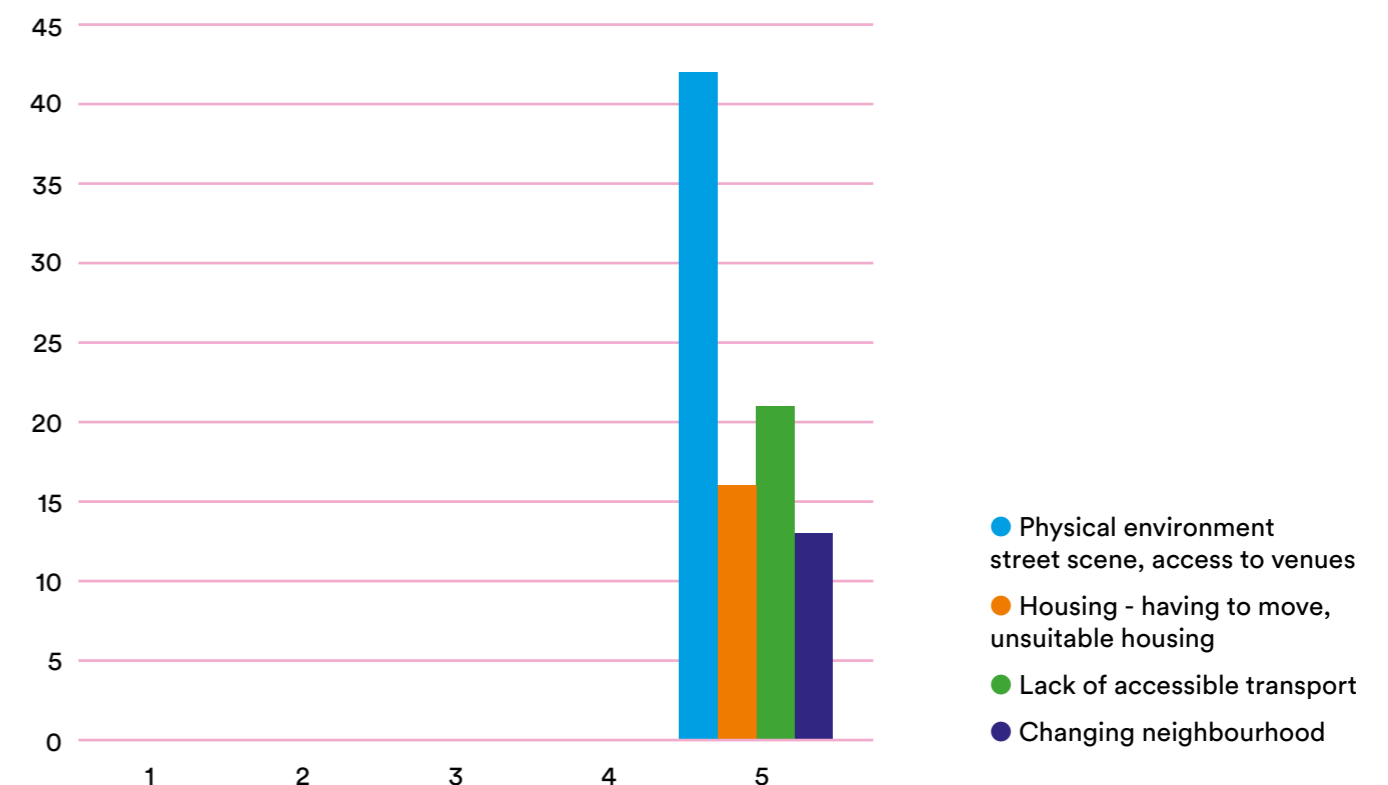
This rapid change has meant that older people do not always feel a part of their community.

*You get sick of all the building. The lorries going up and down. None of this is for us.*

*We went in The Tiger when they re-opened it. Some people might like what they are doing. I felt like a fish out of water.*

The rapid gentrification of Hackney Wick may have extenuated the feeling of isolation and loneliness for some older people.

## What stops people from staying connected? External factors



## Finding out about social activities or events

Participants prioritised access to information about activities and opportunities are available locally as a key issue in engaging older people who do not have strong networks.

Participants and local experts identified the need for information about opportunities to be available in different formats to make sure that different groups of older people know about opportunities especially those at highest risk of social isolation and loneliness.

There seems to be things going on but I don't often know about it until it's over.

You think, "oh -that's nice" then find out it happened last month or it's finishing because there's no funding.

Hackney Today is a good way of finding out about what's going on.

I'm online. If I find anything interesting I'll share it with my friend

I use the Age UK list.

Activities are publicised online and that's it. That way you'll only reach a fraction of older people and probably none of those who need most help.

I'm really noseey and just like to know everything that's going on. I'm like a magnet. Always looking for something new. I'll pick up leaflets at the library. I talk to everyone so I just tell them what's going on otherwise they would never know.

Information has to be updated otherwise people are disappointed when they make an effort to discover that there's nothing going on. That's disastrous because it stops them from having a go at something else



**Word of mouth** including information from friends, neighbours and family-members was the most identified source of information.

**Local professional contacts** including housing workers, scheme managers, support workers, social prescribers, GP, specialist nurses were identified as key providers of information.

**Local papers** including Hackney Gazette, Hackney Citizen were identified as information sources and significantly, thirty participants referred to Hackney Today.

**Leaflets** either received by post, dropped through door or picked up at libraries, GP practices, places of worship or community centres were mentioned as important sources.

I always pick up leaflets. I have a big pile indoors and get them for friends.

**Attending events** is a source of information about other services and activities, the events included activities organised by housing providers including estate events, TRA meetings, the Winter Warmer, church fairs etc.

**Posters** in local places including waiting rooms, bus-stops, outside schools and community centres and at the library were identified as effective information sources

**Newsletters**- Local newsletters including estate and TRA bulletins, information from housing providers, Hackney Council, GP practice and hospital information, Age UK, Carers Centre, Older People's Reference Group and local places of worship

**Noticeboards** on estates, in shops and cafes, at Tesco Well Street and Morning Lane, Homerton Library were identified.

**Phone lines** including Silverline and the RNIB line were identified of sources of information about activities and support.

**Websites** Listings were identified by more than half of the participants as a way of finding out what is going on locally.

I use my lpad to find out what's going on.

Although, some of this group did not access this information themselves.

My son looks up online for me.

Sources of online information identified included Age UK, Hackney Council, HCVS, Carers, groups supporting people with specific conditions, for example, Alzheimers Society, Diabetes UK and British Heart Foundation.

Activities are publicised online and that's it. That way you'll only reach a fraction of older people and probably none of those who need most help.

(SB, Housing Manager)

