

NHS Long Term Plan

Focus Group

Engagement

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Project Summary

The Lancashire and South Integrated Care System (ICS) wanted to ensure that the needs of people were being addressed by recent developments within the healthcare system.

The local Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) were asked to identify priority groups. Local Healthwatch were asked to deliver a set of focus groups which targeted the assigned priority groups. Healthwatch Lancashire completed the first phase of these focus groups and the report can be found on our website <https://healthwatchlancashire.co.uk>

This report is based on the feedback from three focus groups that West Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group identified as priority groups. West Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group wanted to find out more about the things that make a difference to older people in terms of their health and wellbeing, particularly concerning the wider determinant of health.

The main focus group activities took place in March 2020*. Group members were asked for their views on:

- The things they do to help them or might help them to feel happier or improve their life? What, if anything, stops them
- What causes them most concern within their life
- Their suggestions of changes they would like that would make a positive difference to their health and wellbeing
- What they would like the West Lancashire partnership to focus on to make a positive difference to their life

NHS Long Term Plan (LTP) Phase One

The NHS LTP sets out a vision of improvement across the service:

“As medicine advances, health needs change and society develops, so the NHS has to continually move forward so that in 10 years’ time we have a service fit for the future.

The NHS Long Term Plan will do just that. Drawn up by those who know the NHS best - frontline health and care staff, patients and their families and other experts - the Long Term Plan is ambitious but realistic. It will give everyone the best start in life; deliver world-class care for major health problems, such as cancer and heart disease, and help people age well.”¹

* A further update (September 2020) has been added from the group leads to advice on impact of coronavirus pandemic for the groups.

The LTP aims to:

- Make it easier for people to access support closer to home and via new technology.
- Do more to help people stay well.
- Provide better support for people with specific or long-term conditions, for those with learning disabilities and autism and for people as they get older and experience conditions such as dementia.

Why were Healthwatch (HW) involved?

Healthwatch were involved to ensure that local people remained at the heart of the decisions being made as part of the transformation of our healthcare system.

The Focus group work is part of a wider programme that seeks to establish how the people of Lancashire and South Cumbria feel about the NHS LTP.

Healthwatch England designed a survey which would feed responses in to the NHS LTP. The questions focused on identifying what people felt were the important aspects of health care that helped them to prevent ill health and encouraged them to age well.

The report

This is a report for the West Lancashire area. It details collated findings and recommendations from discussions that Healthwatch Lancashire collected during the focus groups. It includes three individual West Lancashire focus group reports for Healthwatch Lancashire.

Priority groups

The ICP priority group is detailed in the table below.

ICP area	Priority group	Aims
West Lancashire	The things that make a difference to older people in terms of their health and wellbeing, particularly concerning wider determinant of health.	To find out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities and things that help them to stay happy and healthy. • Key concerns of older people. • Suggestions to improve their health and wellbeing. • Suggestions for West Lancashire Partnership.

The Focus Groups - key themes and recommendations

Several themes arose in response to the questions posed to the Focus Groups, these are briefly summarised below:

- Attending groups was very important for people's health and wellbeing.
- More availability and easier access to GP services is needed.
- Improvements are required to medication reviews, including more opportunities to discuss and review medication.
- Improvement to transport systems is imperative.
- Improvements are required to town planning and safety.
- More person centred and useful advice for dealing with health conditions.
- More knowledge of health professionals and listening to patients.
- The importance to keep learning different things throughout your life.
- Keeping active.
- Keeping busy and contributing.
- Staying socially connected.
- Keeping positive.
- Restrictions such as transport, and others due to health, being a carer, bereavement and losing touch with friends, limited people's ability to stay healthy and happy.
- Improving public transport and helping people to stay connected, such as supporting local groups like the U3A, helping older people become digitally active and connecting individuals.
- Providing more information and awareness of opportunities in the community.
- Supporting local groups and having more of them in the community such as supporting local groups like Nifty Fifties
- More provision and incentives to get out and stay active
- More opportunities for education - not just digital
- Family respite and services to address carers and other needs

Focus Groups

Greenhill Community Hub – Pain Management Group¹

Participants - 6
Healthwatch Lancashire

Attending groups was very important for people’s health and wellbeing.

More availability and easier access to GP services is needed.

Improvements are required to medication reviews, including more opportunities to discuss and review medication.

Improvement to transport systems is imperative.

Improvements are required to town planning and safety.

More person centred and useful advice for dealing with health conditions.

More knowledge of health professionals and listening to patients.



¹ Unfortunately we were unable to proceed with the planned focus group in Skelmersdale due to COVID-19 and the ensuing ‘lockdown’. However, in preparation for further engagements, we had recently spoken with the Greenhill Community Hub and in particular a pain management support group that meet at the centre. Whilst we didn’t have the ‘five questions’ that we shared with the other two groups for this meeting, many of the responses reflected these broader themes, and we have therefore ‘grouped’ the information shared under these headings.

The pain management group at the Greenhill Community Hub had been running for 10 weeks and was set up for local people who share similar pain management concerns and have been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, arthritis, back and knee injuries and depression.

What things currently help you or might help you to feel happier or improve your life?

Participants from the pain management group told us why it was so important for them to get-together at the Greenhill Community Hub:

“Many of us have been ‘stuck inside’ - it’s much better to get together with other people with the same health challenges and share our experiences. It gets us out of the house for an hour a week and we have a laugh together - it stops you going stir-crazy. I set up the group after seeing a message on Facebook from one of the others and decided we needed to get together. We have been going for 10 weeks and new people have been joining us over that time.”

