

Ageing Better Middlesbrough  
October 2020

# Age Friendly Middlesbrough Fund

Micro funding to support community groups



# About this report

Our programme has put this report together to celebrate the contribution community groups are making towards Middlesbrough becoming more age friendly.

We want to share our learning about supporting community groups through micro-funding. Funding opportunities like this can make a big difference to community groups who find it difficult or wouldn't normally consider applying for other forms of public funding.

However, we have found that development support is essential to reach grassroots community groups.

## Ageing Better Middlesbrough

Ageing Better Middlesbrough is a National Lottery Community Funded programme.

We find out what works to reduce loneliness and isolation for people who are aged over 50 and live in Middlesbrough.

We are part of a national Ageing Better Programme – a £78 million investment of The National Lottery Community Fund to support people in later life.

We work across Middlesbrough in lots of different ways to help reduce loneliness and isolation in people who are over 50.



**Our vision is that older people live happy and healthy lives.**



Holistic Care Centre -Pets Shed



Brushstrokes

In the summer of 2019, we awarded 32 community groups and organisations from across Middlesbrough £30,000 in total.

The fund was created to:

- Support volunteer-led grassroots community groups to make Middlesbrough more age friendly.
- Incentivise community groups to work with the Ageing Better Middlesbrough Community Development Team in terms of capacity building.
- Raise awareness of the wider age friendly agenda.

Our Community Development Team promoted the fund and supported most applicants to apply.

**Although groups could apply for up to £3000, most awards were between £500 and £1500.**

# Co-production and the Age Friendly Fund

The Age Friendly Fund was co-produced with the Ageing Better Middlesbrough Action Group (ABMAG), a group of volunteers all aged over 50 who help steer the age friendly communities work.

ABMAG and programme staff collaborated to design the application process, funding criteria, application form and accompanying guidance.

Volunteers valued the opportunity to be involved in a process that had a direct impact on the ground at a grassroots level.

They were keen to see that awards made the biggest difference possible, ensuring value for money. They also wanted to support community groups that had the potential to attract new members and grow.

Each application was considered against the following criteria:

- 1** Will the activity make Middlesbrough more age friendly?
- 2** Does the activity involve people aged over 50?
- 3** Would the application have a long-term impact? Will people continue to benefit over time?
- 4** How many people will benefit?
- 5** Is the application for something new or duplicating existing provision?

## Co-production

Co-production for our Age Friendly Fund is about engaging with those intended to benefit from the funding (people over 50 living in Middlesbrough), at an equal level.

It's a partnership between volunteers and staff to design and deliver the process together.

## Impact

Volunteers were keen to maximise the reach and impact of the fund.

Awards were made by focusing on the core aspects of applications and awarding partial funding to the bits the panel thought would make the biggest difference.

This meant more awards could be made to a bigger number of groups.

# Key learning from our Age Friendly Fund

## Funding opportunities like this can make a big difference to community groups.

Especially groups who find it difficult or wouldn't normally consider applying for other forms of public funding.

A good range of groups applied to the fund although the programme would always like to attract new groups to work with our Community Development Team.



Just over half (56%) of applications came from groups in Middlesbrough based in the 1% most deprived Wards nationally.

Over three-quarters (80%) came from groups based in the 25% most deprived Wards nationally.

Staff have fed back that groups from more deprived areas are less likely to be open to engaging with public funding because of a suspicion of perceived authority and are less likely to have previous experience of funding processes. Additional support has been needed to overcome some of these barriers.

## Some applicants created a wish list of things rather than applying for the things they really needed.

We decided to set the upper limit for applications at £3000. The panel felt that this resulted in some applicants creating a wish list of things rather than applying for the things they really needed. This maximum amount also attracted some public and third sector organisations to apply.

Moving forward, our panel have recommended reducing the maximum amount to £1000 to benefit smaller grassroots community groups.

## Not all groups are seeking development support or want to expand or change.

Some groups are made up of longstanding friends who want to continue as they are.

## Wrap around development support is essential to reach grassroots community groups.

Our Community Development Team identified groups that could benefit from the fund and supported them to apply.

