

Late Spring

Age-friendly and
inclusive volunteering
grant programme
evaluation

January 2021



In partnership with:

About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

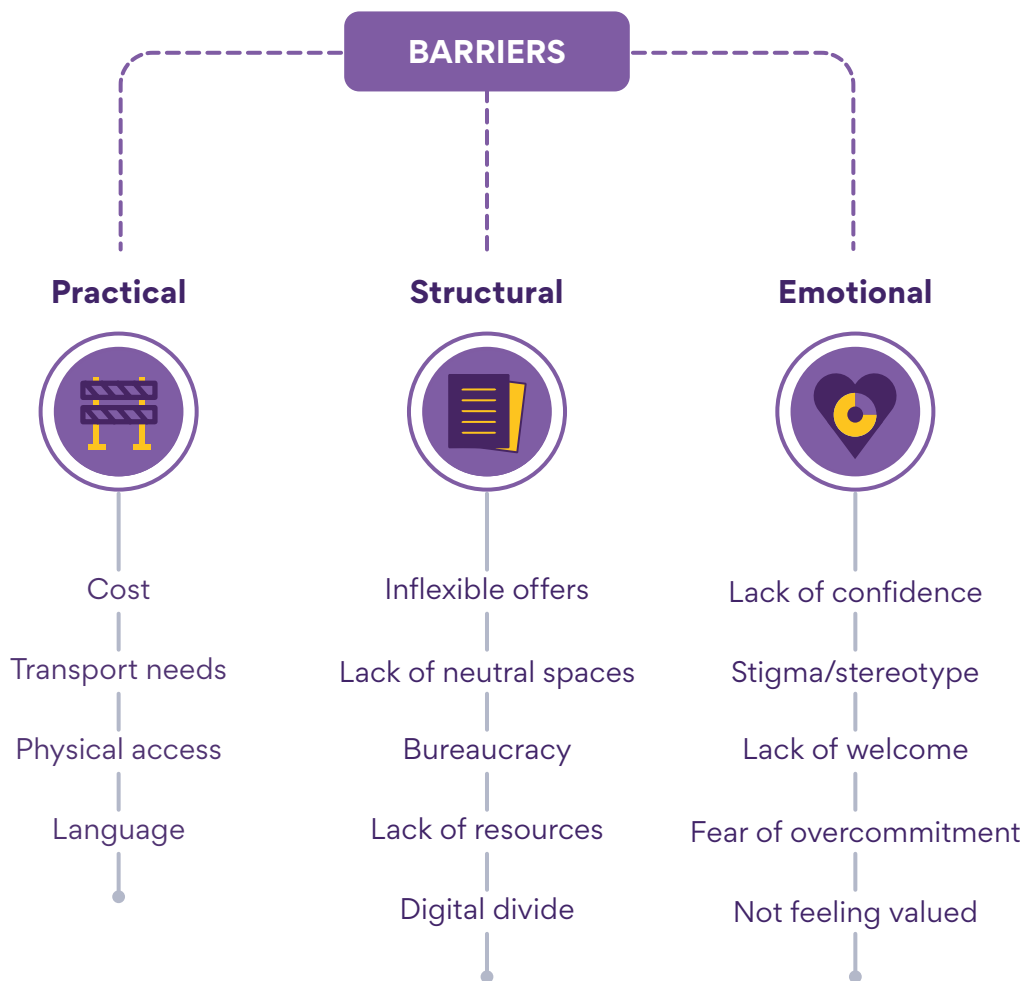
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Introduction

The Centre for Ageing Better, in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) undertook a review into community contributions in later life in October 2018. The review found that many older people, who would benefit most from contributing to their communities, encounter practical, structural and emotional barriers that prevent them from taking part, or from remaining involved as life changes. It called on voluntary organisations to do more to tackle these barriers and set out six key principles for achieving this.

Barriers to participation



Age-friendly, inclusive volunteering is:



Flexible and responsive



Valued and appreciated



Enabled and supported



Meaningful and purposeful



Sociable and connected



Makes good use of my strengths

Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering grant programme

Following the review, the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering fund was set up to put these principles into practice. The programme grant-funded five projects to develop and document models of good practice in supporting older people's voluntary and community activity. The focus was on those most at risk of missing out on the benefits of contributing to their communities.

The fund has three priorities:

- Sustaining lifelong contributions and helping people remain involved throughout major life changes such as bereavement, caring or developing a health condition.
- Helping people connect to and take part in voluntary activities and opportunities that suit their life circumstances, including informal and self-organised contributions.
- Providing practical support to include older people who currently face barriers to volunteering (for example due to health, language, and cultural or social factors).

The project initially intended to only address the priority ‘Helping people connect to opportunities to suit their life circumstances’. However, in practice, it had some impact on all priorities.

Each project received approximately £50,000 to run over a one-year period between April 2019 and March 2020.¹ The grant programme adopted a grant-plus model, supporting projects to maximise their learning and outcomes through project development, action-learning and evaluation support. The focus was as much on development, learning, sharing good practice and sustainability as on immediate outcomes and impact (the grant-plus model was funded through additional funding from the Centre for Ageing Better above the £50,000 for each project).

The scale and activities of the projects are different, each working with older people in different circumstances and settings and using different approaches. This provided opportunities to learn about, and measure the impact of, different models of tackling barriers to community contributions in later life and supporting older people’s voluntary and community activity.

¹ The end of the project and the evaluation took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted on completion of the project. Consequently, this delayed some evaluation activity and access to information, although most of the evaluation activity was conducted prior to the lockdown.

