

Working in Partnership

2020



T.E.D.

Ageing Better
in East Lindsey

How does working in partnership help smaller organisations?

Collaboration between various third sector, private, and public organisations has increased over the last few years as public funding has reduced. Government contracts have also become much larger and often unmanageable for smaller organisations to implement on their own. In this report we highlight some of the challenges these partnerships face, as detailed in the literature, before showing how one TED delivery partner is implementing partnership work on the ground through a more informal and opportunistic approach.

About TED

Talk Eat Drink (TED) Ageing Better in East Lindsey is part of Ageing Better, a Programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better aims to develop creative ways for people aged over 50 to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness through a Test and Learn approach. It is one of five major programmes set up by The National Lottery Community Fund that test and learn from new approaches to designing services which aim to make people's lives healthier and happier.



TED is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and is managed by YMCA Lincolnshire

Working together allows organisations to share not only resources like funding but also expertise. Organisations that were often competing for the same money, are now looking at better ways to deliver greater continuity and levels of service. For example, in 2016 Groundwork and Greenspace Scotland, two environmental charities, signed a three-year strategic partnership agreement to work together on the development and delivery of green space programmes throughout the UK.

Additionally, research from Northern Ireland suggests that cross-sector partnerships enable partners to learn from each other, allowing each partner to better perform their roles, make things happen, help each other meet their goals, and develop more co-ordinated responses to problems (Boydell et al, 2008). Furthermore, research from England conducted in social care and health has shown that cross-sector partnerships are better placed to reach target participants and could involve more participants with different needs (CLES/nef, 2013). It is therefore possible to acknowledge that partnerships now play an important role in the everyday delivery of services in the UK.

Despite this, partnership working doesn't simply involve two or more companies getting together and everything falling into place. There are a number of challenges grounded in stereotypes, assumptions, and rhetoric (Kara, 2014) that aspiring partners must understand and be able to negotiate. For example, in terms of stereotyping, the private sector is often seen as commercial, efficient and/or predatory; the public sector as procedural, bureaucratic and/or accountable; and the third sector as responsive, creative and/or amateur/less competent. These stereotypes can then lead to various assumptions about how each organisation conducts business.

These assumptions can then undermine relationships and create perceived barriers. However, the trouble with assumptions is that they may not apply in all, if any cases. In regard to rhetoric, there is often a disparity between what the official discourse around working in partnership would have us believe (openness, democracy, innovation) and the actual reality. Often hierarchical structures exist that favour some agencies' interests over others and such a position can leave certain members of the partnership feeling alienated or frustrated.

Furthermore, much of the literature around partnerships highlights how they are different in every context (location, service, competition) and dependent on a range of complex and changing factors such as organisational priorities, interpersonal relationships and availability of resources (e.g. time, people, financial). This literature also highlights the necessity to build capacity in terms of individuals, organisations, and partnerships as a whole. In terms of individuals, partnerships need to provide intensive, effective and ongoing support for all those involved to help them perform their roles effectively.



This could include training, payment, IT provision or mentoring. At an organisational level, this may require smaller organisations involved in partnerships to grow in terms of staff numbers, both employed and voluntary, in order to meet the demands of the partnership. This may also involve some degree of organisational change or larger organisations may need to support smaller organisations to ensure they can effectively meet the needs of the partnership. In terms of partnerships as a whole, one suggestion is to shift the perspective away from doing more with less, to doing more with more. This may take some time and a shift in political direction and leadership, but it is possible to develop innovative ways of linking Government, the third sector and communities together to increase the scope and effectiveness of partnerships.

Despite this, as organisations and partnerships look to build and develop capacity, there is still the importance of knowledge, expertise and connections built at the community level, such as the strong, informal and often invisible relationships and networks that have been cultivated by local people on the ground over many years. It is this informal and sometimes invisible network, that has been a key factor in the success of the Magna Vitae facilitated Fitness, Food and Friends project.