Groups often had interesting ideas but needed help to get their vision down on paper in the format required by the funding process.



Staff visited most of the groups on several occasions before and after the funding was awarded for a range of purposes including:

- To promote the fund
- Discuss a possible application and refine ideas
- Finalise the application
- Explain awards and decisions made by the panel
- Deliver equipment bought by the fund
- Follow up with groups to find out how they were doing post award and whether they needed any further support

## Administering a fund like this is resource intensive.

In addition to community development support, there was a significant amount of administrative resource required to support the process.

Processing applications, preparing papers for the panel, liaising with community groups about awards and purchasing goods and services all takes significant time.

We could not forward awards directly to community groups, instead we had to source and buy items and services and then pass them on the groups. This was particularly resource intensive.



# Supporting our volunteers to be involved in co-production.

ABMAG have the ongoing support of an Involvement and Support Officer, who provides practical, emotional and administrative support so members can take a full and active role in the decision making process. One to one support is provided as required, according to individual needs.

Staff provided additional support to the panel by acting as a link to groups applying, answering queries from panel members where they could and liaising with groups when further information was needed.

Our volunteers highlighted that support for groups to apply and implement awards was crucial and resulted in a higher quality of application.

Staff were also a key source of information, providing expertise and knowledge around things like venue and equipment costs to the panel.

Although the process has been successful, there are some things that we have learned that can improve the experience for volunteers and the process overall.



## Volunteer learning:

- The demands on volunteer's time and energy was high. Because of the number of applications in a short space of time, meetings sometimes lasted three to four hours.
- Some volunteers felt pressure to make and get decisions to applicants quickly.
- Decision making could have been spread out by holding shorter meetings over a longer period to avoid volunteer fatigue.
- Some panel members had previous or current experience of some of the groups applying.
- To avoid a conflict of interest panel members did not take part in discussion/decisions with these groups.
- A grading system was introduced to the process which made it easier for the panel to score applications and reassure them that the decisions were fair and consistent.

# How the awards have helped groups.

Funds like the Age Friendly Fund can make a big difference for small community groups, providing a real lift. The groups supported so far estimate they will engage up to 1800 people.

## Thorntree Art Group

After piloting a community art project Community Ventures wanted to continue a weekly volunteer-led art workshop to improve social connections, self-esteem and overall wellbeing of people.

They also wanted to promote community spirit and pride. The project has been successful in bringing people together of all ages to create pieces of art and to share stories behind their pictures.

The Age Friendly Fund bought equipment and paid for training for staff members to run the project. The art group now attracts people from different age groups. Mandy who is over 50 and attends the group with her daughter said,



**"It's not only an art class,  
it is a lifeline. Everyone is  
so welcoming."**

**Mandy, group  
member**

Watch our video about the [Art Group](#)

For more information about the group contact Community Ventures,  
The Greenway, Middlesbrough TS3 9PA  
Telephone number: 01642 989254



# Brushstrokes

Brushstrokes is a newly formed community group that meets to get creative with paints, pastels and water colours.

The group meets weekly to improve skills, meet like-minded people and enjoy their hobby together. They also want to nurture artists and enable them to display their work at local events. Although open to everyone, the group is based in Sunnyside Community Centre which is a residential scheme for older people. Residents attending the group feel more connected to their local community and some lovely friendships have formed.



**"It is two hours of forgetting about other things in your life and just relaxing."**

**Group member**

Our Community Development team was approached by two Ageing Better Middlesbrough members who were looking for help to start a new art group. We identified a suitable venue and helped the group attract new members by advertising taster sessions in our quarterly What's On Guide and Newsletter.

The group was supported to apply to the Age Friendly Fund for equipment that could be used by new members and to cover the initial cost of venue hire and a tutor to give the group a chance to establish themselves.

**Watch our video about [Brushstrokes](#)**

**For more information about the group contact please call: 01642 257053**

# Trinity Pet Shed

The Age Friendly Fund part-funded a new Pet Shed within the Holistic Care Centre garden at James Cook University Hospital.

The shed lets patients spend time with pets when they are brought to the hospital by a friend or relative.