Late Spring

Late Spring is an established bereavement support project for people in later life to provide mutual support, help people remember there is still ‘life to live’ and ‘look to the future without forgetting’. The support groups run twice a month in community venues and are designed to provide space for those aged 60+ who have been bereaved. They come together in a relaxed, warm, friendly and safe environment ‘with others who understand’, as they begin to face the reality of life without their loved one.

Groups are facilitated by a trained community worker, often supported by volunteers. These groups have a mixture of both restorative and informative sessions based around tea, coffee, cake and the occasional meal and activity. People attend for between 12–24 months, though some remain with the group as volunteers. At the start of this grant programme there were 18 groups involving approximately 250 people across Oxfordshire.²

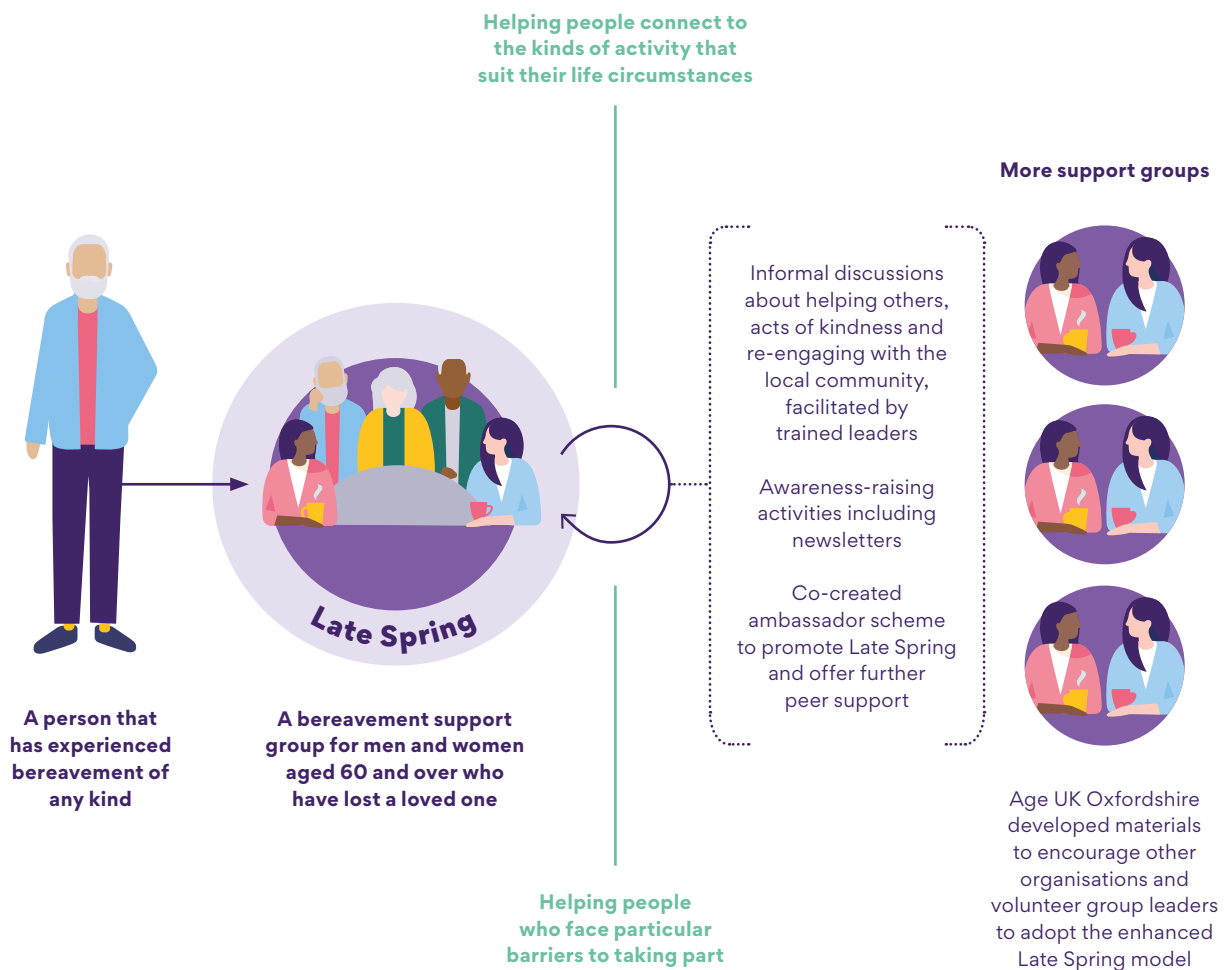
The project aimed to provide a supported route into volunteering for Late Spring members (Late Springers). It sought to enhance the existing Late Spring model and outcomes by helping people experiencing bereavement in later life onto a restorative path and to live life, whilst developing a toolkit so that the model would be replicable elsewhere. It set out to achieve this by:

- Designing new, themed sessions, either explicitly about volunteering or related in some way, to overcome barriers to volunteering, build confidence, inspire volunteering and promote opportunities. This includes running a series of volunteer-focused sessions, including an ‘Acts of Kindness’ session during Acts of Kindness week, discussing the subject and providing ideas and props to encourage Late Springers.
- Developing products to support the delivery of Late Spring and embed and promote age-friendly and inclusive volunteering amongst its members. These products include a Facilitators’ handbook, new members’ welcome pack, bi-monthly newsletter and colour therapy/wheel-focused volunteering packs.
- Encouraging and supporting Late Springers to engage in ad hoc and micro-volunteering³ within the group and elsewhere.
- Working with existing and new partners/networks to identify suitable local volunteering opportunities.

² This report is about embedding age-friendly and inclusive volunteering within Late Spring. It is not about Late Spring itself, which is an established and successful project that appears to have a significant positive impact on its members.

