CENTRE FOR AGEING BETTER

Primary research into community contributions in later life

Local report for Leeds

October 2018

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About the Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is a charity, funded by an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund, working to create a society where everyone enjoys a good later life. We want more people to be in fulfilling work, in good health, living in safe, accessible homes and connected communities. By focusing on those approaching later life and at risk of missing out, we will create lasting change in society. We are bold and innovative in our approach to improving later lives. We work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations. As a part of the What Works network, we are grounded in evidence.

Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Rob Francis.

1. Executive summary

Background

Traverse was commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better (AB) to undertake research into **community contributions** in later life (people aged over 50). Through this work, they wanted to understand how older people currently contribute to and are supported by their communities; what the barriers and enablers are for older people contributing, and how older people can be supported to contribute.

Research was undertaken in five communities: Hartcliffe and Ashley, both in Bristol; Castle Ward in the seaside town of Scarborough; the rural town of Settle; and the Beeston and Holbeck area of Leeds. In each area, older people were interviewed by trained peer researchers from within those communities, with 79 depth one-to-one interviews held in total.

What contributions do people make in their communities?

Our research paints a rich picture of community contributions across all our research sites and types of respondents. Of our 79 interviewees, all but ten spoke about ways in which they give or receive support in the community in some way. Some were highly involved in local groups and projects and self-identified as volunteers, but many did not participate in this way and did not think of themselves as volunteering in their community, instead talking about what could be described as acts of neighbourliness. These ranged from low levels of responsibility – such as putting a neighbour's bins out or taking in a parcel – through to much deeper relationships of trust that saw people looking after someone else's children or helping them to wash their hair. In between was a large cluster of activities including looking in on neighbours to see how they are/paying a social call, doing shopping, helping around the house, and cooking and sharing food. Looking after pets, giving lifts and looking after children also came up multiple times in the interviews.

Motivating and enabling community contributions

In exploring the motivators behind and the enablers and barriers to community contributions, many common themes were found that recurred across the research locations. These often played out differently in different communities, however, impacted by factors relating to local place and people's backgrounds.

People spoke about wanting to **'be a good neighbour'** and 'giving back'. Some talked about their **faith** as a specific motivator. **Reciprocity** was another important theme across the areas. At the 'shallow end' of community contributions this could just be about common courtesy with neighbours returning a favour. At the 'deeper end' of contributions where **familiarity and trust** were more important in laying the foundations, reciprocity and willingness to help out was more often rooted in long-standing contact, friendship, and sometimes shared experiences (e.g. of migration, illness or bereavement).

Sometimes taking part in contributory activities was as much about interviewees' own wellbeing as that of others, motivated by a desire to stay **active and engaged**, including in **response to a life change** such as retirement, bereavement, worsening health or moving to a new area.

Contributions were enabled by places and spaces – which provided opportunities for people to meet, build connections and friendships, which in turn led to community contributions. These could be places of worship, for instance, or community venues and social groups where people met.

Sometimes the **lack of something** could be a motivator or enabler. Lack of public transport could mean that neighbours depend more on each other to get around, for instance, and lack of formal, funded organisations or community venues could lead to local (often older) people stepping in to fill the gap through volunteering. Even lack of family close by could act as an enabler, freeing up people's spare time and encouraging them to get more involved in their community (especially if new to an area).

Barriers

Whilst our interviews shed light on a myriad of social interactions and bonds that underpin neighbourly behaviour, they also highlight many barriers and challenges to community contributions. These included physical and structural factors, which disabled or deterred – in particular **poor health or infirmity**, which prevented people from helping others as much as they had in the past or would like to in the present. People also talked about distance and lack of transport, which prevented people getting to other places (including to see friends), about lack of spaces to host and facilitate interactions or activities, and lack of money to take part in activities. For some interviewees from our South Asian communities in Leeds, lack of English language was another practical barrier.

Other barriers were more closely related to **how people felt**. Interviews talked about needing confidence to both offer and ask for help – and uncertainty about how those approaches would be received (e.g. as interfering, unwelcome or burdensome). Whilst shared backgrounds and long-standing connections enabled contributions, differences and lack of familiarity and trust often erected barriers – between people from different ethnic and faith communities, between younger and older people, and between newcomers and long-standing residents.

Lessons

Across the five communities, older people's community contributions are many and varied and it is clear that even those who take little or no part in formal volunteering are often contributing in their communities and benefitting from the interactions this generates.

Familiarity, relationships and trust are important in setting the scene for rich and high-value community contributions. Linked to this, our research points towards the importance of connections that build social capital and create permission to give and receive help. Indeed, mutual help and reciprocity underpins many of the community contributions seen in the research areas.

One of the most interesting themes throughout the research is the interplay between people and place – between the feelings, experiences and preferences of individuals and how these relate to the local world around them. To enable community contributions, we need to strengthen individuals and strengthen neighbourhoods.

For some, informal connections and contributions can represent the first rung on a ladder of participation, opening doors to involvement and leadership of local groups and projects. But even where contributions remain in that informal space it can be hugely valuable for individual and impactful for the way that whole communities are able to support each other and withstand change.

2. Introduction

Traverse was commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better (AB) to undertake research into **community contributions** in later life (people aged over 50)[1]. The research explored how people support one another in their communities, including those they know well (such as neighbours or friends), and those they know less well. While there is a significant body of evidence around volunteering, less is known about informal volunteering (how people support each other), about participation by certain groups, and what works for who and where. The research, therefore, aimed to find out more about what motivates, prevents and supports people to take part, particularly those least likely to.

Aims of the research

To understand:

- How older people currently contribute to and are supported by their communities
- More about the barriers and enablers for older people contributing
- How older people can be supported to contribute

To identify:

- Clear recommendations – using insight from the research and through collaboration with local stakeholders about how to stimulate and support contributions, including formal and informal volunteering, among older people
- Routes to action – thinking about how recommendations will be taken forward after the research is complete.

The research was conducted in five locations in England. This report is based on research conducted in Beeston and Holbeck in Leeds. Reports have also been produced using data from two sites in Bristol, and from Scarborough and Settle.

1. At the time of commissioning, Traverse was known as OPM Group.

3. Key findings

The interviews paint a picture of older people who are often well-networked within close-knit faith/cultural communities, making community contributions through **everyday acts of neighbourliness** though rarely part of a 'members group' or 'neighbourhood group'. Interactions (and thus contributions) tend to be strongest within faith/cultural communities, but there are several examples of contributions that bridge cross those boundaries as well.