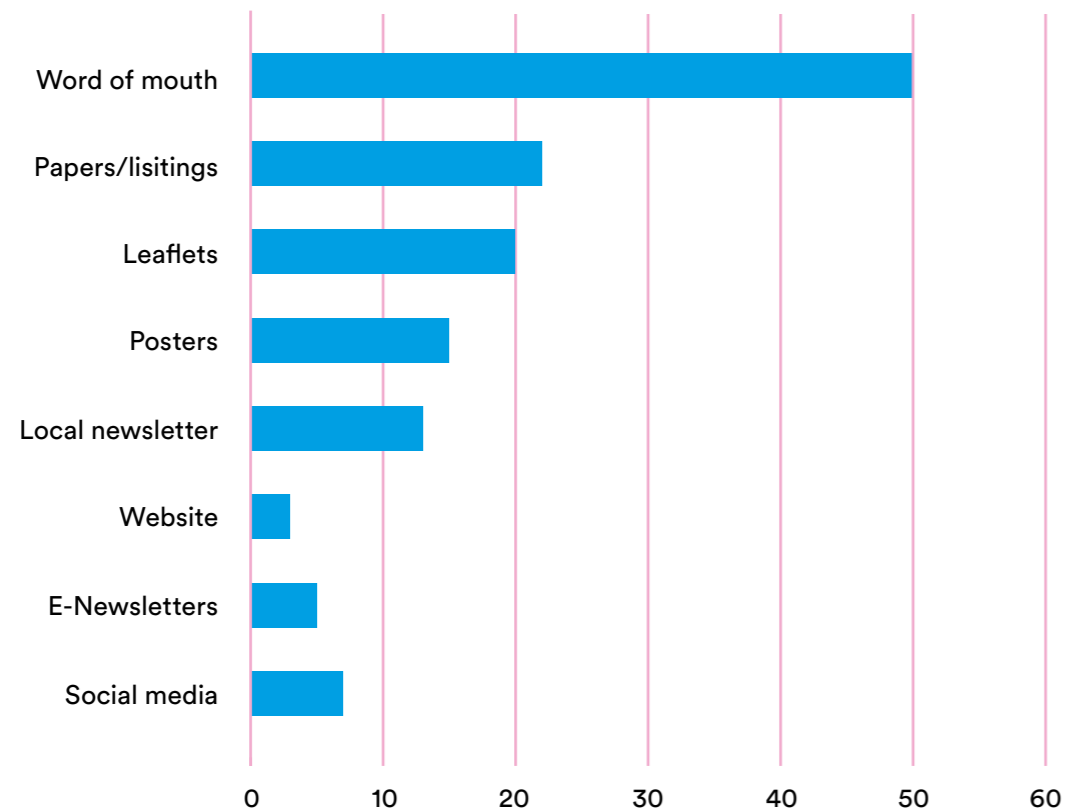
## E-newsletters and online listings

Newsletters and online listings used by participants to find out what is going on;

- **St Joseph's Hospice**
- **Healthwatch Hackney**
- **Hackney CVS**
- **Condition specific organisations, for example Stroke Association, Alzheimer's Society**

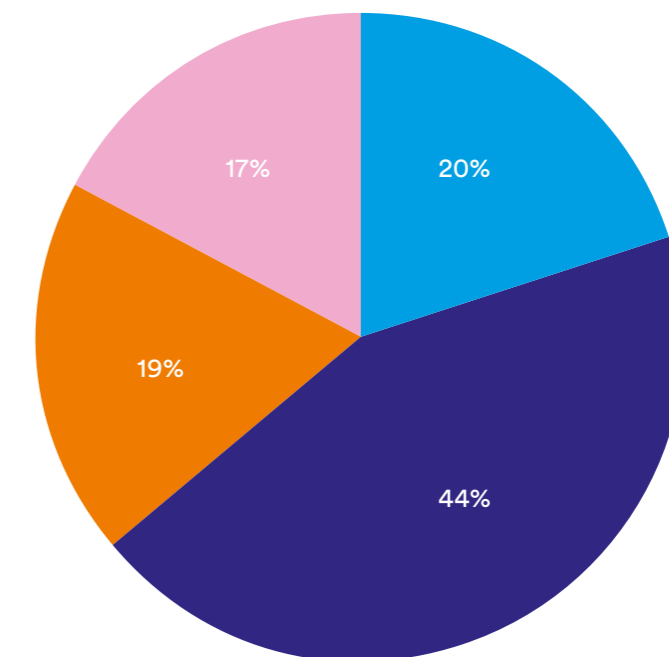
## Social media

Facebook and Instagram were identified as an information source about opportunities to socialise by nearly a quarter of participants but not used by this entire group.



## Assistance needed to participate in social activities

- No assistance
- Information
- Encouragement
- Support to attend



A fifth of participants said that they are self-reliant and confident to find and get involved in local activities if they wanted to.

Three quarters said that they need information this might include reliable information about the activity so that they could be prepared to attend, clear travel directions and information about accessing a venue as well as information about the venue including availability of food and drinks, access and toilet facilities.

People said it is important for them to be aware of potential costs involved in advance of taking up an activity so that they could be sure to have the money.

*I'm pretty good on getting around. I help my neighbours too. Otherwise, some of them would never get out.*

Just under a third of participants said that they needed motivation and encouragement to get involved in activities.

*I find I need talking into trying new things. I used to throw myself into different things but now I find I need persuading.*

About a third of people said that they needed help to travel or to plan travel including route planning, booking Dial-a-ride or taxis. Among this group, seven people said that they needed an escort to use public transport some were reliant on neighbours to help.

*My neighbour knows the buses much better than I do. She helps me work out how I'll get to places.*

## Support to attend activities

A third of participants said that they need support to attend social activities such as a reminder of the event, encouragement to go or help preparing and planning the journey.

*I find that I worry a lot and that stops me doing things. I don't like having to go on the bus myself. I worry that I'll get lost and end up in trouble. It would be nice to have help.*

*You might need help to get through the door on the first day if you don't know anyone even if you are fine travelling and know where you are going. It can be hard to start something new.*

Sometimes practical support to plan and attend activities is provided by support workers, the community connector service provided by Shoreditch Trust or by family members. For some people an encouraging phone call from a friend or neighbour might be enough to help them attend and build up a regular pattern of attendance.

*The day before mum goes to her class I will put out her bag and travel card. In the morning, I ring her to remind her to leave on time and to check that she knows where she's going.*

*I always knock for Pauline, if I didn't she wouldn't get out*

We have several older people who need a bit of a push to get to the community lunch. I'll always remind them when I see them about. We send a volunteer to escort a couple of ladies down, but mostly people look out for others in their block that they know need the company.

*I plan to get to things but on the day, I often struggle to get going and end up not going.*

There are plenty of opportunities for older people in the borough, if not in Hackney Wick but many people, especially those with conditions, which make it hard for them to get about, won't be able to get to these activities or if they do, might not be able to sustain attendance.

Local experts highlight the need to support older people to get involved in and sustain participation in community activities.

*People with depression or dementia, in particular, are unlikely to be able to get to activities, say lunch clubs, on a regular basis unless there is a bit of help to get them there. This doesn't have to come from a professional.*

**I find that I worry a lot and that stops me doing things. I don't like having to go on the bus myself. I worry that I'll get lost and end up in trouble. It would be nice to have help.**

(Male 80s)

## Experiences of different groups

### Men

Research has shown that older men are often at greater risk of poor health and social isolation in comparison to women. This has often been put down to a disinterest in their own health and well-being and disengagement with health service delivery.

*Men tend not to take care of themselves very well. They won't go to the doctors or try to help themselves.*

*Men really go down when they are left alone. There's nothing for them.*

*Men used to be happy to go to the pub but many locals have closed down now. Men need the chance to be together and fend for themselves.*

This view was supported by Local Experts who told us that women are more willing to ask for help than men are and may make more effort to solve problems themselves.

*We find that men often have trouble to pick themselves up after a bereavement. They may have become dependent on their wives to maintain family and social links and struggle to cope on their own. Men need to be able to get involved in low-key activities, which are not demanding. It's almost like they need to re-learn how to socialise.*

*Men are much more reluctant to open up. They don't always have the knack or opportunity for chat that women seem to find easier.*

Some participants said that they thought men had a tendency to ignore issues such as becoming increasingly isolated, until the issue becomes so acute that it causes serious harm.

Men living on their own are at higher risk of inactivity and self-neglect. They may start to drink and smoke too much.

### People with mental health needs

People with mental health needs were identified as a group at higher risk of social isolation.

The incidence of many common mental health issues increase with age, for example, some studies show that depression rates among people over 85 can rise to 40%.

Older people with mental health needs are likely to have additional challenges that increase their isolation, for example, alcohol misuse, poor physical health and financial problems.

One local expert explained how people experiencing mental health issues face a negative spiral.

*The lonelier a person is, the more likely they are to experience increased depressive symptoms.*

*When I get depressed, I find I just have not got the go to talk to anyone.*

A local expert from the Social Prescribing Team reported that older people experiencing common mental health problems often fail to seek help and may believe their distress is an expected element of ageing. Often, even if medical or therapeutic help is requested, it may be a challenge to reach appropriate help locally.

Not only does a mental health condition make it harder for an individual to stay connected but are likely to experience stigma and prejudice which increases their exclusion.

*I think people saw him as some kind of threat not as someone who was having hard time.*

*You could feel like you are making progress in getting to know people – then one single bad day can blow you out of the water. People can judge you awful hard.*

**Men really go down when they are left alone. There's nothing for them.**

(KF, Hackney Carers )



# When I get depressed, I find I just have not got the go to talk to anyone.

(Female 70s)

## People who have limited English

People with limited English language skills were identified as having additional challenges in maintaining social connections as they age.