³ By micro-volunteering, we mean small, informal, time-limited volunteering activities or community contributions often conducted in-situ.

- Establishing a Late Spring Ambassador programme to promote and advocate Late Spring and Age UK Oxfordshire, and provide a more formal volunteering pathway for Late Springers (this was not an initial aim of the project, but came out of consultation with Late Springers as part of the planning and development phase of the project).
- Developing a Late Spring toolkit/facilitator pack and training programme, and promoting amongst local networks and organisations to support the establishment of new Late Spring groups managed by other groups and organisations, with one such group created during the life of the programme.



Learning and evaluation

A ‘light-touch’, independent, evaluation of the project has been conducted to capture learning and identify emerging impact. This is a one-year developmental programme and therefore the focus is more on evidence of good-practice models that can overcome practical barriers and embed the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles, with only an expectation of emerging individual and organisational impact. The light touch evaluation and the length of time that the project ran makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether the project has led to working with volunteers from more diverse backgrounds than would have otherwise happened and/or whether the volunteering experience (despite being good) was better than it would have been otherwise. However, the findings do illustrate how practice has been adapted in line with the principles of age friendly and inclusive volunteering and began to explore a new approach that hopefully with more time would lead to a greater diversity of volunteers and a better volunteering experience.

Specifically, the evaluation sought to capture evidence about how the model has:

- Helped meet the fund’s priorities (Sustaining lifelong contributions was not directly addressed by the Late Spring project, although there are some outcomes related to it.).
- Overcome practical, structural and emotional barriers to community contributions and volunteering.
- Tested, validated and embedded the age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles.
- Impacted on individuals and organisations involved in the project.

Monitoring and evaluation has been embedded in the programme and project from the outset. This includes the following activity, which has informed this report:

- Quarterly monitoring reports and other documentary evidence provided by the projects to the Centre for Ageing Better.
- Co-creation of a Theory of Change working document to help shape the delivery of the project, establish expected outputs, outcomes and impacts, and provide a guide to evaluating the model (see appendix) (the Theory of Change was co-produced with the project at the development stage of the programme, and subsequently some elements may have evolved over time).
- Learning logs maintained by the project to capture learning, ongoing feedback, progress and impact.

- Development of evaluation materials to capture evaluation insight from individuals and organisations involved in the project.⁴ This includes questionnaires with over 50 Late Springers and interviews with 12 Late Springers, interviews with stakeholders involved in delivering the project (including Late Spring group facilitators) and other stakeholders and organisations involved.

⁴ These materials were co-produced with the project and Centre for Ageing Better and are available for use in the continued monitoring and evaluation of the project and model. They were used by the evaluators towards the end of the project to independently capture learning and impacts through face-to-face, telephone and digital methods with individuals and key stakeholders involved in the project and programme.

Learning and impact

What activities have taken place? Process, challenges and learning

The project was **attracted to the development and learning support provided by the programme**. It was also naturally aligned to the ‘test and learn’ approach, although it **found the process intensive and would have welcomed more time to develop and embed its model**:

“As an organisation [Age UK Oxfordshire] we tend to go through a similar approach of developing, testing and learning and so that was something we were comfortable with. We enjoyed the creative process, which has led to the development of some useful approaches and resources but would have liked more time. Some of the support, training and workshops were really interesting and helpful but some were not as relevant for us and took up limited time we would have rather used to develop our approach. We feel like we’ve made good progress and we can already see some positive benefits but there was a big ask of us around all the development and workshops. It would have been good for the programme to be longer so that we had more time to develop our products and see the full benefit.” Stakeholder

The project’s main **challenge was incorporating the concept of volunteering while not undermining the core aims and approach of Late Spring as an existing service**. This necessitated striking a delicate balance through co-production with Late Springers and adopting a flexible approach:

“Of all the projects I felt we are unique in that we’re introducing volunteering into an established service. We saw this project as very much adding value to the Late Spring model, enhancing it. But we had to be careful that it complemented rather than undermined it. We had to manage that by engaging with our Late Springers and facilitators so we got the balance right. Ultimately it came down to being flexible depending on the interest and nature of each Late Spring group.” Stakeholder

“One of the first things we tried was ‘village notice boards’ where different volunteering opportunities could be promoted. Unfortunately, they were not very popular. Late Springers saw them as being too direct and making the group look like a volunteering group, rather than a bereavement group. They took too much time away from the core purpose of the group. So we moved away from that to be less obvious and used other methods like newsletters, where volunteering is included but not the only focus. The boards were not a complete waste of time, some of our facilitators still use them as a prop to encourage members to think and talk about reconnecting with their communities and volunteering.” Stakeholder

Related to the above, the **use of language became key to introducing and incorporating volunteering subtly and flexibly, without being too overt or forceful**, allowing Late Springers to engage with the subject on their own terms:

“Our initial engagement with Late Springers helped us realise that they really didn’t like the word ‘volunteering’. It put them off, made them feel like they were being pushed into things and distracted from the purpose of Late Spring. So we got around it by talking about ‘acts of kindness’ or ‘making a difference’, and linking it to helping each other out and helping out in their communities, so it became a positive concept rather than something that distracted and divided.” Stakeholder

“We’re not a volunteering club, we’re a group for people that have been bereaved, and that is the most important thing. I’m not against volunteering in itself. I can see the benefits, but people can’t be made to feel like it is the main focus of the group or that they’re being forced into things. Some people are very raw and need time before they can even consider anything like volunteering.” Late Springer

How have barriers to age-friendly and inclusive volunteering been overcome?