Almost all participants reported that they regularly help their neighbours. This help takes the form of practical and emotional support in a range of ways, from taking in parcels and 'keeping an eye' on neighbours or their homes, through to shopping and giving lifts, looking after children and some cases quite **personal and intensive types of support**, such as helping another woman to wash and comb her hair. **Cooking and sharing food** was commonly mentioned – sometimes part of a regular volunteer commitment (e.g. women helping at their gurdwara) but is more often an example of the informal community contributions that characterised the interviews.

People frequently cited their **faith and culture** as motivating neighbourly behaviour – their 'duty' as a Sikh or Muslim. **Places of worship** themselves appear as important in enabling and underpinning the contributions that people make. Those people who said they did volunteer work often do so at or through their place of worship. These buildings are also important as places where people meet and sustain friendships with others from within their own faith/cultural communities – networks which in turn underpin the offering and receiving of support.

Beyond places of worship, interviewees (especially women) enjoy socialising and activities at **community venues** run by local organisations.

Trust and familiarity were very important as enablers of support giving and receiving, built through shared identity, shared experiences and often long-standing connections and friendships. **Where this was lacking it was also a barrier** to contributions, with interviewees talking about younger neighbours or newly arrived neighbours from different backgrounds being less neighbourly. This also related to concerns about safety and anti-social behaviour, as well as some direct experiences of racism, all of which made people less inclined to get 'out and about'.

Poor health was the most frequently cited barrier to people contributing in their communities. Several interviewees talked about help they used to provide to friends and neighbours, which limited fitness or health now prevented. In almost all cases, however, those whose health restricted them still gave examples of how they supported other people outside their own families.

Lack of facilities was talked about as a problem by some people, especially Bangladeshi interviewees who – reflecting an attachment to culturally-specific venues – mentioned the closure of a centre they used to use next to the mosque. Others suggested that facilities or events that brought people together from across the community should be created. Availability of transport, cost of transport and cost of activities were other structural barriers identified.

Lack of English language skills is a barrier for some of the female interviewees. This, they said, meant they could not interact with people outside their own faith/cultural community, and made them dependent on family. Some also spoke about their families' reluctance for them to be active outside the home, perhaps related to concerns about their safety. Community researchers added that in some families, male relatives can exert a high degree of control – including financial control – over older women, so that much activity outside the home is difficult.

4. Methodology

Overall approach

To understand whether, how and in what circumstances people later in life contribute to their local communities and the barriers and enablers they face, it was important that the research was **location-specific and sensitive to local contexts**.

To achieve this, Traverse worked with local stakeholders in each location to recruit and train **community researchers**, themselves members of the target populations, to conduct fieldwork, as they would be more effective at seeking out and gaining trust from research participants than someone external to the community. We also engaged a wider range of **local stakeholders** at various points throughout the process, drawing on their help to guide the research and develop routes to action out of the findings, as follows:

1. **Choosing the five research sites** was based on local factors including health, socio-economic factors, ethnicity and whether the setting is rural or urban. **Leeds** was chosen as an urban site with ethnically diverse areas with high levels of deprivation.
2. **Scoping interviews** were held to better understand local contexts and build a relationship with local voluntary organisation. The research in Leeds was coordinated through the city council and AB's existing links with local organisations including Holbeck Elderly Aid, South Ministry Network, Hamara, Health for All Leeds and Touchstone Sikh Elders.
3. **Co-design workshop** was held in October 2017, facilitated by Traverse. This helped to identify key locations within Leeds to conduct research, suggest potential community researchers, discuss expected findings and possible ways that the research would be mobilised.
4. **Community Researcher training** was given to **seven community researchers**, covering qualitative research techniques, how to locate suitable participants, ethics and seeking consent, and the practicalities of using a voice recorder and taking notes.
5. **Co-analysis and routes to action workshop** was held to discuss key findings with community researchers and stakeholders; and to focus local stakeholders on developing actions based on the findings that would a lasting impact in the community.

About the community researchers

In Leeds the call for expressions of interest in the community researcher roles was promoted via the three local community groups: Hamara, Health for All Leeds and Touchstone Sikh

Elders. Our lead contacts in each organisation identified and approached individuals who they considered would be willing and capable of undertaking the role. We recruited community researchers from the three faith communities, men and women. It proved difficult to recruit people who were themselves aged over 50 in all cases, so instead we worked with some younger interviewers who, through their work with voluntary sector organisations locally, had strong networks with older people.

Seven community researchers were trained in total: one man and one woman from Pakistani, Bengali and Sikh Indian backgrounds, and an additional Pakistani woman to help us achieve the target sample of interviews.

As part of the interviews, researchers asked participants to complete a 'diary' showing their activities on each day during a typical week; this was a useful tool for prompting participants to reflect on their weekly activities as a basis for identifying what community contributions they made or benefited from and generating discussion around this.

Reflections on the methodology

Working with community researchers brought significant advantages to the research. They had access to research participants who would have been hard to reach via traditional research recruitment methods. Their familiarity with local places, groups and people helped them to pick up on themes during interviews. Their embeddedness within their communities meant we could draw on their own insights to help contextualise and explain the interview findings, and ensure that we interpreted interview data correctly in our analysis. However, the community researchers were conducting research for the first time, following a short training session from Traverse. To help ensure the robustness and quality of the data that they captured, we asked researchers to record their interviews (where participants agreed to it), and had regular discussion with them through telephone calls, workshops and interviews, to discuss findings and give further support.

5. Locating the research

Like the other geographical sites in the over-arching study, Beeston and Holbeck was selected within Leeds to ensure a focus on people aged 50 and over from black and minority ethnic and C2DE socio-economic groups (who existing evidence suggests are less likely to volunteer/contribute formally). Another key criterion for site selection was a clear **route to action**. That is, ensuring that the research took place in locations where AB has established relationships with local stakeholders to better enable localised application of insights and recommendations.

On the basis of these overarching criteria, local stakeholders at Leeds City Council recommended three short-listed neighbourhoods for consideration as possible sites for the research by the local steering group. These were:

- Recreations, in Beeston and Holbeck
- Stratford Street and Beverleys in City and Hunslet
- Lincoln Green in Burmantofts and Richmond Hill

Discussions at the first local stakeholder workshop in Leeds came to focus on Recreations in Beeston and Holbeck as the preferred site for the research. This site was selected on the basis that less known about the population living in this area; that it ranks highly in Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data, and that it is home to a large South Asian population, particularly Pakistani Muslims.

The research site subsequently expanded to include the whole of the Beeston and Holbeck ward, following challenges in engaging people living in the Recreations specifically. Community researchers suggested that recruitment difficulties were in part related to suspicion and distrust about community engagement.