Success story – Magna Vitae: TED Fitness, Food and Friends

The TED Fitness, Food and Friends project run by Magna Vitae Leisure is one example of when working in partnership can be successful, particularly from an informal perspective. The following sections thus highlight what the Fitness, Food and Friends project is, how it is facilitated and co-produced with beneficiaries shaping its content, and how Fitness, Food and Friends have come to engage with a wider network of providers and opportunities for older adults in East Lindsey.

The Fitness, Food and Friends project employs a flexible curriculum shaped by its members. As each new member joins the project, they are asked to complete an expression of interest form in regard to the sorts of activities that would interest them. This allows those facilitating the programme to tailor its delivery towards their members' needs, wants and interests. The programme is also refreshed every 12 weeks based on further feedback and any other events that may be happening in the area that would be suitable. By having this flexibility, it has allowed Fitness, Food and Friends to remain current and up to date with the needs of its beneficiaries, as well as being able to connect with, and bring in, outside partners and delivery personnel.

The variety of activities offered has included Thai Chi, Digital Skills and Alexa Training, Bushcraft, and Mental and Physical Health awareness. These sessions often include an activity and an educational element in order to shine a light on how a number of health problems faced in older age can be interrelated, for example, diabetes and depression.



Additional topics covered have also included: Glycaemic load in nutrition; antioxidants, fats and oils; food and mood; the role of protein in the diet; the Mediterranean diet; Indian food; mental health, heart health; type 2 diabetes; and arthritis. This variety of activities and educational topics is a key factor in Fitness, Food and Friend's success.

"Connecting with people, seeing the green trees, doing some planting, and being with more motivated and enthusiastic people just makes you feel better"

Margaret (Fitness, Food and Friends participant)

Additionally, although the Fitness, Food and Friends project is predominantly for older adults the sessions are open to all who may find them beneficial. In this way the programme has been able to engage with a wider base of people, placing participants and their needs at the centre of its design, while still satisfying its status as a TED partner.

By opening its doors to a wider audience this has also provided the Fitness, Food and Friends project with the ability to engage in a broader range of partnerships beyond the programme itself. For example, Fitness, Food and Friends has recently worked with a local cardiac rehabilitation programme allowing their beneficiaries to access some of the cooking and nutrition workshops. This has provided not only detailed nutritional information for those on the cardiac rehabilitation programme, but also vital links to information on how to support someone who has cardiac problems for those on the Fitness, Food and Friends project.

Fitness, Food and Friends also work with a number of other outside organisations. One of their main partnerships is with Platform Housing, a partnership that the Fitness, Food and Friends delivery managers have built over many years while working on a number of different community projects. Platform Housing run and manage a number of coffee mornings at their housing venues as well as village halls, to which Fitness, Food and Friends and Magna Vitae have access to, affording them the opportunity to promote various events and cultivate support.

Fitness, Food and Friends and Magna Vitae believe that this face-to-face approach to marketing is imperative, as often older adults, especially older men, are less likely to respond to a poster or ask what an event is about. If, however, they are engaged in a conversation about something there is likely to be less anxiety and clearer information passed along. Such a position is consistent with much of the learning being produced by TED and other Ageing Better partners which has highlighted how engaging with someone on a face-to-face, personal level can help break down barriers and remove any stereotypes regarding certain venues or activities.

"We were absolutely delighted with the success of our Fitness, Food and Friends project. The sessions focused on how to improve mental health and physical wellbeing using practical tools which were easily transferable into the home"

Donna Lysons (Community Engagement Officer at Waterloo Housing)



It's this 'boots-on-the-ground' approach that has allowed Fitness, Food and Friends to foster other partnerships and relations. They now have links with the Eco Centre, a non-profit organisation focusing on building stronger communities by connecting people with each other and the environment in Skegness, who provided their facility for a 12-week block of Fitness, Food and Friends. This allowed for a range of outdoor activities to take place including gardening, harvesting fruit and veg, creating products from wood (e.g. a cheeseboard), bush craft skills (e.g. lighting a campfire and cooking over it), and general information about plant life, wildlife, and the outdoors.

"the added dynamic of the eco-centre as a venue added value to the project as it allowed people to get outdoors and enjoy the peace and calmness of the site. As a result, people even reported lower levels of stress which was great to hear".