The Late Spring project was **aware of the potential barriers to volunteering and adopted a subtle, flexible and supportive approach to overcome various barriers:**

“Working with older people, we’re always aware and mindful of the barriers to participation, and in designing services we aim to overcome them as much as possible. In our application we acknowledged the practical, structural and emotional barriers, which made sense to us and I’d like to think we’ve helped make it easier for Late Springers to overcome these barriers and be supported into different forms of volunteering to suit them.” Stakeholder

Practical barriers have been overcome through the use of accessible language that introduces volunteering subtly and in a way that fits with the expectations of Late Springers:

“We talked with our groups about language and they all said they didn’t like the word ‘volunteering’. So we used language that suited the nature and purpose of Late Spring. It was linked to what Late Spring is all about, supporting people through bereavement and onto a restorative path. Using this language meant that we could then start opening up conversations about volunteering. It acted a bit like a bridge to more specific conversations about volunteering for those that wanted to know more.” Stakeholder

“I’d never thought about volunteering before. I’d never done it. And it wasn’t something I saw as important to me at this stage of my life. But they talked about it in a different way and I started to think about how I already do a lot of these things and how I get pleasure from it. Helping family, friends and neighbours. It made me think about what more I could do, so I started looking at doing more things and volunteering properly.” Late Springer

Structural barriers have been tackled by taking a flexible approach to how volunteering opportunities are offered and how volunteering is talked about, in ways that suit the interests of Late Springers. This includes groups discussing volunteering (or the alternative language used by the project) as much or as little as they would like. It also promotes different types of volunteering and different opportunities. This includes in-situ and micro-volunteering at the groups themselves, encouraging Late Springers to provide support to one another and presenting

other volunteering opportunities, such as the Ambassador programme and opportunities with other organisations:

“After experimenting, we quickly moved away from this approach of having a board promoting more formal volunteering opportunities. It was too specific and too much for our groups. Instead, we let the groups decide what and how they wanted to cover volunteering and we provided them with the props, like the colour therapy/wheel-focused volunteering packs that promote volunteering opportunities linked to the interests or personality of an individual, or the Acts of Kindness resources to give people ideas about what they could do and inspire them. We were keen to give people different ideas, so if all they want to do is help make tea at the groups or give a lift to one of the other Late Springers or not do anything of the sort, that’s fine, but if they wanted to do more then we had the information and resources to help them.” Stakeholder

“I think it is good that there are different things you can do and get involved with. I make tea at our group and that’s enough for me. I feel like I’m doing my bit and helping, and someone’s got to do it. One of us has also become an Ambassador, which is a good idea but not something I want to commit to.”
Late Springer

Late Spring groups, by their very nature, are supportive and designed to build social connections, self-esteem and confidence amongst members. Specifically, regarding volunteering, there are examples of where Late Springers have been subtly encouraged and supported to take part in community and volunteering activities as part of their recovery, helping **overcome emotional barriers**:

“The approach and resources we’ve developed are all about linking volunteering to looking forward and making a new start, to recovery. So it’s about enhancing Late Spring outcomes. This means that introducing volunteering is done in a supportive way, subtly, talking to people about how it might help them and how they can help others, reconnecting with their communities. We’re gradually building confidence, self-esteem, so that people can start thinking about moving forward, and volunteering may be one of the answers to this. This project has given us the space and resources to support people and have these conversations about volunteering.” Stakeholder

Reducing barriers and increasing access to volunteering opportunities

The Late Spring project has worked to overcome barriers and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles. It has promoted volunteering opportunities, which has helped broaden Late Springers' community contributions. This includes people from diverse backgrounds and life circumstances that may not otherwise have volunteered or got involved in their community at this stage of their lives, especially following bereavement:

“Taking part in new things and getting more involved in my community is good for me. It will give me something to do, help me get out and about more and give me a bit of purpose. I've never really volunteered before and at this stage of my life I hadn't been thinking about it. But I can now see why it would be good for me and that I can help other people, so I'm grateful that they talked to me about different opportunities and are encouraging me to get involved.” Late Springer

How have age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles been promoted and embedded?

Age UK Oxfordshire and the Late Spring model naturally supports **age-friendly and inclusive volunteering** principles, and seeks to embed them within their activities:

“As an organisation we're committed to making Oxfordshire more age-friendly. One of the things that attracted us to the [Age-friendly and Inclusive Volunteering] programme was that they promote these principles, so we saw a natural partnership and a way of helping us further promote and embed age-friendly approaches in our organisation and in Oxfordshire.” Stakeholder

Flexible and responsive:

The Late Spring model, through discussion with its members, promoted volunteering in a flexible way to suit the circumstances of each group and the individuals within the group, by introducing volunteering subtly and presenting a flexible range of opportunities:

“It was a softly, softly, subtle approach, but not overt and not pushy. We listened and responded to our Late Springers. We were trying to provide our facilitators with the tools to discuss volunteering in a flexible way to suit each group and its members. Some groups want to engage and others don’t and that’s fine. Some people are already volunteering and some used to and are interested in doing it again, it depends on their circumstances. So we wanted to develop an approach and resources that could be used flexibly to suit different circumstances.” Stakeholder

“We were against volunteering becoming a prominent part of our group. The group is for people that are bereaved and some people are quite raw. Talking about volunteering is a distraction and not always appropriate. I don’t mind it occasionally coming up and we also want to get more people and groups to come and speak at our group, so there is a place for it, but I don’t want anyone to feel like they’re being pushed into volunteering. It needs to be done in a flexible way and the approach determined by the interests of the group, so the facilitators need guidance and resources to help them judge the best way forward and talk about volunteering in a way to suit the group.” Late Springer

Enabled and supported:

The Late Spring model is naturally supportive in its approach and ethos. Support groups aimed to strike a balance between providing Late Springers with information, encouragement and opportunities, while not being too forceful or distracting from the core purpose of Late Spring:

“We created lots of resources and props to help our facilitators support their members. The colour wheel and volunteering information, Acts of Kindness props and the facilitators’ handbook are part of this. We wanted to arm them with all these tools, but let them use their discretion as to how and when they used it.” Stakeholder

“I believe in volunteering and I don’t need much of an excuse to talk about it. So I think it is good that it is discussed at group meetings and that if you are interested in volunteering there is information and support available to you. But I appreciate that it isn’t for everyone.” Late Springer

Sociable and connected:

Part of the focus of the Late Spring model is to be sociable and create new friendships and bonds. Within this context, the project sought to promote and encourage volunteering:

“ We wanted to place volunteering as a way of helping people recover and reconnect with their communities, and realise that it is ok to do something for themselves. Coming to the groups is the first step, and that helps people develop new friendships and do new things, and then going beyond that volunteering takes it a step on.” Stakeholder

Valued and appreciated:

The project developed a bi-monthly newsletter incorporating volunteering to help promote opportunities and show appreciation for those involved. Similarly, Late Springers felt valued and appreciated for helping out at groups or gained a sense of ‘positive affirmation’ by talking about volunteering and the ways they help others:

“ We always try to make a point of thanking our members that help at the groups. They help make the groups and Late Spring what it is and we want to encourage more of that. That’s one of the reasons behind the newsletter – we want to keep people informed, create this sense of community and show thanks and highlight what everyone is up to. We like to show people all the good they’re doing, which makes them feel positive, improving their confidence and sense of worth.” Stakeholder

“ I never thought of helping at the group as volunteering, or giving a lift to a neighbour. It made you feel good, like you’re doing something positive when they put it in that way, when they talked about it as an act of kindness or volunteering. It makes you feel good and want to do more of it.” Late Springer

Meaningful and purposeful:

Volunteering is embedded within the Late Spring model to help members recover and progress along a restorative path, helping Late Springers develop a new purpose in their lives:

“ There was a reason behind embedding volunteering into Late Spring. We think it is a way to help some people exit Late Spring when they’re ready. That may be volunteering with Age UK [Oxfordshire] as an Ambassador or in one of our other projects, or it may be volunteering with other organisations. It may even

just be about being more active, helping friends, family and neighbours and the positivity that comes with reconnecting with your community. It's part of giving people a renewed purpose. This was one of the reasons we created the Ambassador role, a pathway out of Late Spring, while staying involved with us and benefiting from their enthusiasm and commitment." Stakeholders

"Coming to the group is really important to me. It is an important part of my life. I like helping out where I can, making tea, calling other group members up, organising events and trips outside of the group meetings. We're all friends now and important to each other. Helping out in this way keeps me busy, and I get a lot out of it all too." Late Springer

Makes good use of my strengths:

The Late Spring project aimed to offer a variety of opportunities, from in-situ, ad hoc and micro-volunteering to more formal or longer-term options to suit individual members:

"If someone wants to get involved, there is plenty of opportunities for them, whether that be helping out in a group, becoming an Ambassador or volunteering in one of our other projects. Our colour wheel volunteering packs provide lots of information and opportunities to suit different people and their interests, as well as the different ways people can get involved in the groups themselves." Stakeholder

What have been the impacts on individuals and organisations?

Individuals

Late Spring has helped **increase awareness of volunteering opportunities. Its groups have engendered an interest in volunteering amongst Late Springers, as well as increased their confidence to volunteer.** For example, 43 of the 58 Late Springers that responded to a feedback survey said they had become more aware of the opportunities to help others or volunteer by coming to a Late Spring group. Some 33 of the 58 said they were more interested in helping others or volunteering because of Late Spring. In addition, 27 of 59 said their Late Spring group helped them feel more confident about helping others or volunteering in the future ⁵:

⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown happened at the same time as the feedback questionnaire was administered amongst Late Spring groups, which meant that only about a quarter of Late Springers completed a questionnaire.

“ We’ve spoken about volunteering and acts of kindness a few times in our group. It’s a positive thing. There’s a world of different opportunities out there and talking about it has encouraged me to consider doing other things.” Late Springer

“ Coming to the Late Spring group has helped me feel better. I’ve made new friends and it’s helped me stay active. I feel more positive and confident, and more able to take on new challenges. So the idea of volunteering is more interesting to me now and something I feel more confident about, than before I came to Late Spring.” Late Springer

Attending Late Spring groups and discussing volunteering has reaffirmed to some Late Springers (31 of 58 that responded to the feedback questionnaire) that they **often help people or volunteer, either within Late Spring or elsewhere. This generates positivity, and helps sustain volunteering activity and encourage members to volunteer:**

“ I never really considered what I do as volunteering or thought much about it. But talking about it gave me and others a chance to realise that we do quite a lot for people. Just small things, like checking in on a neighbour or giving a friend a lift to the group, but it adds up and acknowledging that makes you feel good about yourself. It makes you want to carry on and do more of it.”
Late Springer

“ There’s a magic in watching people’s faces. Many people are already doing lots of this [community contributions/volunteering]. And even if they’re not doing anything formally, many of them help out within the groups, helping set up, giving lifts or just being one of the more experienced people helping newer members. When we talk about it, they realise that they’re making a difference, and we’re celebrating that. They may not want to call it volunteering, but they realise that they’re having a positive impact on those around them, whatever it is they’re doing and this is all part of helping build people’s confidence and self-esteem. We then can build on that to open the conversation up about volunteering and doing more, including some people going on to become an Ambassador.” Stakeholder

Subtle and flexible promotion by facilitators has encouraged some Late Springers **into helping more or volunteering, including becoming a Late Spring Ambassador**. For example, 18 of the 58 Late Springers that responded to the feedback questionnaire said they had helped people or volunteered as a result of Late Spring:

“I was glad to become an Ambassador. Late Spring is a brilliant project and I want to stay involved and help it and other people, just like it has helped me. I like helping. I enjoy it.” Late Springer

“I like getting involved. I’ve always volunteered, but that had to stop for a while when I was caring for my partner. Going to my Late Spring group helped me feel better and more able to get involved. I help at my group, but I’m also getting involved in other things to stay active. I like meeting new people and doing new things. It’s good for me. I’m not sure I’d have done this without Late Spring. They help build your confidence and encourage you. Talking about acts of kindness and volunteering made me realise I should get back out there again.” Late Springer

“We’ve helped introduce the idea of volunteering with our Late Springers, and helped them realise that volunteering comes in lots of different forms. I don’t think we’d have had the conversation specifically about volunteering if it wasn’t for this programme. It’s given us the space and resources to do it and to make it a natural part of Late Spring, helping people to reconnect with their communities as part of their recovery. I think in several cases we’ve sowed seeds in people’s minds about volunteering, sparking new and old interests. For example, I remember one man said he wasn’t interested at all in volunteering. He’d never done it and thought it wasn’t for him. But in speaking about it, we sowed a seed and now, following some signposting from us, he’s started doing some things with local organisations. It may only appeal to 1 or 2 people in a group, but it could have a big impact on that person and the people and organisations they support.” Stakeholder

Late Springers that helped in their communities or volunteered, whether through Late Spring or elsewhere, recognised that it had a **positive impact on their health and well-being, improving confidence, helping them be more active and reducing isolation**:

“It’s about being active, getting out, meeting people, doing things and having a positive impact on your life and others. I think talking about volunteering and promoting it at the group is a good thing, and recognising that you’re helping others is good for the way you feel about yourself. It is important for me to be active and to help others. It keeps me busy, stops me sitting at home on my own and I feel like I’m doing some good.” Late Springer

“We wanted to integrate volunteering into Late Spring as a way of helping people recover and look to the future, so they can start a new part of their life. So in that sense it is intrinsically part of improving people’s confidence, health and well-being. It [volunteering] provides a platform to help people progress and in turn that helps improve their well-being, as well as helping the people and organisations around them.” Stakeholder



* 58 respondents completed the feedback questionnaire. Many Late Springers didn’t complete the questionnaire due to Covid-19 meaning several Late Spring groups didn’t meet in March onwards.

Organisations

The funding has helped Age UK Oxfordshire **develop resources to help other organisations set up and manage Late Spring groups**. This has led to one such group being formed, with potential for Late Spring to be more widely promoted and adopted in the future:

“ We know how important Late Spring is and we want to encourage more groups to be set up locally and elsewhere. We’ve now got the resources, the training and the guides to help organisations set up and manage a Late Spring group. It’s early days, but it will grow organically now we have the resources in place.” Stakeholder

“ We set up a Late Spring group in our care home to help families that have lost a loved one. It’s been really good so far, really beneficial to those that have joined. It’s important because it can be very hard to lose someone and then break off contact with the care home, where they’ve spent a lot of time visiting. So this is a way to bridge the gap and help people in the first period when they’ve lost someone and they’re very raw.” Stakeholder

Late Spring and Age UK Oxfordshire

Introducing, promoting and embedding volunteering within Late Spring has helped **enhance its model and improve its outcomes**:

“ The biggest challenge was taking a team of staff, existing service and existing service users on a journey. But we now have a team of staff that are aware of age-friendly and inclusive volunteering, supportive of it, regularly talk about it and know that they can be person-centred in supporting service users and their groups, only if appropriate, to consider volunteering [either within Late Spring or elsewhere].” Stakeholder

“We wanted to include volunteering within Late Spring but not undermine an established and effective service. We feel like we’ve managed to do this after much effort. The idea of Late Springers supporting each other, doing acts of kindness, and volunteering has probably always been in there. But this project has helped us give it more prominence and space, bringing it more to the forefront and seeing it as a strategy to help people reconnect with their communities and progress. We’ve managed to embed and weave it in, and be more proactive about volunteering, without it dominating or undermining the group. Instead it feels like it’s now something that enhances what we do, providing another way to help people recover and giving them opportunities to stay involved with Late Spring and Age UK.” Stakeholder

The funding has helped develop **resources for facilitators to manage Late Spring groups, including supporting Late Springers to be volunteers:**

“Late Spring is now a more established project. We’ve increased the number of groups and members over the year. We’ve improved the resources and support available to the facilitators and groups, which means we now have a more defined structure to the sessions we run. This includes resources that have volunteering weaved in, so that facilitators can use them flexibly. It’s done in such a way that volunteering in its various forms can be talked about without it being too obvious or awkward. It now feels like it’s the norm to be talking about things like reconnecting with your community or making a difference, because it is all part of people recovering and looking forward. Overall, we feel better equipped to support people that have been bereaved and to work with them to help make a difference in their communities or volunteer.” Stakeholder

“The new resources are really useful, helping make it easier for us to run our groups and also for any volunteers to help us. I also really like some of the volunteering resources, such as the information packs and acts of kindness props, which I’ve used to good effect with my group. Before we may have spoken about things like volunteering, but now we have the tools and props to do it better, allowing us to discuss it more and in a more considered, structured way as part of a pathway to moving on, although only in a way that fits with the group. This is something that we will keep on using, dipping in to as it’s appropriate and depending on the interests of the group. It’s an important way to talk about the future, move people on and give them a sense of progression.” Stakeholder

Late Spring has set up its **volunteer Ambassador programme, providing an opportunity for Late Springers to volunteer with Age UK Oxfordshire**, benefiting all parties:

“I’m really pleased with the Ambassador scheme. It makes sense on lots of levels. It came out of discussions with our groups about volunteering, about what they saw as volunteering and what they could do to help. It provides an opportunity for some Late Springers to progress from the group, move on to a new stage in their lives, but stay involved through a supported volunteering pathway. And in the process Late Spring and Age UK benefit from their experience of being in the group and their passion for it. It is also a bridge to other volunteering opportunities. So they volunteer with us first, build up their confidence and then they may go on to volunteer elsewhere.” Stakeholder

Participating in the programme has helped **embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering within Age UK Oxfordshire**:

“We’re now having more conversations about age-friendly and inclusive volunteering across the organisation. It is now regular and common language, the norm within our organisation to talk about volunteering and age-friendly principles.” Stakeholder

“Across all the clients we work with, we’re now signposting more than before to volunteering as a potential solution, as part of social prescribing, just because it is something at the forefront of our minds and something we’re more confident with, for example as a solution to loneliness and isolation. We’re focusing more on the person and their needs, which can bring in volunteering more. We also realise that we and other voluntary organisations have a role in making those voluntary opportunities more age-friendly, more flexible and more suitable, whereas before we might have thought that volunteering wasn’t suitable for some of our clients. But if we make the opportunities more appropriate, volunteering can be positive for everyone involved.” Stakeholder

Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering fits with Age UK Oxfordshire’s strategic aims. **Participating in the programme has helped give the organisation the authority, relationships and resources to advocate age-friendly principles locally**:

“The [Age-friendly and Inclusive Volunteering] programme was always a good fit for us strategically. We’ve spoken to lots of different organisations about age-friendly approaches and volunteering over the last year. I now feel that we’re in a better place to promote being age-friendly because we understand it more and living and breathing it ourselves. I feel we’ve got the resources and the right language at our disposal, which means I can go out and speak with other organisations and promote the principles with confidence.” Stakeholder

What is the sustainability for the future?

Age UK Oxfordshire will continue to support Late Spring, and as part of this **further promote and embed age-friendly and inclusive volunteering, including development of the Ambassador programme:**

“We’re already thinking about and planning for the future, about how we continue to support Late Spring and how we keep weaving in volunteering as part of it. We’ve made progress this year and embedded volunteering and the age-friendly principles into Late Spring. We’ve been doing some budget work and we’re committed to funding the coordinator post for another year, which covers volunteering. So it is maintaining our capacity and having someone to oversee Late Spring, take a step back, do project and development work and support the facilitators. This will also allow us to carry on developing and evolving our approach and products about volunteering, as well as growing the Ambassador programme.” Stakeholder

“We see this project as a beginning, not an end. The aim is that our staff and partners are always thinking about age-friendly principles and volunteering. So that it’s hard wired in their heads and they’re always thinking about the barriers and principles. We want Late Spring to grow and flourish so that it is a springboard into helping in their communities and volunteering, including volunteering with Age UK and other projects we’re working on like the Community Links project.” Stakeholder

Similarly, Age UK Oxfordshire wants to continue promoting Late Spring and age-friendly and inclusive volunteering to other organisations in Oxfordshire:

“An important part of this project was about supporting other organisations to set up Late Spring groups and promoting age-friendly volunteering. We’ve only scratched the surface on this so far and want to do a lot more, which fits with our strategic aims. We’ve got several plans and opportunities to take forward, several of which have come out of this project such as new partnerships with other organisations and networks. We can lead by example, using our newfound resources and experience and our relationships to promote age-friendly principles amongst other organisations in Oxfordshire.” Stakeholder

Case study



Embedding volunteering, subtly and flexibly, to enhance an existing service, improving outcomes

Louise⁶ has been involved in Late Spring for several years and it has an important role in her life:

“I heard about Late Spring from a friend. I wasn’t sure what to expect, but after my husband died I felt like I would benefit from the support. It’s now a really big part of my life. It’s a place where you can speak honestly and share your emotions. After the first few months other people in your life don’t really want to talk to you about it. They want you to feel better and move on, but it doesn’t work like that. There is a permanent sense of loss. But I can be myself at Late Spring and share with other people that feel the same and understand what it’s like.”

Louise has been micro-volunteering at her Late Spring group and helping others in her community, and making her aware of this created a sense of positive affirmation:

“I like to help out. I’m the one that tends to make the tea. I tend to be one of those people that help others. I’ve never really seen it as volunteering, but I guess it is. It feels good to know you’re doing something positive and that you’re appreciated.”

Louise’s group has discussed volunteering and the different opportunities that are available:

“We’ve talked quite a bit about volunteering and getting involved in our communities, and the benefits of it. I remember the colour wheel, which was a fun and interesting way to introduce you to different volunteering ideas and things you could do, depending on your interests. It got me thinking. I appreciate it isn’t for everyone and the group isn’t all about volunteering. But I do think being active and helping people is good for someone that is bereaved. There is nothing worse than sitting on your own in your home feeling lonely and sad.”

⁶This is a pseudonym.

Helping people and volunteering has helped Louise feel more positive about the future, be more active, meet more people and do new things, and consequently feel less lonely and improve her health and well-being:

“Coming to Late Spring is really important to me and I like helping out at the group. I’ve also since got more involved in my local area and joined a local group that supports people in need in the local area. I heard about it through someone else at my Late Spring group and they said to come along and help out. I enjoy it, it’s one morning a week and it is another thing to do and keep me active. I get to meet new people. It’s better than being stuck in the house, on your own with nothing to do or no one to speak with. That’s not much of a life. It’s good for me and at the same time I can help other people, which makes you feel better about life.