5.1 Description of local area

Figure 1 Beeston and Holbeck area map

1. ASHA Neighbourhood Project
2. Hamara Healthy Living Centre
3. Touchstone Ltd.
4. Holbeck Elderly Aid
5. Tunstall Road Community Centre
6. Potterdale Day Centre
7. Jamia Masjid Abu Huraira Mosque
8. Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Gurdwara
9. The Building Blocks Centre

Our research focuses on Beeston and Holbeck in South Leeds – an area bisected by the M621 motorway.

Historically a white working-class area, over the last half century it has become home to large South Asian communities, with organisations and facilities developed by – and serving – these populations, including places of worship. In recent years these settled communities have seen new waves of migration, particularly from Eastern Europe, begin to change the make-up of the area.

Local stakeholders identify some key challenges and tensions impacting on perceptions of the area. Recreations borders the UK's first legal prostitution zone, for instance, and two of the 7/7 bombers came from Beeston. More widely, issues of anti-social behaviour, crime and unemployment contribute to negative experiences and perceptions. One of our community researchers also talked about the 'generally low expectations' in the community. Our research highlights how, for some people, concerns about crime impacts people's willingness to get out and about – this seemed to be especially the case for older South Asian women, whose families may limit their ability to go out due to fear about their safety.

That said, and despite such losses (including the recent closure of a community venue attached to the mosque), the area has a rich community and voluntary sector. These include several faith-based and culturally-specific groups and projects, such as those run by the organisations Asha, Hamara, Touchstone and local places of worship. In addition, there are activities for older people run by Health for All Leeds and Holbeck Elderly Aid, among others, which are not specifically faith or ethnic-identity based.

5.2 Existing routes to action in the local area

Leeds has a pioneering Neighbourhood Network scheme[2] across the city, two of which cover this area and are run by Hamara and Holbeck Elderly Aid. The Big Lottery's Ageing Better programme 'Time to Shine'[3] is also in the Beeston and Holbeck area and run by Leeds Older People's Forum. In addition, Leeds is one of one of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities, which means the city council and partners have made a highly visible commitment to make Leeds the best city in which to grow older. This level of commitment and city-wide and neighbourhood level activity means that there are a number of clear routes to action for the findings and recommendations emerging from the research.

The Centre for Ageing Better, Leeds Older People's Forum and Leeds City Council have joined together in a five-year partnership to develop and share innovative approaches to tackle social, economic and health inequalities in later life. The partnership supports the

2 http://www.opforum.org.uk/nns/

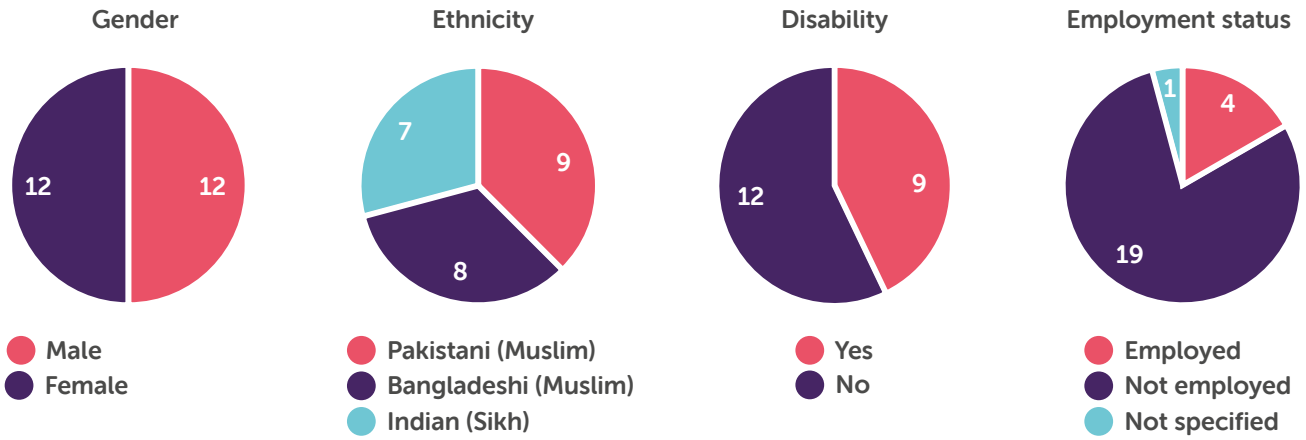
3 https://timetoshineleeds.org/

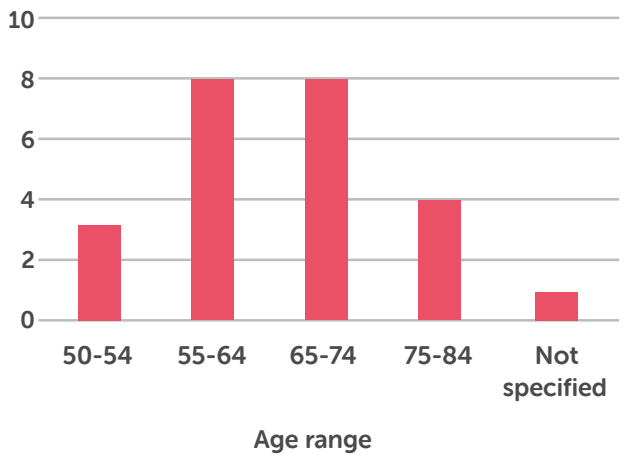
work of Age-friendly Leeds and the existing ambition for Leeds to be the best city to grow old in. Together the partnership is capturing and applying evidence about what works to help ensure a good later life across the city. The work will develop and test new approaches where it's not known what works, and it will share lessons and successes. The partnership will also be working to make sure that the voices, needs and preferences of older people are reflected in what we achieve and how we achieve it.

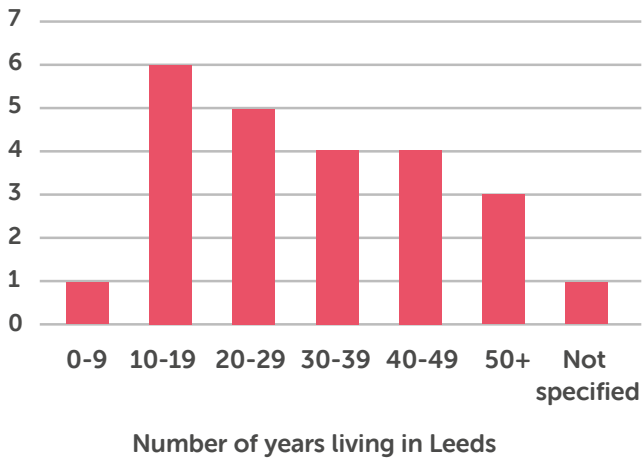
6. Community contributions in Beeston and Holbeck

6.1 About the research participants

The achieved sample for the research in Beeston and Holbeck is presented below:







24 participants took part in in-depth, one-to-one interviews conducted by seven community researchers in Beeston and Holbeck. The interviews were conducted by community researchers in people's first languages where this was their preference (Bengali, Kashmiri, Punjabi and Urdu). Community researchers took detailed notes in English which were used to inform the detailed case studies included throughout this report.