If you haven't got good English, you may lose confidence to participate in activities as you age. The pool of people around you who share your language may get smaller and your social world could become restricted.

In addition, a local expert pointed out that people for whom English is a second language may lose language skills through age-related cognitive impairment or dementia.

## People without families or those whose families live far away

Participants and local experts identified people without families or those who live far away as more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness.

If you have no family around there is no safety net – no one to get you out of trouble.

As you get older you learn that family is everything. I feel sorry for people without families

## Older people from a black or minority ethnic background

Racist prejudice contributes to the experience of social isolation and loneliness of some older Hackney Wick residents.

A participant who emigrated from Guyana spoke about not being accepted by her neighbour despite having lived in Hackney for nearly sixty years.

I lived next door to my neighbour for almost forty years, sent my children to school with hers. She might say "hello" but I know she never will see me as a friend.

A participant who was born in London and has Caribbean roots told us that her efforts to connect with neighbours from different backgrounds resulted in rebuff, which she found painful.

I don't feel isolated because I have my family and my church and many friends. I try to help my neighbours who are old like me sometimes – because that's the kind of person I am- but I know that some don't want my help.

In particular, participants and local experts identified older people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds who live apart from their family or others from their community are likely to be at higher risk of social isolation.

I find that older people may not be sensitive to cultural differences. For example, an African neighbour of mine is judged because she talks louder than other people. She is very friendly but people take her the wrong way.

One Turkish participant shared her surprise that older people in London experience isolation and loneliness.

In my country, older people are never alone. They live with their families and help until they can't anymore and then their children and grandchildren take care of them. It was my biggest surprise to see that things are very different here.

Two local experts said that they believed that older people from African or Caribbean backgrounds in Hackney Wick were less likely than white groups to become socially isolated or lonely in older age. They said that the main reasons for this seem to be stronger family connections, participation in a church and being part of community group, which has been long established in Hackney.

## Disability

Both participants and local experts said people with disabilities might be more likely to be socially isolated due to added difficulties getting around, maintaining involvement in activities and perhaps communicating.

We know that businesses and community centres are supposed to be accessible but in reality, the challenge of getting in and out of places can be intimidating and exhausting. As I've got, even though I've always been determined, I simply don't have the energy.

If you're in a wheelchair or on sticks, you are not invisible but it seems to be a reason not to be seen. I'll be waiting at the bus-stop and the bus-driver looks straight ahead like you're nobody.

One participant said she had been better able to maintain relationships and interests as she has aged because her life-long experience of disability had demonstrated the need to work at relationships in order to stay connected.

One participant said that she felt that she had been better able to maintain relationships and interests as she has aged because she has lived with disability all her life and learned the importance of building and maintaining relationships to stay connected from a young age.

## People with learning difficulties

We did not engage any participants who have a learning difficulty as part of this research. However, three participants as well as four local experts identified people with learning difficulties as a group, which is likely to experience higher levels of social isolation and loneliness especially when living independently and away from close family connections.

Two of the participants have worked as carers for people with learning disabilities and one was a parent of an adult who has Downs Syndrome and lives in supported housing out of the area.

There are several clusters of supported and independent living schemes for people with learning difficulties in Hackney Wick.

Participants said they thought that people with learning difficulties were likely to struggle to make and retain friendships as well as experiencing discrimination, which made them vulnerable to abuse. They identified that some people with learning difficulties may struggle to communicate and connect with people beyond their immediate circle.

## Ageism

Four participants specifically mentioned that maintaining social contacts and staying active as they age has been hampered by the prejudice of individuals, institutions and systems.

Participants reported that they had felt under pressure to give up activities that they enjoyed.

No one said anything in particular but they made it clear that it was time for me to step down.

People assume that if you are old you are no longer reliable or even interested involved in learning. One day I found that I had been deleted from the mailing list.

## LGBT people

As Older LGBT older people we know we never really fit in and are used to that.

Many older LGBT people have low expectations of genuinely being welcomed and fitting into groups other than those that specifically LGBT. They may have discrimination throughout their lives and even criminalisation.

The world has changed. The pubs and clubs where we used to go don't exist anymore and now we are all expected just to fit in. Young people have no idea what our lives were like.

I dream about there being a friendly café round here where older lesbians are really welcome.

LGBT participants pointed out that there are London-wide networks for their community but that activities often involve travelling which is too much of a struggle or simply impossible for some.

# I dream about there being a friendly café round here where older lesbians are really welcome.

(Female 80s)

# What works in supporting older people maintain social connections

## Peer support to stay connected

Participants spoke about the importance of being able to support each other especially when they may have shared similar experiences or challenges.

We have lost quite a few friends but find that those left tend to stay in touch because we know how hard it can be.

We should help each other out because we are in the same boat. I know what it's like to be alone. Don't hold back from contacting people who have lost a husband or wife.

Support from people with specific connections, for example, participants who share an experience of immigration referred to a common link, even if they have come from different countries of origin. Participants who arrived in the area at a similar time to them said they had built connections and friendships based on that experience.

## Maintaining interest and positive thinking

Several participants highlighted the importance of being optimistic and sharing a positive attitude as key to maintaining social connections. Over half the participants interviewed identified the personal responsibility of individuals to maintain an interest in the world and make an effort to stay connected.

Put your lippy on and get out there.

It's never too late to make new friends. Our lives change. You lose old friends but I've found that I still want to get to know new people. I think I'll always be like that.

## Owning a pet

Participants said that having a pet has improved their wellbeing. In particular, dog owners said that their pets helped them to feel connected.

I'm out walking my dog twice a day, even if I don't fancy it. Walking him gets me out and about. I know what's going on.

Animals are very good company if you are on your own.

Having a dog means you talk to other dog owners. It's like being in a club.

## Volunteering

Many participants identified volunteering as a positive way of meeting new people, maintaining a sense of purpose and staying connected.

It's great to have a reason to get up. I know I'm needed and I never let them down.

The volunteers we spoke to were very positive about the benefits of getting involved in activities where they can contribute to their community. In particular, three volunteers said that they valued working as part of team alongside different groups, and in particular with younger people.

I volunteer at the Gascoyne Lunch Club. I love being part of the team and working with young people to get food ready, the tables set and then to eat together.

I'm a befriender. I visit people who cannot get out. I also walk a neighbour's dog because she cannot walk far.

Volunteering is an effective way to share the skills and talents of older people.

Participants pointed out the benefits of reciprocity they found through volunteering and valued volunteering as a route to belonging to a community that cares about them.

I help out at the church. It's like family to me. I feel looked after.

People always say "thank-you" and I feel like I've done a good job.

Local experts identified the benefits of including older people as volunteers in local projects.

Older people have great experience, time to give and so much to gain through volunteering. Many look for a role once they retire and it can give them a new sense of purpose and network of contacts.

There is no reason why people in their 80s and older can't continue to volunteer – they can listen or offer help on the phone, do admin or help others to stay connected – for example, checking in with people who have memory problems.

Despite general agreement that volunteering is a valuable way for older people to remain connected, there were only two participants over eighty maintaining volunteer formal roles. With some consideration, there is great potential for local agencies to support older residents stay connected by offering a range of flexible volunteering options close to home through which older people could continue to contribute and remain part of the community.

One participant shared an experience of being excluded from taking up a volunteer role

I wanted to volunteer but needed to get a (DBS) certificate before I started. I don't have a passport so they told me I couldn't get the certificate.

Although participants over eighty reported that they valued opportunities to help others through informal volunteering such as getting tea ready for meetings in sheltered units.

## Befriending

About one third of the participants we contacted struggled to get out of the house. Many said that they needed opportunities to socialise at home or very nearby. Two participants said that they valued regular visits from befrienders introduced by community organisations.

I'd recommend getting a befriender. I have a visit every week it's lovely to know what's going on in the world. I used to worry that she'd find me boring and not come back but we have lovely chat.

Local experts told us that in there is often a long wait to access befriending services and that there is an urgent need for increased access to these projects. Schemes run by Volunteer Centre Hackney and Shoreditch Trust as well as Compassionate Neighbours, which specifically provides end of life support, were identified as particularly valued as they offer support over a longer time-frame enabling time build trusting relationships.