Conclusion

The Late Spring project highlights the challenges of integrating age-friendly and inclusive volunteering within an existing, successful project, ensuring that it enhances rather than undermines the service, while embedding age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and overcomes the barriers. The project demonstrated the **importance of using the right language** and approach, especially where existing relationships/services are in place. In practice this meant adopting subtle and positive language such as ‘acts of kindness’, ‘making a difference’ and ‘helping others’. These meaningful phrases are in keeping with the purpose of Late Spring helping bereaved people recover and progress along a restorative path.

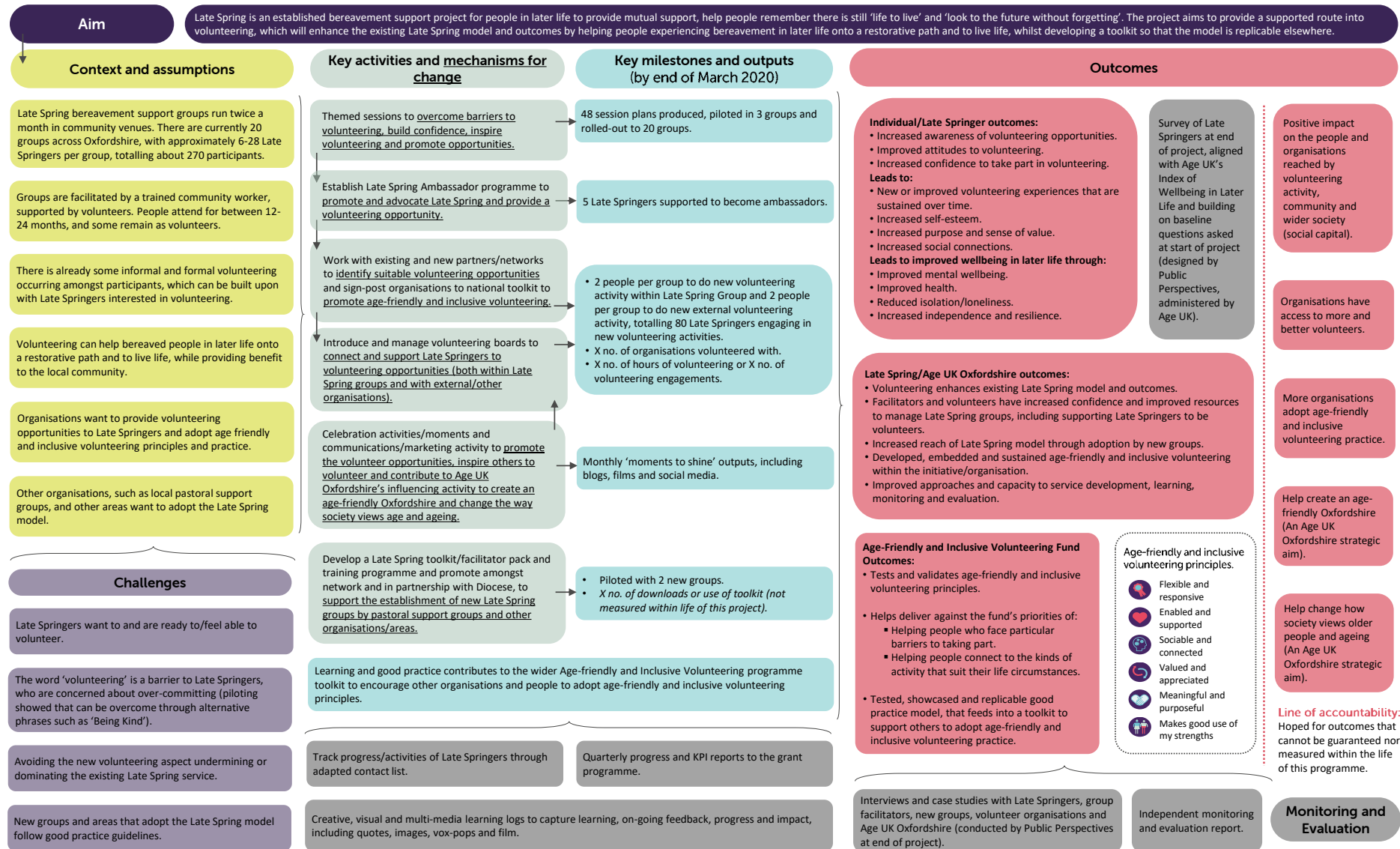
Similarly, the project promoted and encouraged flexible volunteering, helping Late Springers connect to opportunities that suit their circumstances. This involved micro-volunteering in-situ at Late Spring groups, and more formal volunteering opportunities with Age UK Oxfordshire and other organisations. This included establishing the Ambassador programme, which provides a supported pathway into volunteering for Late Springers, allowing them to progress, while staying involved with Late Spring and also acting as a foundation for potentially engaging in other volunteering activities.

This model has helped increase awareness and interest in volunteering amongst Late Springers, as well as increase their confidence to volunteer. Consequently, it has supported some Late Springers into helping more or rekindled interest in volunteering, resulting in positive experiences. In the process, the approach has **enhanced the Late Spring project and helped improve its outcomes.** This has been achieved by helping Late Springers recover and look to the future, increasing their confidence, reducing isolation, promoting being active and improving well-being.

Similarly, the funding has helped **strengthen the Late Spring project, by developing resources to support facilitators to manage groups,** including supporting Late Springers to be volunteers and developing the new Ambassador volunteer programme.

Age UK Oxfordshire remains **committed to growing Late Spring and supporting other organisations to adopt the model,** as well as promoting and embedding age-friendly and inclusive principles within its organisation and with other organisations.

Appendix: Late Spring Theory of Change



Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



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