We have explored the rich qualitative data collected by the community researchers, by considering the responses overall and by considering responses by variables which through the course of the study emerged as likely points of difference, namely: gender, heath and ethnicity.

It is important to recognise that the research sample is very small, and the nature of the data collected qualitative. We cannot therefore assume that the experiences and views of our interviewees are generalisable to the wider population in Beeston and Holbeck, in Leeds or to communities from the same ethnic and religious backgrounds living in other locations.

The 24 interviewees comprised an even mix of men and women, and near equal numbers from Pakistani (Muslim), Bengali (Muslim) and Indian (Sikh) backgrounds. They were aged between 50 and 85, and all but one had lived in the area for at least 10 years – most for many more, including some over fifty years. The average length of residency in the area was 27 years across the sample.

Eleven of the 24 said they had a disability or long-term health condition, and very few were in paid employment.

6.2 Key findings: patterns of activity, motivations, enablers and barriers to contributions

6.2.1 Context

We started by trying to understand people's feelings of belonging to where they lived. The majority of interviewees felt a relatively strong sense of belonging to the local area, yet many emphasised the high levels of anti-social behaviour and only a minority felt there was good community spirit, with several people commenting on the decline in trust and neighbourliness over the time they had lived there. Many put this down to high levels of population churn, stigmatisation of the area itself, and a lack of support from local services like the police and council in addressing these issues. Some people also talked about newer residents being less likely to integrate with those already living there.

This apparent contradiction points towards the importance of people's strong bonds to family and long-standing neighbours, often intertwined with places of worship and social groups and networks usually within their own faith/cultural communities. These connections were often rooted in shared experience and supported by frequent contact. These in turn fostered trust between neighbours and provided the foundation for community contributions to be offered and received. Through those connections, it appears, people are enabled to feel a strong sense of belonging in spite of negativity about aspects of the neighbourhood itself.

6.2.2 Patterns of activity

Almost all those interviewed said they took part in religious activities, and faith and places of worship both appeared as important in people's lives. Most people said they attended social activities, around half said they volunteered locally and around half said they attended a social club 'based on an activity'. Only a couple said they attended a 'members group' or a 'neighbourhood group'. The interviews therefore paint a picture of older people who are often well-networked within close-knit faith/cultural communities, but who are rarely 'formal members' of a group or organisation.

6.2.3 Everyday acts of neighbourliness: from 'shallow' to 'deep'

We also see a rich picture where everyday acts of neighbourliness are widespread. Almost all participants reported that they regularly help their neighbours. This help takes the form of practical and emotional support in a range of ways. Some could be seen as relatively 'shallow' interactions that need not necessarily involve a high level of trust or responsibility – such as taking in and putting out bins or taking in parcels – or could be personal but potentially low intensity.

"Normally if my nextdoor neighbours are not at home I take their parcel and keep it for them until they come home and they pick up from my house."
Male, Bangladeshi Muslim background

"I look out for my neighbour and check on neighbours if they haven't been seen for a few days - are they okay?."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

Many of the examples people gave, however, reflected a greater investment of time – such as doing someone's shopping for them, helping with gardening or giving them lifts, and implied a higher degree of trust such as helping with children, translating letters and even providing what could be described as personal care.

"I help people out by taking them to places as I can drive a car. I take other people's children to school and go shopping. Sometimes I cook extra food and give out to people in my area as this brings me happiness."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

"I go and help an old lady wash her hair and comb her hair as she cannot manage it herself."
Female, Indian Sikh background

Cooking and sharing food

Cooking and the sharing of food emerged as a common theme, mentioned by a third of interviewees – mostly women but also some men. This was sometimes done as a volunteering activity (e.g. at the gurdwara) but was more often talked about in the home where people made food for a neighbour – either because it was felt they needed the help, or just as an act of socialising.

"One of my neighbours has a disabled child, I've known them for couple of years now so I sometimes help them by giving them cooked food. I go to their house if she asks me for help."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

"We are very close, we make each other food, we are same ago too, go to each other's house, we have tea."
Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

In some cases, sharing of food was a way to build friendships with neighbours from different backgrounds.

"I share the food with my English neighbours and they really appreciate and reciprocate this at festivals."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

6.2.4 Receiving help from neighbours

Most people also felt their neighbours or others in their area helped them too. This help was sometimes a mirror image of the help interviewees themselves gave – i.e. the same acts of neighbourliness reciprocated – and was sometimes an expression of how another person's skill or ability could meet the interviewee's need. They talked about neighbours helping with their gardening, heavy lifting or DIY, for instance. Neighbours were both people from their own faith/cultural communities with whom they had a shared experience, and people from outside.

"We were both Bengali, we came over at the same time. In the past, an English lady helped out by taking us to the GP, the dentist etc, when the need was there."
Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

6.2.5 Faith, culture and being a 'good neighbour'

This everyday behaviour was often talked about as being underpinned by participant's faith and culture, linked sometimes to 'community spirit', or words like 'values' and 'humanity'. Help tended to flow along relationships established via being neighbours, or old friends

(some talked about meeting people when they first moved to the area), and mostly, but not solely, within one's own faith/ethnic background (what we will refer to as bonding capital).

"We are bound by our religion to help everyone especially the neighbours and it is also our custom we help each other."
Male, Bangladeshi Muslim background

6.2.6 Differences by gender

Patterns of regular activity and examples of more formal volunteering (although people didn't necessarily call it that) were most clearly facilitated by participants' involvement at their local mosque or gurdwara and were **highly gendered**. For the four Bangladeshi men interviewed, the mosque was a primary focus for their weekly activities, some attending more than once a day. Their informal support to one another focused on activity such as providing lifts for other men to the mosque, and spending time socialising after prayers. Provision of informal support to one-another was a more prominent theme amongst women, and their community contributions tended to be less focused on religious venues. Indeed, women were more likely than men to talk about attending community group-based (rather than faith-based) activities and informal socialising with other women at their homes, or while out shopping. These interactions are mostly with women of the same faith/cultural background, though not always.

The Sikh women interviewed were more engaged in activities at the gurdwara than Muslim women at the mosque. Women's activity appeared to have more variety, with a mix of informal socialising and everyday acts of neighbourliness, alongside activity structured by their religious attendance.