## Keep moving

Many participants said that taking steps to make sure that they maintained their mobility was an important factor in being able to maintain social connections.

Participants said they maintained their physical mobility by walking regularly as far as possible, gardening, taking part in exercise classes, doing physio exercises at home,

They highlighted the need keep moving

Walking netball at Kings Hall is fun. It's good to be in a team.

Keep dancing!

Get out with the Walking Together group. It's a nice gentle pace. You get plenty of rest stops and meet people who are interesting.

My mum used to love dancing. She has dementia now and life has really shut down but every week she perks up for the Chair Disco.

Participants also identified the priority to avoid falls, which might be life changing and could result in severely limiting their movement.

I've chucked out stuff I don't need. The last thing I need is to break a hip falling over.

The Falls Clinic at the Homerton has been great in helping me recover confidence to get about and improve the strength of my muscles.

## Make the most of the opportunities available

Many participants considered that Hackney is a good place in which to grow old and advocated for making the most of local resources including learning opportunities, access to libraries, museums, cinema, theatre and music venues and free transport.

We've got everything in Hackney. It's the place to be.

You can do something different every day of the week for free.

If you are out and about then you meet like-minded people.

## Keep talking

Participants advised that their peers should make an effort to keep talking to friends and neighbours, even if conversations are restricted.

*Just chatting and letting people know little things about your life, or the life you used to have is so important.*

*I still keep contact with my friend. These days I ring her up more often instead of going out. We still have a good chat.*

A couple of participants said that they were worried that they would lose the habit or skills of chatting to people other than their close family.

*You get used to your own company and talking can be an effort or you worry that you'll say something daft.*

## Stay in contact with young people

Many participants said that they would advise peers to maintain relationships with young people to stay connected and to share different perspectives. Participants valued relationships with younger family members and friends.

*Be persistent. Put effort into maintaining relationships. Stay in touch with your grandchildren or get to know young people who live near you. There is so much to share between generations*

Talking to a younger person enabled one participant to open up sensitive issues that she felt she could not share with someone of a similar age.

*I've found that I can talk to her (Compassionate Neighbour volunteer) about things I can't share with anyone else. I can't talk to my children about dying. Friends my age are careful to dodge the subject. But I've found myself sharing what I want for my funeral! I think I can do that because she's young.*

## Connecting people to local community activities

Participants and particularly local experts highlighted the need to create pathways to support isolated older people to local community activities.

Participants we spoke to shared examples of how they had been supported to get involved in activities that they would not have explored alone by friends or neighbours.

## Sharon got me into the Bingo. I'd never have gone by myself.

Two participants shared that they had been referred to local activities by a social prescriber based within their GP practice.

*There is a huge need for mechanisms to support older people to take part or maintain their involvement in our community. We should focus on joining up those who are alone with our community centres, churches, schools and clubs.*

Local experts identified the need for significantly more support to connect older people with a wide range of opportunities to socialise in the local area.

People need help to get over the threshold. There are local agencies to connect isolated residents to community activities, for example, social prescribing projects, but so much more could be done to support and maintain participation in activities or networks.

**There is a huge need for mechanisms to support older people to take part or maintain their involvement in our community. We should focus on joining up those who are alone with our community centres, churches, schools and clubs.**

(SM, Vicar)

# Experience of loneliness

Assessing people's experience of loneliness may be more complex than measuring levels of social contact and the issues may be more sensitive for participants to contemplate or share.

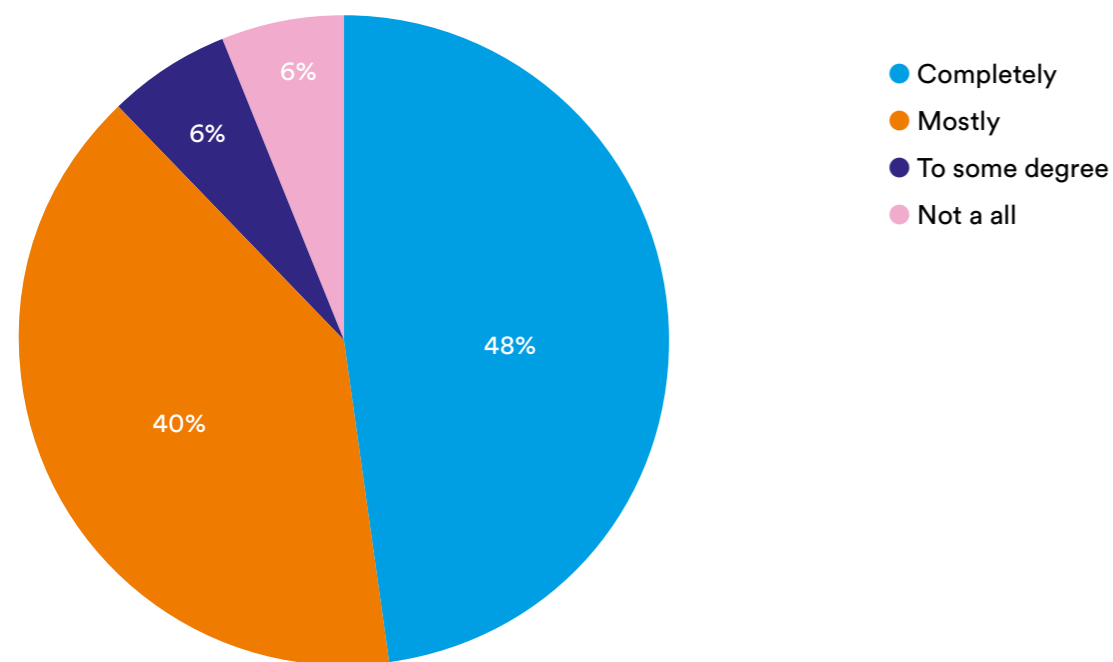
The steering group selected standard questions from English Longitudinal Survey of Ageing (ELSA) to capture the quality of relationships to identify participants' experience of loneliness.



## Satisfaction with friendships and relationships

- a) completely
- b) mostly
- c) to some degree
- d) not at all

### I am content with my friendships and relationships



Initially, twenty-five participants reported that they are completely content with their friendships and relationships. Twenty-one said that for the most part, they are happy with the way things are. A small proportion of the participants said that they were either not at all happy or to some degree happy with their friendships and relationships.

I've got more friends than I had when I was working. People have the time for each other here. We're in it together.

Yes. I walk my dog twice a day. Every time I step out, I meet friendly faces. Always someone stops for a chat. This is a lovely estate. At Christmas they bring all the old people hampers. You feel looked after.

I'm content with my friendships. It feels about right. I'm not going to rush out and take up with new people at my age.

Two participants added that although they were content with their current friendships and relationships they were concerned that this might not always be the case.

I wouldn't want things to change.

It's all good now but every funeral I go to I think that this won't last long

The few who said that they were not at all content with their friendships and relationships live alone, do not know people living nearby and either have no family or live far away from family.

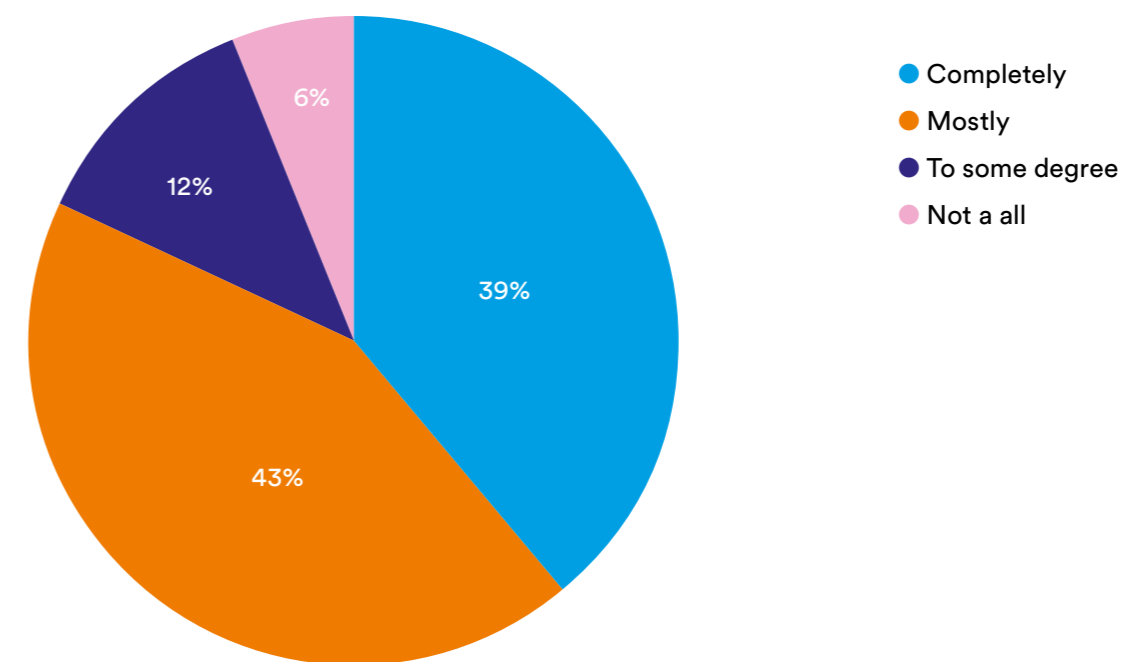
I never married, I lost most of my friends when I stopped working - that's over twenty years ago now, then I had to leave my flat and move here where I knew no one.