(Marko Humphrey Fitness, Food and Friends Project Officer)

This partnership is symbiotic, as Fitness, Food and Friends get an outdoor venue in which to hold different events that would not have been possible to do in other places, and the Eco Centre get to promote their services to local residents. Fitness, Food and Friends even provided links to a taxi company to get people from their residence in the local Platform Housing venue to the Eco Centre, thus providing further opportunities for relationship building between local businesses, big and small.

"When people and groups like Fitness, Food and Friends want to come here for a series of sessions, we find out what they want to do, and we will do our utmost to make that happen. It is not about us laying on a set number of activities and being prescriptive but about working together"

Paul Charles (EcoCentre Director)

Fitness, Food and Friends have also started to cultivate links with the Job Centre and the Department of Work and Pensions, again through personal contacts and opportunities. The DWP and Job Centre have begun taking a more holistic view towards unemployment and getting people back into work, especially with new research showing how long-term unemployment of three months or more can significantly impact on a person's mental health. By accessing programmes like Fitness, Food and Friends, the DWP and Job Centre believe they can help improve a person's wellbeing which can have a significant impact on their attitude towards work and negotiating the challenges faced in finding work.

Finally, it's not just Fitness, Food and Friends who have been engaging in this type of partnership working. The TED Project has helped foster greater links between YMCA Community Lincs and East Lindsey District Council, as well as developing relationships with a number of delivery partners including Age UK Lindsey, Carers First, Citizen Advice Lindsey, Lincs Digital and Magna Vitae. These partnerships have also allowed for a number of other organic relationships with local businesses to be established to help provide a number of the TED services including; The Plough, Binbrook; Chapel Garden Centre, Chapel St Leonards; The Hildreds Shopping Centre, Skegness; and The Royal Oak, Mareham le Fen to name but a few.

Conclusion

Despite the rising number of corporate and strategic partnerships that are now happening in the Charitable landscape, this report has highlight how there is still space for the often unseen, under the radar local networks and partnerships that are facilitated on an informal, personal level. It is via these relationships and informal partnerships that the sustainability of projects like Fitness, Food and Friends can happen. It is this type of relationships that TED and other Ageing Better programmes can help encourage



Key support needs identified from the literature:

- 1 Time is essential in establishing an effective understanding in a partnership.
- 2 Resources to enable effective partnership working must be available (people, time, training, investment).
- 3 Ongoing, tailor made support which is accessible in times of need.
- 4 Work on build trust and rapport between staff.
- 5 Support in evidencing the value for beneficiaries.



Partnerships Advice

Things to consider when engaging in partnerships:

- 1 Why do you want this partnership and how will it benefit all involved?
- 2 What delivery model will you adopt?
- 3 What is each partner contributing?
- 4 What responsibilities will each partner have?
- 5 Do the various policies, procedures and terminology for each organisation align?
- 6 What are the agreed timescales?
- 7 How will this impact upon your participants?
- 8 Will this have any impact on those outside of your programme?



About East Lindsey



East Lindsey is a large, sparsely populated district within the county of Lincolnshire, which includes the popular coastal seaside towns of Skegness and Mablethorpe.

East Lindsey has a higher than average ageing population with 29% of people aged 65 and over. High numbers of older people move to East Lindsey in their retirement years and many have multiple chronic health conditions and few social and familial connections in the region. Public transport across East Lindsey is poor and therefore accessing services can be challenging, especially for older adults.

The overarching aims of the TED Programme are to:

- Reduce social isolation and loneliness
- Help older people to become better connected with volunteering, social, leisure and health improving activities
- Provide opportunities for older people to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of both the services and businesses available to them

We currently have 1700 registered TED members, 100 businesses across East Lindsey hold an Age-friendly Business Award, and 516 volunteers have contributed 8,156 hours to the TED programme between April 2018 and December 2019 .

Further information...

To find out more about TED or to get involved visit our website www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk or start a conversation and share your views online: Twitter: [@ted_EastLindsey](https://twitter.com/ted_EastLindsey)



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