"Women help each other out."
Woman, Bangladeshi Muslim

Men's activity was more structured around their religious attendance and small acts of everyday neighbourliness related to activities like giving people lifts. Their community contributions in terms of informal social support and networks appeared to be less rich than women's. This picture contrasted with what a small number of women (particularly from Sikh and Bangladeshi backgrounds) reflected about their male relatives controlling their ability to get out and about.

6.3 Motivations

6.3.1 Faith and culture

"I do it voluntarily. God will give me rewards for helping other people. It's part and parcel of my culture."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

"It's part of our custom and culture that we must help each other, especially our neighbour."
Male, Bangladeshi Muslim background

As already highlighted, faith – and intertwined with that, culture – was frequently cited as a motivation for interviewees to take part in and to contribute to their local community, either informally helping their neighbours or through more structured volunteering and charitable giving. The sentiment of helping out, and the act of support were seen as integral to being a good Muslim or a good Sikh.

People often spoke about neighbours who were some way in need because of health or family circumstances – usually other older people, but sometimes younger people as well.

"My neighbour is a single parent and he has his daughter with him on a weekend. I go and help him when his 6 year-old daughter comes to stay with him. I feel sorry for him as he cannot cope with his life at times."
Female, Indian Sikh background

Several interviewees emphasised that the compulsion to help one's neighbours stretched to people of other faiths.

"Good community spirit and good family and cultural values. Our Islam teaches us to be kind and loving to our neighbours Muslims or other religion."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

"Yes, definitely I help them whenever they require and ask, not just Muslims but all neighbours."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

In practice, most acts of neighbourliness appeared to be between people from the same background, perhaps reflecting the prevalence of certain faith communities in close proximity to each other, and the strength of their social connections, reinforced by faith,

family and language. That said, there were also examples of people socialising with, helping and being helped by neighbours from different backgrounds to their own.

"I go to [a day centre] with white people, I told my friends to come but they won't because it's not just women or Bengali. I don't care, I enjoy going. I want to go more mixed groups in the community."
Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

"[I would like to see] More festivals for multicultural activities to understand each other as good neighbours and community members."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

6.3.2 Reciprocity

Linked to a culture of being a 'good neighbour', reciprocity was an important theme running through the interviews. People often talked about helping their neighbours because they had themselves been helped on a specific occasion and wanted to return the favour, because they had always helped each other over many years, or because they may need help in future and they were conscious of doing their bit when they can.

"They helped first, then I helped."
Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

[Following support given after a bereavement] "I feel they share a kinship and helped me knowing that if they were to experience something similar then I would do the same for them."
Male, Sikh Indian background

6.3.3 Going through a life transition

Another motivation, or trigger for participating in activities (organised and more informal) was going through a life transition. This could be related to no longer having so many childcare commitments, a bereavement, or a change in health status.

"I chose this [to walk regularly in the park] due to health reasons as I have a heart problem and had bypass operation... I started this with family only, but then later on started doing it with friends and neighbours too, it has helped everyone."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

A woman from a Pakistani background reflected that when she no longer had to look after her children she realised that she was lonely:

"I usually used to see my friends over a cup of tea at friend's house where one of my old friends told me about the coffee morning (at a local community group). As I

feel lonely sometimes I decided to join it."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

A woman from a Sikh background started helping at the gurdwara once her husband passed away, something which has led to a part-time job there:

"I started attending a social group as I got very depressed after my husband passed away. I love cooking so I started helping in the kitchen as a volunteer. I ended up getting paid work for 4 hours a week and I needed money."
Female, Indian Sikh background

However, the same woman reflected that the fact that she cannot speak much English limits who she can interact with and support.

6.4 Enablers

6.4.1 Faith-based venues and organisations

Above we have reflected on the importance that interviewees placed on their faith as a motivator of community contributions. Religious venues and organisations appear as important themselves, in a different way. It is clear from the interviews that faith-based venues and organisations gave people a route to more formal or regular volunteering whilst also fostering the social links between congregants, which can turn into informal community contributions.

Community contributions relating to places of worship

When asked, almost half of interviewees said they volunteered locally, and a small number volunteer for national or international charities. This volunteering was largely connected to people's religious activities and places of worship, or they had volunteered at/through those places in the past (e.g. teaching, helping with trips and other activities). Sikh women talked about cooking at the gurdwara, for instance, and other interviewees gave different examples.

"I realised the importance of the ritual of washing dead bodies for people and the reward you get and how families are so grateful."
Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

Religious venues were also an important location for more informal contributions – i.e. the acts of neighbourliness discussed earlier in this report, such as giving lifts to and from the mosque.

Social links fostered by mosques and gurdwaras

Only in a couple of cases did people talk specifically about friends made at the mosque or gurdwara introducing them to a new activity – aside from these it is difficult to identify a place of worship as the source of a friendship or connection which leads to activity in other settings. It is clear, however, that interviewees' social networks often involve heavy overlaps between extended family, neighbours, places of worship and community groups, and we can at least conclude that religious venues and organisations are a core component of how people meet, build and sustain friendships which in turn open up other opportunities for interaction (and offers of support). In some cases where people were otherwise isolated and alone at home much of the time, religious attendance was clearly an important vehicle for social interaction.

"I feel better after doing that activity like chair based exercise. My friend from the temple encouraged me to do that activity."
Female, Sikh Indian background

6.4.2 Availability and character of community space and groups

Whilst places of worship were important as locations where people met, fostered and maintained social networks and made contributions, several others were also discussed. Community centres and community organisations were frequently mentioned, and are highlighted on the map earlier in this report. These hosted a range of activities that people attended, including coffee mornings and lunch groups, exercise-based activities, classes for cooking, English language and religious studies. These were often groups and activities focused on specific faith/cultural communities where people felt at ease and could communicate easily. They were often gender-specific as well, though some (such as lunch groups) were not.

"[I go to] feel part of a group and feel part of the community. It's female only, so I feel safe and open to talk honestly."
Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

Regular social interactions – including those involving small groups – also took place in people's homes, although this was not frequently mentioned.

"Once in a month some of our friends – ladies – gather together for a religious class in one of our friend houses."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

6.4.3 Trust and familiarity

Much of what people talked about as 'good neighbourliness' was fostered by relationships built over time. Unsurprisingly, the most time-intensive or personal forms of support that people gave to others tended to be made to people they had known over many years.

"Over the years a relationship developed, we built a friendship – we've had 35 years in this house... so they have built trust and a relationship."
Male, Sikh Indian background

The interviews also gave glimpses of the way in which the company of someone known and trusted could encourage people to attend a new event and build their social networks.