I used to have lots of friends but I hardly see them now.

## Perception of support available

- a) completely
- b) mostly
- c) to some degree
- d) not at all

### I have enough people I feel comfortable asking for help at any time



For the most part participants indicated that they felt that help was available to them if needed most of the time.

My wife died two years ago and I miss her terribly indoors but people on this estate really look out for me. There are more than a dozen people on this street I could call day or night for help. They would be there. I didn't know it before my wife died but I'm sure now.

People here (sheltered unit) look out for each other. Help is always at hand – not just from staff, but the residents who know what it's like to be old and on your own.

However, the three participants who indicated that they were not at all comfortable of being able to ask for help were emphatic that there was no one available to help them out and this is a constant fear for them.

This year, for the first time in my life I dreaded my birthday. My sister has always been there. She died in March. I sat through the whole day and no one said Happy Birthday to me. No cards.

Nearly Local Experts said that they believed many older people they are in contact with, especially those in their 80s and 90s, were not confident that the help they need would be available from family, even if the family live relatively closely.

People are often sensitive to potential negative judgement of their family relationships- very few people admit that they do not get the help they need from their families even if this is clearly the case.

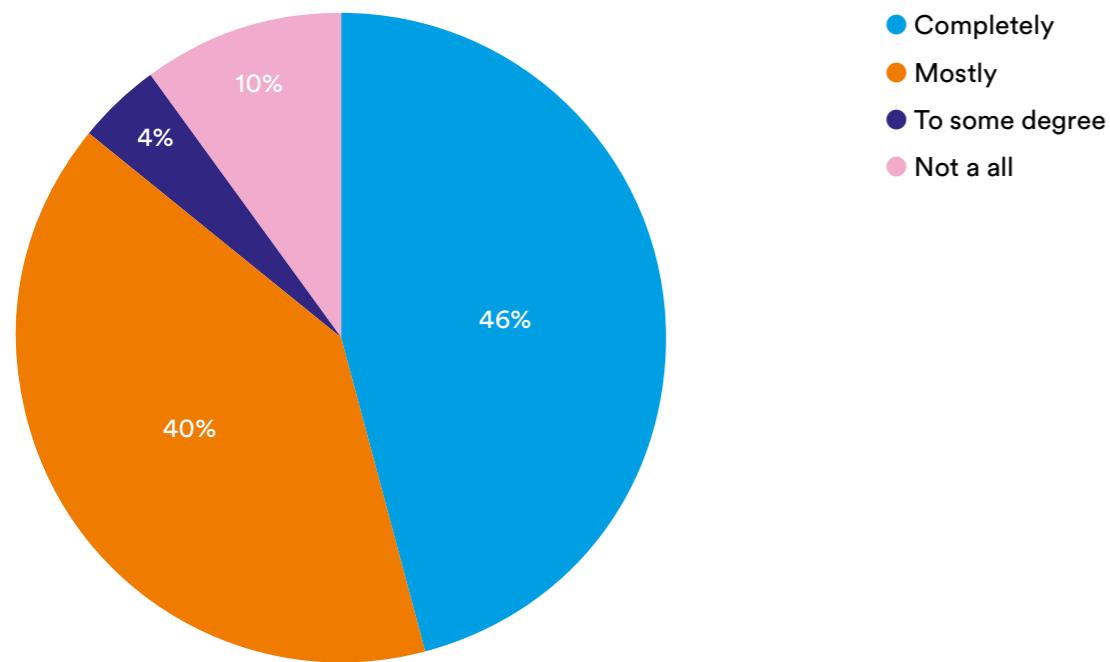
It's heart breaking when you hear people say that their families are too busy, work too hard or spend the little time they have with their children or grandchildren....it must be so hurtful to be bottom of the list, or not even on it.

The issue of loneliness is very sensitive and experienced differently by different people so sometimes staff or neighbours aiming to help lonely people struggle to find a way to offer help.

Some residents put on a brave front. They don't want you to know. You can try to get them involved and help them to make new friends but you have to be very careful not to step too far...the issues are very sensitive and if you over-step the mark you could lose them completely.

## My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be

- a) completely
- b) mostly
- c) to some degree
- d) not at all



Just fewer than half the participants reported that their relationships and friendships are as satisfying as they would like them to be.

*It doesn't take much. We are not in each other's pockets but I'm completely satisfied with the friendships I have.*

When talking about the satisfaction with their relationships, some participants talked about the importance of reciprocity of their relationships. Great value was placed on relationships where mutual support is unquestioned. Participants talked about enjoying being able to rely on their friends and to be available to help them out when needed.

*We look out for each other- that's the most important thing. Some days I'll need help and she'll be there and when she's all upset I just put the kettle on and get the biscuits out.*

*My husband died eight years ago. I miss him every day. That won't change. I've got used to a new kind of life. I've still got my friends and neighbours I see nearly every day. I've moved in here (sheltered scheme) and made new friends. We've all lost our husbands so we mind each other.*

In general, participants were less inclined to share their own experience of loneliness but referred to the experience of others they know and of the devastating impact of loneliness.

*There are people here (sheltered unit) who never get visitors. They move in without knowing anyone. Those are the ones who don't last long.*

Clearly, for some older people in Hackney Wick, loneliness is a very painful experience.

*It's hard to go to hospital appointments- dreading the news that might be coming and knowing that there's no one to share it with.*

A few participants articulated the impact of loneliness had on them.

*There is nothing worse than knowing that your existence hardly matters to the people around you. Some days I feel like a ghost.*

*I didn't know what to do when the cat died.*

**This year, for the first time in my life I dreaded my birthday. My sister has always been there. She died in March. I sat through the whole day and no one said Happy Birthday to me. No cards.**

(Female 90s)

# What Loneliness looks like

The Wise Wick Steering group developed a picture of what connectedness and loneliness looks like among older people in Hackney Wick from the stories collected in this project.

## Loneliness is:

- Loss of - a partner, mobility, choice, recognition
- Living alone
- Anxiety about “what might happen” with no-one to interrupt negative thoughts
- Not knowing your neighbours
- Not being able to get to where you want
- Having no family or living far away from them
- Feeling like a burden or believing that family members are too busy to help
- Having little to look forward to

## Connected is:

- Knowing the name of the concierge, GP receptionist and corner shop owner
- being confident that your neighbour will take care of your parcel
- knowing the local gossip and plans to change a local bus-route
- knowing when a new business is opening
- contacting a local service with confidence that your needs will be met
- knowing when the schools break up for summer

# Emerging themes

Some themes which do not respond directly to the questions in the survey but are related and linked to the experience of social isolation and loneliness have emerged in our conversations with older people



## A Changing Environment

People interviewed connected older people's experience of loneliness and social isolation with the changing environment and demographics of the area

**I've lived in Hackney Wick all my life but I look up in the bus and think – where am I?**

Nearly all participants in the survey referred to the substantial changes in Hackney Wick including the impact of the 2012 Olympics. They have witnessed the effects of waves of regeneration and of gentrification, and these processes have influenced their sense of belonging and connection.