**"We wanted to do something for people who have been stuck in hospital for weeks or months on end, who were missing their own pets."**

**Lauren Farrow, Manager of the Holistic Care Centre at James Cook University Hospital**

There is evidence that pet therapy can reduce stress and anxiety, but due to the risk of infection, animals are not allowed onto a ward where cancer patients are recovering after chemotherapy. Spending time with their pet can reduce the anxiety patients might have about the animal's wellbeing while they are in hospital.

Our Community Development team successfully supported the Holistic Care Centre to apply to three funds, including the Age Friendly Fund.

The pet shed is now up and running and will benefit patients for years to come.

Watch our video about the [Pet Shed](#)



# Steph's Tea and Cake

The group is a weekly get together for anyone within the community to drop in for a cup of tea, a home-made cake and most importantly, a good chat.

The group was started by Steph, a local resident of the Thorntree/Brambles Farm area of Middlesbrough. With the support of Community Ventures and her friend Carole, Steph found the confidence to start her own group to help people feeling lonely in her community.

**"I decided to start my own group to help people that don't come out or socialise in any way. The group has made me feel happy and given me a sense of purpose."**

**Steph, Group leader**

The group is also a member of Middlesbrough's Warm Welcome Network, an initiative set up by Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland, to ensure that groups and activities are welcoming and accessible. Everyone that visits Steph's tea and cake group talks about the lovely warm welcome they receive and the fact that the group isn't too big, so if you don't like being around lots of people, it is a good place to try.



The Age Friendly Fund supported the group to get up and running by buying some essential catering equipment and also some resources to host special events including an afternoon tea and Halloween party.

Slowly but surely the group is becoming more widely known in the community and attracting a number of regulars.

**For more information about the group contact Community Ventures,  
The Greenway, Middlesbrough TS3 9PA  
Telephone number: 01642 989254**

# 50+ Dance Group

The 50+ dance group comes together weekly to improve balance and flexibility through dance and to have fun. The group was formed as a result of a 10-week exercise and dance course called 'Falling on your feet', delivered jointly by Helix Arts and Ageing Better Middlesbrough.

Group members wanted to continue to meet up to dance once the programme had finished.

**"We wanted to continue with regular dance sessions to maintain our current level of fitness and flexibility, and to maintain friendships developed during the sessions."**



**Group member**

Our Community Development team supported the group to find a dance tutor who could deliver the sessions and apply to the Age Friendly Fund for support to cover the costs of the tutor and venue for 12 months. We hope that this seed funding helps the group attract enough regular members to introduce a small charge for the session. This could help the group become sustainable.

People who take part in the dance classes have noticed that their mobility and overall level of fitness has improved. Some members have also noticed that learning a dance routine has a positive impact on their memory. Some members also meet after the session to have a coffee and a chat.

**"My favorite dance is Jive. Everyone is so friendly. I enjoy coming here, the dance instructor is superb. We all have a lovely time."**

**Group member**

**[Watch our video about the 50+ Dance Group](#)**

**For more information about the group contact Loft Studio, 2nd Floor of the Forbes building, Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough**

**Contact Nadia on 07960 165337**

# Memory Lane

The Memory Lane is an opportunity for people to get together who want to share memories and meet new people.

A live performer usually opens the session with a 'golden oldie' and then question cards or topics are used to invite members to share their own memories using portable microphones. There's also a quiz and raffle.

Sessions help to trigger happy memories, connect members to their community and let new friendships to develop as people tell stories and discover things they have in common.



The sessions take place in a local pub and now has more than 20 regular members.

Our Community Development team supported Diane, group leader, to advertise the sessions in our Taster Session and What's On Guide.

Staff attended the first three sessions to support Diane and offered advice on how to become a constituted group.

The group was also supported to apply to the Age Friendly Fund to cover the cost of public liability insurance and some office supplies.

**"I used to enjoy sharing memories with my nana and knew it would work. People come from local care homes, and some travel independently, we host our sessions in a local pub which helps with the atmosphere."**

**Diane, Group Leader**

For more information visit [www.facebook.com/MemoryLaneMiddlesbrough](https://www.facebook.com/MemoryLaneMiddlesbrough)

## Get in touch

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