"My friend asked me to join the activities."
Female, Sikh Indian background

"...A friend encouraged me to go, to get me out of the house." Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

Charvi (Bengali female, aged 50-54)

Charvi has lived in the area for 30 years. She is close to her neighbours, including her nextdoor neighbour who she spends a lot of time with when their children are out at work during the daytime – this helps the day go quicker, she says. This is a friendship built up over many years, and sees them helping each other out very often in small ways, including sharing food.

Charvi attends the Kushy Nanas, a group for older Bangladeshi women. She started going about three years ago following a period of illness when she decided she wanted to start exercising again. She went through her own motivation to 'feel a bit better', she says, and keeps going both for her physical health and mental wellbeing, as she finds that it helps to get out of the house.

She also goes to a local day centre. She goes with White British ladies. **'I told my friends to come but they won't because not just women or Bengali,'** she said. **'I don't care, I enjoy going. I want to go more mixed groups in the community.'**

Charvi says she helps everyone, but she knows that other Bengalis help each other and sometimes are frightened to help anyone else. There are lots of new families in Beeston from different backgrounds who don't speak Bengali, and Charvi says this can be disconcerting for older Bengalis.

6.5 Barriers

Physical and mental health

Health was cited most commonly as a barrier to people participating in and contributing in their communities, with most interviewees commenting that health or fitness prevented them from doing as much as they used to or as much as they would like.

"Only my bad health [prevents me], I wish I could do more as I used to do many years ago."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

Physical health was most frequently discussed, from struggling with 'aches and pains' to serious medical issues which had changed people's daily lives, but mental health was also discussed by some people. One man from a Pakistani background living with depression and diabetes reflected that a barrier for him – he used to be very active, an allotment holder and volunteer - was the fear that **"people might pick on me"** because of his depression. One woman had been very effected by her depression and felt that it meant she had little to offer.

"When I was not depressed and physically well I used to help an old neighbour, but they passed away... people do not want to talk to depressed, lonely, older people."
Female, Sikh Indian background

And yet, most people who spoke about having health problems also gave many examples of ways in which they continued to help other people.

6.5.1 Language and cultural barriers

Women in particular talked about language being a barrier for them taking part in activities that are not run by their own faith or ethnic community. That this is an issue for women more than men reflects national data on English language proficiency amongst non-native English speakers – the 2011 census found that amongst women, 60% of non-native speakers spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all', compared with 50% amongst men. One of our female interviewees from a Sikh background talked about her son stopping her from going out alone, reflecting: **"I do not socialise with anyone locally as I cannot speak English and cannot communicate with people locally. I am not physically able to get out and about."**

Community researchers reported that whilst some older women had little interest in learning English, many did and recognised that this would give them access to more activities and opportunities, enabling them to be less reliant on friends and family. This supported some of the comments from interviewees.

"There should be more groups for women, especially English classes so that they can do basic things like go to the doctor on their own and not rely on others."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background

"The Community Centre has a sessional worker who comes to teach English and teach cooking. I feel less lonely at home and I learn how to speak English with other people."
Female, Sikh Indian background

There were also reflections from community researchers about the dynamics they saw within some local communities, including a view that the Bengali community is 'becoming more conservative and more insular'. They spoke about male family members exerting a high degree of control over older women, including examples of financial control whereby state pension payments were taken off an older person by younger family members, leaving them with very little to use themselves to socialise and participate in activities outside the home.

6.5.2 Structural barriers: facilities transport and cost

Many participants reflected on a lack of – or cuts to – groups' funding, and the result that there were fewer activities and fewer places for them to go. A community centre attached to the local 'Bangladeshi mosque' was identified by many as having closed and being a loss for that particular community:

"For Bangladeshis - the lack of facilities/meeting place/community centre preventing more socialising opportunity for our Bangladeshi community."
Male, Bangladeshi Muslim background

"There was a community centre next door to the mosque, which the Council has closed so we have nowhere to go for social activities. It will benefit me and others if a community centre was open for public. There are no activities specifically for Bengali people."
Male, Bangladeshi Muslim background

The cost of doing things like swimming and attending some activities was also a barrier for some, along with transport – particularly for those without access to a car. One participant reflected that there used to be an easily available Access Bus, but that this has reduced its service meaning that you can't use it any more. Community researchers reflected that even seemingly small costs could be prohibitive for older people with very little money of their own and very limited financial control.

Transport was cited as a barrier either because it was too expensive or because, combined with poor health, travel was difficult.

"Going from one place to another is a problem if you don't have your own car, I used to drive but not anymore."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

6.5.3 Lack of trust in others and weakening of social bonds

Whilst high levels of trust in friends and neighbours was an enabler of community contributions, lack of trust in others – or at least lack of familiarity and social connection – was also clearly a barrier.

Baljit (Sikh Indian female, aged 75-84)

Baljit has lived in the area for 16 years but does not feel much sense of belonging there. She feels isolated – arthritis makes it difficult to get out and about, and her son stops her from going out on her own. Two days a week she goes to the local community centre where she sees friends – other Indian ladies – and they play bingo and have lunch together. She takes part in a chair-based exercise group for older Indian women, run by a voluntary sector organisation. She has been doing this for the last 15 years after her friend at temple asked her to go along. She no longer goes to temple because of her health, and most days she stays at home with no activity.

Baljit would like to do more, such as walking with ladies from her community, but her aches and pains are a barrier. And in any case, she does not feel safe at all in the area where she lives – she thinks that people are racist – and her son tells her that it is not safe to go out on her own.

That said, she does feel that her neighbours help her a lot – and that she helps them. In particular, she talks about a younger single man who sometimes comes over to share meals at her house – he works long shifts so this helps him. Baljit sometimes goes to his house as well, especially when his daughter comes to stay with him. She feels sorry for him – he is also Indian and has no family in the UK, and she feels that he treats her like a mother. He is very helpful to her in return, taking her shopping and to GP appointments. She says 'I try to help him with giving him food and giving him love, but I cannot help him with taking him anywhere as I do not drive.'

She thinks people don't help each other more in her area because they are from different cultures and religions, and because there are language barriers. Baljit herself feels she is limited in the sorts of activities she can take part in and the contributions she can make because she does not speak English.

'I do not socialise with anyone locally as I cannot speak English and cannot communicate with people locally.'

Several interviewees talked about high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood, and a few people referred to the general **appearance and feel of the local environment**, which augmented people's reluctance to spend time out in their neighbourhood.

"Improve the area – there is dog poo everywhere. I would like walk, and to feel better about the area. It's dirty."
Female, Bangladeshi Muslim background

Unease and negativity about the local areas appeared to limit social interactions – the foundations of community contributions – in different ways.

Firstly, and most directly, it related to fears about personal safety and meant that people were reluctant to be 'out and about', especially in the evenings. Women in particular talked about fear of going out, or about their families' concerns about them being out.