For some, the changes in the area make Hackney Wick a better, more dynamic and interesting place to be. Others considered nearly all the changes to be negative for older people, if not for all of the community as a whole.

For everyone, the physical changes to the area have changed how people navigate the ward.

**Everything is changing. The place is almost unrecognisable.**

**Old people always say that things are changing, but here and now things are moving so fast and furious. I'm not complaining, it's just the way it is. I think it's probably just as baffling for the young people- maybe worse because they have to live with it.**

Some people said that change has been for the better.

**The place looks nicer, cleaner, more taken care of. The buses have improved.**

Others said that change had meant losing valued resources including a market, post office and library.

People associated changes to the area with rising prices which have had a direct impact on them. Local shops may no longer be relevant, or affordable.

**I don't want a bleeding skateboard.**

One resident in Wick Village said she had to travel to Tesco on Morning Lane or Lidl on Well Street to buy the essentials avoiding the higher costs and limited range of more local alternatives.

Many people said that the rise in rents and the price of property has meant that their children and younger generations of local families have been forced to move away. Often the move has been, not just out of Hackney but out of London. This means loss of every day contact, the opportunity to take care of and form relationships with grand-children and contributes to anxiety among older people uncertain about the availability of immediate help in case of urgent need

Some people interviewed spoke as if they are witnesses to the changes but not stakeholders. They raised concerns for the young people, perhaps their own grandchildren who have inherited uncertain times and challenges.

For many, the changes in the area have amplified older people's experience of loneliness and social isolation.

**I've lived in Hackney Wick all my life but I look up in the bus and think – where am I?**

**(Male 80s)**

## Being Part-of

Participants placed value on having long-standing connections on their estates and streets. For example, getting to know each other over years through playgroups, schools, membership of faith groups or sports clubs or alliance to a particular pub.

**I was on the darts team at The Tiger for years. We did everything together, birthdays, New Year, summer trips.**

Connections, which are maintained throughout life or involve different generations, can be especially important in old age. One participant illustrates this by sharing her story about life-long and inter-generational connections between families.

**He was a terror at school. Got into fights with my boy. Me and his mum sorted it out. He practically moved in with us when his mum re-married. I know that if I get into trouble he'll be there for me**

Participants who share an experience of immigration talked about a common link, even if they have come from different countries of origin. Participants who arrived in the area at a similar time to them said they had built connections and friendships based on that experience.

Participants talked about their engagement with different groups of new arrivals in the area. One person interviewed talked about developing relationships with people from the creative community, for example, getting involved in the Hackney Wicked Festival, beginning to feeling comfortable to visit the café at local art spaces and eventually participating in an art class.

Others shared examples of how they had developed positive relationships with new neighbours. However, many participants in the survey felt like newer residents were not interested in them and often not even aware of them.

Many of the older people interviewed referred to their experience of separation from the local community, not just because of their reduced involvement potentially linked to ageing but because of a decline in community togetherness.

**We are a world apart. I think that I'm invisible to them.**

For some the loss of community togetherness extended from a sense of not being part of the community to being irrelevant and not mattering.

## A voice for older people

To build genuine integration in the community rather than access to a few targeted services or activities older people must have a voice which carries weight and influences the changes needed.

**Older people have insight. We've had our own experience and have had time to think things through. We should be heard.**

Residents who have lived in Hackney Wick for a long time, have seen the area change and have contributed to the community throughout their lives. These people have been; active parent supporting a local school, congregation members or employees in services delivered locally and have essential local knowledge as well as insights into priorities for the future.

Older people in Hackney Wick should have a voice that talks with authority about the whole not a splinter, for example, older people should be included in discussions to plan local schools not just activities targeted at old people.

If social isolation and loneliness among older people are to be reduced in Hackney Wick the voices of Hackney Wick older residents need to influence the way the public sector operates in Hackney so that they change behaviours and procedures to be more empowering for older people and support their contribution to community life.

A fundamental for this is to establish effective communication channels that reach deep to engage different groups of older people including those who are not online. There should be support to get older people on line if that is what they would like.

Consultation needs to be targeted and active and to reach into groups beyond those who are active online or regular service users of services designated for older people.

**If people don't take any notice of us today then younger generations will face the same trouble when they hit their eighties.**

## Not all the Same

People contributing to this research shared many common experiences and perspectives as older people living in Hackney Wick but were quick to point out that older people living in the area are not all the same.

**We don't all like knitting. We don't all read The Sun.**

Participants had mixed feelings about belonging or being seen to belong to a community of older people.

Although participants said they would like to access activities provided specifically for older people, many were very clear that their priority is to participate in activities aimed at the whole community and not be shifted into those designed for old people.

**I don't want treated like an "old person".  
I'm not interested in old people's lunch-clubs.**

**I don't get involved in stuff for old people.  
No offence. I just want to be part of what's going on.**

Everyone has a different experience of social isolation and loneliness.

We were told that there is a chasm between the experience of someone in their sixties who is in good health, working full-time, financially independent, taking care of family and another in their late eighties, living alone, with a range of complex conditions and no family contact.

Older people from different ethnic backgrounds are likely to have very different experiences of social isolation and loneliness. Research conducted into the experience of social isolation and loneliness among different groups migrating to the UK in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s including Indian, African, Chinese, Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities shows levels of loneliness among BAME people as generally higher than for the rest of the population..

Similarly, the children of immigrants are also likely to have different experiences throughout their lives and into age.

The stories shared in this research clearly show that difference relating to gender, age, ethnic background, disability, sexual orientation and lived experience all have an influence on people's experience of social isolation and loneliness as they age.



## Need for an Age-Friendly Hackney Wick

**An Age-friendly Community enables people of all backgrounds to actively participate, and treats everyone with respect, regardless of age**

People referred to the need for better consideration and effort to make Hackney Wick an age-friendly community which is inclusive, values the contributions older people make to society, and challenge ageism and social isolation. The starting point for building an age-friendly community is to value the experience and input of older people.

**Older people should be valued for their experience.**

An age-friendly community encourages active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities.

**We need better services that join up and do what they are needed to do for local residents.**

**An Age-friendly Community is a place** where people of all ages are able to live healthy and active later lives. These places make it possible for people to continue to stay in their homes, participate in the activities that they value, and contribute to their communities, for as long as possible.

Older residents are engaged in shaping the place where they live. This involves local groups, councils, businesses and residents all working together to identify and make changes in both the physical and social environments, for example transport, outdoor spaces, volunteering and employment, leisure and community services.

### Building an age-friendly Hackney Wick would involve:

- **Creating the Conditions to reduce and prevent loneliness**
- **Identifying and Informing older people at risk of loneliness**
- **Working with Communities to increase services & activities available**
- **Supporting Individuals to live fulfilling lives**



# What works in Hackney Wick

During the time this community research took place Wick Award initiated and supported a range of projects and activities to bring people together



## Julia does organic gardening



After thirty years of working as a psychiatric nurse, when Julia retired she wondered how she would manage to stay busy and connected.

Julia helped to establish a community garden on her estate where she encourages her neighbours to get active, get outdoors and grow their own organic veg. Taking care of the garden keeps Julia fit and mobile and there is plenty of time to chat.

Julia values sharing her passion for organic growing with her community including her grandchildren.

**I love being part of this project. Neighbours come to spend together or to enjoy the peace. I feel like I can help young people get involved and learn from nature.**

The garden has become a community hub where local residents can enjoy green space by the River Lea, learn new skills and make new friends.

**Why it works** - free, on the doorstep, initiated by local residents, outdoors, mood-boosting, active, opportunity to learn and share, intergenerational, opportunity to connect.

## Rainbow Supper Club

Rowena has always been a community activist and has never stopped getting involved in community events.

Rowena realised that there are very few opportunities for LGBT elders to socialise in a friendly environment. She applied to Wick Award for a Community Chest grant to establish a monthly Supper Club hosted in the communal lounge of the sheltered housing where she lives.

A regular dinner date provides the chance to meet new friends for people who may not have positive contact with their families and might have struggled to maintain relationships with people from their LGBT community as they have aged.

The Supper Club was promoted via the Open Door Project for LGBT Elders.