"I do not know them much and I cannot speak English. They have thrown eggs on my window and called me racist names."
Female, Sikh Indian background

Secondly, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour appeared to be bound up with a wider feeling that there was 'less community spirit' than in previous years; that people were less interested in getting to know or helping their neighbours, had less time for each other and were less invested in their local communities.

"There are not many opportunities available as people keep themselves to themselves, no community spirit left anymore."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

"People have become more self-centred and have become more financially secure and don't need to help or ask for it. I would say that they younger generation has a different view and have always had things and opportunities and don't understand what it's like to struggle for something like my generation did. Maybe that is why we are always willing to offer help and support."
Female, Pakistani Muslim background.

In some cases, interviewees clearly had newer residents in mind (especially those from different faith/cultural backgrounds to their own), and in some cases they were referring to 'the younger generation', as in the example above, but it wasn't always clear whether they specifically meant those from inside or outside of their own faith/cultural communities.

"Our good neighbours have gone now, we do not like young noisy neighbours with very mischievous teenage kids. But before we always helped our neighbours

without even asking them for help. We talked to each other, which helped."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

These feelings appeared to reinforce the likelihood of people socialising within their faith/cultural communities and within their own age group, and made it less likely for connections and thus contributions to be built across different parts of the community.

Positivity about integration

It is clear that difference in background can erect additional barriers to interaction and thus to community contributions across communities, and some interviewees wanted to see older people supported with more faith/culturally-specific activities and venues. Other interviewees, however, were keen to encourage more mixing.

"They can help community to build relations by introducing more physical activities mixing people."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

"Organise activities on a weekend or a community centre for all the people in the area. Organising meals to support each other."
Female, Sikh Indian background

Overall, we saw a picture of older South Asian people feeling less positive about their area, less inclined and sometimes less able to forge connections with people from different backgrounds because of mistrust of newer neighbours and their own direct experiences (e.g. of racism). In this context, the strength of neighbourly bonds based on long-standing connections – particularly though not always within their own faith/cultural communities – appeared especially important in maintaining a sense of belonging and positive social interactions.

A small number of interviewees also referred to their lack of trust in authorities, and their feeling that some existing community facilities were not meant for them or designed with them in mind.

"I don't trust local council and so-called community centres which are built only for staff and their families."
Male, Pakistani Muslim background

Community researchers also reflected that there is a great deal of underlying distrust of those in official roles and the motivations for organisations to intervene in the community, perhaps related to the area being stigmatised for its connection to the 7/7 bombers, Islamophobia, crime and perceptions that the authorities do not act to improve things.

Fear of people 'knowing your business'

Throughout this report we reference the value of familiarity in building trust, which in turn creates the climate for the most intensive examples of community contributions. A few interviewee comments point towards concerns that people may have about guarding their privacy, however, and the desire to keep non-family members at a distance lest they generate 'gossip'.

"People talking behind your back and being suspicious of help [may deter people from offering help]."
Male, Sikh Indian background

Community researchers were confident that fear of 'gossip' could be an unspoken barrier to people building their contacts with others outside of the family, especially among some women who might be wary of people 'finding out' about private family matters.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Conclusions

Few people amongst our South Asian interviewees considered themselves as members of community groups or neighbourhood groups, and fewer than half said they volunteered, but everyday acts of neighbourliness – including some quite personal and high commitment activity – are widespread. This is often rooted in strong bonds developed over many years with people from the same faith/cultural backgrounds, underpinned by common connections to places of worship and culturally-specific groups and activities. Faith – in terms of being a 'good Sikh' or a 'good Muslim' is felt by many to be an important motivator of neighbourly behaviour – with interviewees also talking about 'community spirit', humanity and values as underpinning their willingness to help and support others.

It is clear, therefore, that for our interviewees community contributions are heavily bound up with sense of religious and cultural identity, and the reciprocity associated with trust, familiarity and connections built up over time. Perhaps this is why so many interviewees felt a strong sense of belonging to where they lived, in spite of negativity about the state of the wider neighbourhood and lack of connection (and in some cases fear of) other neighbours.

Neighbourly activity was far from exclusively within faith/cultural communities, however, and interviewees also referred to the help and support given and received between people from different backgrounds – usually less personal and 'intensive', it appears, but valuable in building trust and friendship – from help with DIY to sharing food at festival times. And whilst several people wanted to see more activities for people from a specific background to congregate together – such as Bangladeshi interviewees who missed their old community space – there were some who were more interested in bringing older people together across the whole community and felt that current opportunities for this were limited.

It is also important to recognise that whilst the research findings paint a rich picture of neighbourliness supporting people in a range of ways, it also highlights the loneliness and isolation some older people feel, exacerbated by fear of crime and the abuse they may face, by poor health including depression; by lack of confidence in English; and by lack of money. And whilst family is important and positive for many, for some women it appears that it can stifle their ability to engage with the community beyond their home.

7.2 Proposed routes to action

Specific routes to action were identified at the final local workshop held in Leeds and attended by representatives from local organisations Asha, Hamara, Touchstone, Health for All Leeds, several officers and one recently elected councilor from Leeds City Council, and representatives from Groundwork and Big Lottery. Some of the project's community researchers also took part in the session. The specific areas of activity to be developed are set out below.

A) Embedding an asset-based community development approach in Beeston

The chief officer for Transformation and Innovation in the city council's Adults and Health Team led a group discussion about asset-based community development (ABCD) in Beeston and Holbeck. This responded to the point raised by the research that whilst there is a rich seam of 'good neighbourliness' in evidence, underpinned by a strong sense of belonging to the area, understanding about how to build connections and how to reach more people are not always clear.

The chief officer has committed to fund an ABCD pathfinder project in the area, starting in the summer.

B) Community transport: reducing barriers to participation and thus social interaction

In Leeds, the partnership between the Centre for Ageing Better, Leeds Older People's Forum and Leeds City Council has identified three early priorities: community contribution, community transport and housing. The work on community transport has identified that older people find it difficult to travel between communities in Leeds. This was reiterated in the Routes to Action workshop session. It was therefore felt that there could be synergy between the follow-up actions from the community contributions research and the community transport. The community transport project is looking at how capacity within the community transport system can be used more efficiently by enabling providers to work more closely together. Whilst in the planning stage, this could involve the use of volunteer driver schemes to enable people to access transport needs that are not currently being met and lead to greater involvement in community life.

C) Gardening and growing as a vehicle for stronger community connections

One discussion involved representatives from Groundwork, Public Health Leeds Health for All Leeds, and focused on how growing and gardening could be used as a means of creating greater community links and community cohesion. This aimed to respond to several points highlighted in the research, including:

- poor perceptions about the local environment which undermined people's sense of pride and positivity about where they live;
- an appetite for more opportunities for people to come together, using existing public spaces, and including across boundaries of ethnicity and age;
- the importance of cooking and sharing food as an activity that facilitated interaction between neighbours and which often featured in the contributions older people made and received.

The group plans to start by exploring two specific projects:

- Initiating a 'Crops in Pots' project, focused on terraced and back-to-back streets, to involve residents in brightening up their streets with hanging baskets and planters. Low cost, low pressure and low commitment, this could foster interactions around something which creates a clear, visible benefit to everyone and which may open the door to a new set of reciprocal contributions that support neighbourliness, familiarity and trust as people help each other in small ways with the pots and planters in their street.
- Exploring how allotment sites in Beeston could be used to host community growing and gardening sessions, along with social events and cooking-related activities. Potentially requiring a higher level of participation and commitment, at least from some residents, this could be a next step following on from the street-level project above.

In both cases, it was suggested that links be made with existing groups and festivals, for example Holbeck in Bloom, Beeston Festival, Holbeck Gala. This could potentially open up access to people who already have relevant skills, interests and networks that could help to kick-start and support these projects.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Appendix 1: Detailed methodology

To understand if, how and in what circumstances people later in life currently contribute to their local communities and the various barriers and enablers they face, it was important that the research was designed to be **location-specific** and sensitive to local contexts. To achieve this, Traverse worked in collaboration with local stakeholders in each of four locations to recruit **community researchers**, who were themselves members of the target populations, to conduct fieldwork, as they would be more effective at seeking out and gaining trust from research participants than someone external to the community. The method used to locate, train and ensure the quality of the research outputs are listed below:

1. Choosing the research locations	Locations for the research were chosen to give a diverse perspective on what local factors impact community contributions, including health, socio-economic factors, ethnicity and whether the setting is urban or rural. Leeds was chosen as an urban site for the research with areas of high deprivation and ethnic diversity.
2. Scoping interviews	Once this site was chosen, scoping interviews were set up to better understand local contexts and build a relationship with local voluntary organisations to support the research in Leeds.
3. Stakeholder workshop: Co-design	The research in Leeds was coordinated through the city council and AB's existing links with local organisations including Holbeck Elderly Aid, South Ministry Network, Hamara, Health for All Leeds and Touchstone Sikh Elders. An initial **stakeholder workshop** was held in October 2017, facilitated by Traverse. This helped to identify key locations within Leeds to conduct research, suggest potential community researchers, discuss expected findings and possible ways that the research would be mobilised.
4. Community Researcher training	Traverse offered training to **seven community researchers**, covering qualitative research techniques, how to locate suitable participants, ethics and seeking consent, and the practicalities of using a voice recorder and taking notes.
5. Midpoint review	Traverse facilitated a midpoint review with the community researchers and some key stakeholders to ensure that the right people were being targeted for the research to discuss initial research findings.

6. Reflective interviews	The Traverse site lead invited all researchers to reflect on their experiences of the research.
7. Stakeholder workshop: Co-analysis and developing routes to action	Traverse facilitated a **co-analysis and routes to action workshop** to discuss overall key findings with 20 local stakeholders. The first part of the workshop encouraged attendees to reflect on the findings, whilst the second part asked them to start shaping some tangible plans that would translate the research findings into real local actions.

In Leeds the call for expressions of interest in the community researcher roles was promoted via the three local community groups: Hamara, Health for All Leeds and Touchstone Sikh Elders. Our lead contacts in each organisation identified and approached individuals who they considered would be willing and capable of undertaking the role. The following table identifies the profile of our seven Leeds community researchers:

	Gender and age	Ethnic background
Community researcher 1	Male / 50s	Pakistani
Community researcher 2	Female / 40s	Pakistani
Community researcher 3	Female / 30s	Pakistani
Community researcher 4	Female / 40s	Bengali
Community researcher 5	Male / 60s	Bengali
Community researcher 6	Female / 50s	Indian
Community researcher 7	Male / 30s	Indian

Community researchers were provided with training either face-to-face or one-to-one over the phone. Follow-up conversations were held with each individually, to: check on progress, address issues and challenges, and latterly to get a sense of the researchers' own reflections from their research. Information gathered during these calls was collected in a learning log which has helped to inform our analysis. A full methodology statement and all research tools can be found in the overarching report for the study.

Information gathered during three local stakeholder workshops held in Leeds was also collected in the learning log, and this information has also helped to inform our analysis. The three local workshops were facilitated by the Traverse lead researcher at key points during the study and were attended by an AB representative and invited local stakeholders (the council and local VCS organisations) as follows:

- 9th October 2017, hosted by Leeds City Council
- 3rd January 2018, hosted by Leeds City Council
- 11th May 2018, hosted by Age UK Leeds

The aim of each workshop was to ensure that local stakeholders were involved in:

- Sense checking and verifying the neighbourhood site selection and identify barriers and enablers to the research and the community researcher approach
- Considering initial emerging findings, reflections and challenges to the research, and inputting into the research design at a mid-point
- Considering Traverse's analysis and recommendations and working to identify local recommendations and routes to action

Local stakeholders in Leeds were particularly interested in understanding more about:

- Perceptions and patterns of volunteering among South Asian communities and in particular whether engagement happens just through faith/community of identity groups and the extent to which this matters;
- What might be different for people from South Asian communities in terms of enablers to taking part;
- Is the type of contribution different among South Asian communities, compared with neighbourliness and volunteering among non-ethnic minority communities, what particular cultural practices shape expectations and behaviours related to community contributions;
- What works to motivate people to take part, and conversely, what limits or stops them.
- What support might be needed to cultivate and sustain this.

Our analysis has aimed to identify insights which address these questions.

As part of the interviews, researchers asked participants to complete a 'diary' showing their activities on each day during a typical week; this was a useful tool for prompting participants to reflect on their weekly activities as a basis for identifying what community contributions they made or benefited from and generating discussion around this.

Reflections on the methodology

Working with community researchers brought significant advantages to the research. They had access to research participants who would have been hard to reach via traditional research recruitment methods. Their familiarity with local places, groups and people helped them to pick up on themes during interviews. Their embeddedness within their communities meant we could draw on their own insights to help contextualise and explain the interview findings and ensure that we interpreted interview data correctly in our analysis. However, the community researchers were conducting research for the first time, following a short training session from Traverse. To help ensure the robustness and quality of the data that they captured, we asked researchers to record their interviews (where participants agreed to it), and had regular discussion with them through telephone calls, workshops and interviews, to discuss findings and give further support.

This report is available at **www.ageing-better.org.uk** | For more info email **info@ageing-better.org.uk**

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