**Why it works** – free, welcoming, safe, targeted at a specific group, opportunity to meet and connect

## Shirley does Chair Disco

Shirley is in her seventies and cared for her mum with no support for many years. It was a struggle to find any time for herself.

Shirley's GP referred her to the Family Action Social Prescribing Project, which introduced her to Chair Disco, a free weekly exercise session.

Chair Disco is hosted in the resident lounge at Adelaide Court, a safe and comfortable place to be with easy for the sheltered housing residents to join in.

Chair Disco became the one slot of "me- time" in Shirley's week. The sessions helped her mobility and improved her mood.

The friends Shirley found at Chair Disco were there for her when her mum died.

**Why it works** – Free, Fun, friendly, on site for those least able to travel, mood-boosting, builds strength and mobility.

See Chair Disco here: [vimeo.com/422461086](https://vimeo.com/422461086)

## Elsie likes tea and chat

Elsie is in her nineties and lives independently on Gascoyne Estate. She has great neighbours and, although she is not as mobile as she used to be, is a regular church-goer.

Elsie met Gareth from Volunteer Centre Hackney when he visited St Mary Eton Church to promote the Community Supporters Project.

Elsie was matched with Charlotte, a befriending volunteer who lives nearby and has been visiting Elsie regularly for tea and chat for the last eighteen months.

**I don't go out much any more but I really look forward to seeing Charlotte. We get on so well. She keeps me in touch with the world.**

**Why it works** – Intergenerational, supported by best practice in volunteering and thoughtful matching





## Gordon and Trowbridge Silver Surfers

Gordon is Chair of Trowbridge Seniors Club.

Our members were wanted to get online so they can stay in touch with their friends and families but some of them were worried they wouldn't be able to get the hang of it.

The club was supported by the Economy of Hours Project to establish a programme of IT sessions offering one to one support delivered by volunteers.

Volunteers and learners loved making new friends and sharing skills. Many learners found that they were able to get online independently after a few sessions.

See Silver Surfers here:

<https://tinyurl.com/y8nbd45w>

**Why it works** - free, friendly, attached to an established club, brings together different generations, supported by a skilled and welcoming co-ordinator.



## Bridget is on the Gascoyne 2 Lunch Team



Bridget in her eighties and volunteers every Wednesday to prepare and serve a community meal at Gascoyne 2 Community Centre.

Bridget completed a Level 2 Food Hygiene Course to become a regular cook and loves being part of an intergenerational team providing a warm welcome and hot meal.

Regular guests value Bridget's cooking skills and friendship.

**I never miss a week. After all the work, we sit down together for our lunch. I'm always thanked properly. It's good to be helping people. For some people it's the highlight of the week.**

**Why it works** - Local, every week, intergenerational, opportunity to share

See Gascoyne Community Meal here:

[vimeo.com/425094703](https://vimeo.com/425094703)

# Reflections on the Wise Wick approach

Working with community researchers from the local community has brought significant advantages to this project. Researchers' and Local Experts' embeddedness within Hackney Wick meant we could reach out to collect stories which otherwise would have been missed.

The research has been able to draw on their knowledge and insights of community researchers whose familiarity with local places, groups and people meant that they were able to pick up on themes during interviews.

Community research needs to be a slow process. Reaching out to find older people who do not usually join in community activities using the connections of individual community researchers takes considerable time. The stories were collected over a period of eighteen months.

We have learned that, for some older residents, informal connections can open doors to involvement in local groups and activities. By agreeing to participate in the research, some participants found they had made initial steps towards becoming more connected.

Nearly all participants said they enjoyed the process of meeting with community researchers and sharing their stories.

Several participants used the directory of local resources, which was compiled at the beginning of the project and developed during the course of the work. Community researchers invited participants to attend social activities during the research period and were able to introduce participants to activities where they had identified an interest.



# Wick Recommendations



## Overall Aim

Hackney Wick should aim to become an age-friendly neighbourhood where residents at all stages of life are able to make and maintain social connections. This means there should be opportunities for participation in community life that enhance the quality of life into old age. Organisations and service providers should be inclusive, ensuring they support older people with different needs and capacities.

## Approach

Hackney Wick should be a community, which has a positive approach to ageing and enables older residents help to shape the place that they live. Local groups, the council, businesses and residents should be encouraged to work together to identify and make changes in both the physical and social environments, especially in key areas such as transport, outdoor spaces, volunteering and employment, leisure and community services.

We should aim to:

- Create a culture of inclusion that welcomes diversity and is sensitive to the experiences and needs of different groups
- Value the capacity and resources of older people
- Support older people to stay active and get around
- Ensure older people have an influential voice in the development of the area
- Address the key problem of loneliness and social isolation

This will involve:

- Help for different generations to come together to respond to the needs of older people
- Ensuring low incomes are not a barrier to staying connected
- Ensuring housing, health and community services support people to maintain good social connections as they age
- Supporting older people to live in homes which meet their needs
- Ensuring the outdoors environment, especially green space is accessible and well used by older people

## Wick Award priorities for addressing social isolation and loneliness among older people

### 1 Culture of inclusion

Wick Award and community partners should;

Support older people in Hackney Wick to develop their own forum to create a voice for their needs and ambitions and use this voice to:

- Participate in Hackney Older People's Reference Group and other relevant local forums
- Support opportunities for older people to define local priorities addressing loneliness and social isolation
- Support older people's contribution to Hackney's Ageing Better and Inclusion Strategies and the Well Street Common Neighbourhoods Pilot
- Facilitate local discussion about how best community services can support older people to remain socially connected
- Build on existing informal networks to reach out to the most isolated and help them to remain connected
- Invite older people to review and inform the way we work and deliver services which:
- Help older people stay safe
- Support local projects which bring different generations together by encouraging older people to become mentors to local young people and connecting youth and older people's groups
- Support activities, which address a range of different needs, such as the weekly community meal, which brings together vulnerable older people and local families during school holidays.

### 2 Increase access to welcoming local spaces

Everyday social connections matter. Wick Award should support the development of Welcome Space in the Big Local area. This could include:

Environmental space to:

- Support for initiatives such as "chatty benches" or "friendly tables" in affordable and welcoming cafes where people can drop by and join others
- Support existing and development of new informal, outdoor meeting spaces. Examples include Well Street Tesco, seating areas outside Hackney Wick and Homerton Stations

Operational changes to:

- Encourage businesses to welcome older people by providing practical advice about access needs, including menu basics which might be attractive and affordable to older people supporting cafes to bring together different groups by inviting older people to join family-focused activities, inviting older people's groups to run sessions in venues attracting younger people
- Share information about venues that already welcome older people

### Development of Community Hubs

Wick Award should consider:

- Support for development of at least two identified Community Hubs, one on each side of A12. These should be on estates or close to residential areas and offer access information, a range of activities and opportunities for local people to access a friendly venue on a drop-in basis.
- Working with partners to develop a sustainable model for managing community centres to benefit all groups of local residents especially people who are lonely or socially isolated
- Partnering with local housing providers to make the most of communal space in sheltered housing accommodation

### 3 Activities on the doorstep

Wick Award should work with partners to help older people to participate in a range of community activities close to home.

These might include support for:

- Older people's and TRA groups to find funding for initiatives and activities
- Flexible volunteering opportunities enabling people to share skills and feel valued
- Stepping-stone pathway for older people to try activities without commitment
- Long term activities rather than short term projects
- Activities targeting people at higher risk of social isolation including men, LGBT and BAME groups and people who have dementia, long term conditions or learning difficulties. Where there are no such local activities, ensure that potential participants have information about their transport options
- Activities to improve wellbeing
- Activities in shared space at sheltered schemes
- Support faith groups in extending their offer to lonely or socially isolated older people
- Initiatives to encourage older people to get outdoors
- Participation in the Hackney Wick Creative Enterprise Zone to encourage increased participation of older people in local arts and culture organisations
- Initiative to encourage use of existing community facilities in the area including Homerton Library, schools, Children's Centres, art space and sports facilities

### 4 Increase awareness of local opportunities

Wick Award should work with partners to:

- Ensure campaigns targeting the most isolated older people reach these groups via networked peers. This approach requires an early lead in time for campaigns Identify neighbourhood champions to pass on information
- Promote advice services covering care services, housing options, financial advice and planning for end of life
- Produce and advocate for clear and large print leaflets which avoid jargon in favour of simple, direct language, with translations where needed
- Share information locally, for example by using posters in Library, Churches, Well Street Tesco, Estates and sheltered schemes noticeboards, community centres and GP Surgeries
- Avoid overdependence on online information by providing information by phone and dissemination of printed listings
- Support access to local IT classes
- Share directory of local resources and development of the new social prescribing platform
- Signpost opportunities for services to be delivered in people's homes including befriending projects, meal and pharmacy delivery services, at home visits from Compassionate Neighbours and community connectors projects

### 5 Help older people get about safely

To stay well and connected older people need to be able to get around their neighbourhood safely. Wick Award should therefore work with partners to:

- Promote access to transport options including TFL buses, HCT services, GOAL scheme, Taxi-card schemes, reliable taxi firms able to address the needs of passengers with disabilities
- Address dangerous cycling and the use of electric scooters on pavements especially at key danger points such as Wick Road, Well Street and Victoria Park by promoting safe use of shared use paths and more robust interventions including penalties
- Promote strategically placed benches on key routes to local shops and amenities, especially in areas where there are no bus-stops to enable people to rest safely
- Highlight access issues when changing road systems
- Create more disabled parking spaces and improve awareness about how these are prioritised, planned for and enforced locally
- Ensure vulnerable older people with disabilities are able to park close to their homes
- Make it easier for vulnerable residents to purchase visitor vouchers without having to apply online
- Improvements to pedestrian access around Eastway, Wick Road and Brookfield Road

### 6 Improve access to financial information and options

Wick Award should work with partners in to:

- Better access to information about claiming benefits in accessible venues close to home. These might be in GP practices or through provision of a walk in or phone service to older people such as to the Family Information Service
- Challenge the stigma of claiming benefits or asking for help
- Support for carers to access specialist financial information
- Provision of IT classes and free online access to enable people to apply for benefits independently
- Better information for vulnerable older people and those in contact with them about access to food banks, free community meals and charitable help

### 7 Amplify the voice of older people in planning local housing and increasing access to information about housing options

Good housing and support services are essential for people to age well and maintain social connections within their own communities. Wick Award and partners should therefore help ensure local providers:

- Include older people's voices in the planning of housing to meet current and future needs to ensure new developments include accessible housing for those with disabilities and complex conditions
- Build housing that supports neighbourly togetherness and mixed communities to avoid older people becoming isolated
- Improve information on and access to the aids and adaptations service
- Provide more social housing designed to meet the needs of older people
- Improve repairs reporting systems and action times on key issues such as lift repairs
- Use appropriate channels to involve and update older residents



**Update May 2020**



## Impact of Covid 19

This report, documenting the findings and recommendations of the Wise Wick Research on social isolation was completed at the outset of the COVID outbreak in the UK. This update has been included six weeks into the national lock down at a time of global emergency when social isolation measures have been introduced to address Covid 19.

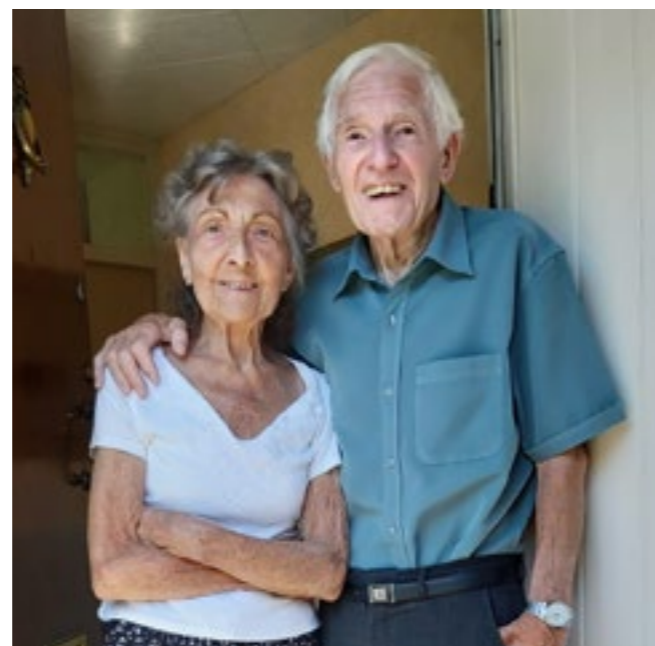
Significantly for our area and the work we have undertaken on Social Isolation for older people;

- Older people and those with underlying health issues are at higher risk of COVID 19 and need to self-isolate to protect themselves
- The national 30% of the population worst hit by the virus are from BAME groups
- Those on the lowest incomes experience higher rates of infection

The experience of social isolation and loneliness is not new to many older people in Hackney Wick. The current restrictions are impacting older people with the least resilience hardest and having a significant impact on physical and mental wellbeing.

We have already observed:

- The disruption to wider family, friendship and daily contact i.e. visits to local cafes, GP's, shopping has been significant. This has further isolated many local older people
- Uncertainty about the duration of lock down, fears for the future and the practical challenge of getting by on a day to day basis has increased anxiety
- Older residents who are not online do not have direct access to information, the benefits of new services currently being provided online or the means to stay in touch with friends and family
- Delivery of social care has seen restrictions
- Disruption to planned medical treatments and delays in the diagnosing of new conditions
- Isolation is impacting negatively on mobility because people are not getting the regular exercise, they need
- Impacts on mental wellbeing through social isolation and loneliness are likely to become even more profound
- People with specific conditions such as dementia are facing even greater challenges to adapting to the new restrictions



## Response to the Covid emergency in Hackney Wick

Wick Award is embedded in the local community and for this reason has been able to respond directly and immediately to support residents dealing with Covid 19.

Through established and trusted relationships and networks Wick Award has organised grassroots community-based response to local need. The reach and access to older and isolated residents, many of whom are not 'shielded' and are hidden from mainstream statutory provision currently includes over one hundred older people across the Wick Award area. Many participated in the research for this report, but some have become connected during the lock down.

Connections are growing daily through the web of local groups and individuals with knowledge and concerns. This demonstrating the need for community-based responses in the immediate and long term.

The economic impact of the pandemic will have a massive consequences on the delivery of services in the future, therefore the need to build a more connected and self-reliant community has become more essential.

During the COVID pandemic Wick Award is delivering against the recommendations in this report:

## Supporting individual vulnerable residents

Wick Award has been able to support older residents including those who participated in this community research by coordinating with local partners to maintain contact with vulnerable residents during lockdown offering help including;

- Regular check in and ongoing phone contact
- Information about local services including local mutual aid groups
- Direct support from trusted local volunteers willing to shop and collect medicines for those self-isolating, delivery of hot meals
- Referrals to Council emergency aid and food delivery



## Developing supportive networks

Wick Award has been able to support a local neighbourhood response to Covid 19 by developing a local partnership to organise support for the most vulnerable including

- Established Tenants' and Residents' Groups
- Emerging neighbourhood groups
- Local businesses
- Community organisations
- Faith groups

Wick Award has provided support to individuals initiating local action and establishing mutual aid groups by filtering and sharing the most useful information and resources and connect them with VCS organisations in the borough,

checking in regularly and providing them with motivation and guidance and supporting them to organise effectively and safely.

Wick Award has provided practical help to neighbourhood groups for example printing letters and posters for mutual aid groups, providing a shopping float for volunteers buying getting food for those self-isolating.

On estates where there is no established TRA Wick Award has identified trusted local people to provide volunteer support to those self-isolating.

## Liaising with borough-wide organisations

Wick Award has good contact with local GPs, health services, Faith organisations and the broader VCS organisations working in the borough and has been able to sign-post vulnerable residents to the safe and reliable support available to them including access to emergency funding streams.

The learning, insight, understanding and personally connections developed during the research for this report supports the work now underway with older people in Hackney Wick. Many were experiencing social isolation and loneliness prior to this work; many more are now isolated and experience loss of connection due to the COVID pandemic.

The body of this report details the data, lived experience, views and thoughts of older isolated people in Hackney Wick. The recommendations within the report reflect and respond to the evidence the research collected, the outcome of the work has enabled a community response in Hackney Wick which is appropriate, trusted and valued by older people. We know this because they have told us.