“I am sick of being stuck in the house. I really look forward to these meetings every Tuesday - it’s the highlight of my week.”

“The group has really helped - I feel like a ‘fibro-warrior’ now.”

What causes you most concern within your life?

Accessing primary care services and GP appointments:

The group shared their experience of using local health and social care services. Most of their concerns related to accessing primary care services.

“I want to get adjustments in my home to help me with my condition, but it’s hard to get hold of an OT without going through your GP.”

“Getting an appointment with a GP is really difficult. At our practice they have only 16 appointments a day. You have to ring before 8:30am to have a chance of getting an appointment. If you try to book an appointment otherwise, it’s 2 weeks before you can get a telephone consultation or 4 weeks to see an actual doctor.”

“When you do get an appointment then it’s only for 10 minutes and that’s not enough - we can only discuss one thing and many of our health concerns are linked.”

“Do you know what does my head in? You have to be on time for your appointments but they always run late. It’s all one way. I was in for the first appointment of the morning and the appointment was still 25 minutes late.”

“I’m sick to death of waiting to see a doctor.”

“Phoning back for a telephone consultation is fine - but we never know when they will ring. It would help if they gave some approximate time (within an hour or so).”

Some people had concerns about triage arrangements, “I don’t want to share my personal health concerns with a receptionist - how can they understand my health needs - they’re not qualified. I would prefer to speak to someone with medical training.”

Appointments with the nurse practitioner:

“I’m happy to see a nurse practitioner - rather than wait to see a GP. They (the nurse practitioners) seem more bothered about you - you feel more valued.”

“I have some concerns about seeing the nurse practitioner. The last time (when I saw one) they didn’t link my two health conditions and misdiagnosed me. If I am going to have to see a nurse practitioner I would want better communication with the wider medical team - to ensure I get safe care. I also can’t get a ‘fit note’ from my nurse practitioner, so need to get appointments for this from the GP.”

Using the pharmacist:

“I go to the chemist if I can’t get to see the doctor. I went to see the chemist when I had a bad throat and after their advice I felt much better.”

“I’d speak to the chemist, but there is no privacy. They do have a cubicle to meet but I’d just look like a ‘smack-head’.”

Shared health care record:

Members of the group reported that they felt their needs were often handled in isolation and at times, at a detriment to person centred care. It was felt that health professionals on occasions had not looked at current medication/health records, which meant having to tell their story over and over.

“I really like the idea of a shared health care record, as it would stop me having to repeat myself over and over again each time I have an appointment.”

“Yes, but it doesn’t currently happen. When I was caring for my Dad between two hospitals they had no record of the care he had received elsewhere.”

Using the walk-in centre:

In terms of the walk-in centre in Skelmersdale and whether people go there, “no chance - I’d rather just go to the chemist.”

“The lift at the Concourse is never working which makes the walk-in centre difficult to access.”

“The walk-in centre in Ormskirk is really good. I am happy to go there, but won’t go to the one in Skelmersdale - its crap.”

“They have a GP in Ormskirk, but not in the Skelmersdale one. The Ormskirk one is good for getting your bloods done.”

Medication:

In terms of regularly routine assessments (linked to long-term conditions), the group said:

“They’re not in a hurry to see you. There’s no check up on medications. You have to chase them up.”

“The practice got in touch with me about a review, but then cancelled it. I was really upset.”

“I was on the same medication for IBS for over 10 years, but I can’t get them now without paying.”

“I get mine (medication) for free as I have epilepsy, but I discovered I had been on ‘kid’s drugs’ and these weren’t helping one bit. I have been on these same drugs for over 30 years. It was only when a specialist told me I that I was on the wrong medication that I managed to get this changed at the GP Practice. They have now ‘upped’ my medication and I am a lot better.”

Transport access concerns

Transport was highlighted as a key concern by the group members - this was particularly linked to the layout of communities and the challenges associated with accessing core services.

“None of us drive except Jeanette and living in Skelmersdale this leaves you really isolated.” Getting to our local practice (Sandy Lane) isn’t too bad (25 minutes walk) but getting to one of the linked (neighbourhood) practices is really difficult. Transport (buses) is so poor, that you have to get a taxi and that’s really expensive. It’s a good four miles to the other practices and that’s £12 for a taxi (£6 each way). Public transport is just ‘too jerky’ with my condition - it hurts, as you feel every jolt. This isn’t helped as the roads are really bad. The bus route goes all over the place (to each of the estates rather than direct) and the last bus back to Skelmersdale is 8:45pm if you to travel to Ormskirk or Southport.”

“Another member of the group is confined to a wheelchair so taxis can be difficult too.”

“We are currently completing forms for ‘dial-a-ride’, so that the group can do trips out. As individuals we apply for membership and can then use as a group.”

Personal safety concerns

The group shared concerns around personal safety - many of their concerns related to the isolated nature of the communities and the footpaths in the town.

“I don’t like going out on my own - I have a lot of anxiety.”

“The layout of the footpaths means that you have very secluded pathways, and you don’t feel safe - particularly if you are walking into the centre of Skelmersdale ... so that puts you off. Many of the footpaths are also not lit.”

“I have a walking stick and feel that I might have to be prepared to defend myself with it, when I go out.”

“If you do go out the flags are so uneven - it’s hopeless for wheelchairs.”

“A lot of the pavements are blocked - as people park on the pavements.”

Challenges with keeping healthy

The group shared other challenges with keeping healthy.

“Sleep is one of our main concerns. I have difficulty with relaxing. I can’t sleep without the medication.”

“There is no compassion from health professionals about our condition.”

“We get no practical advice” - “they say ‘the best thing you could do is ride a bike’. Could you imagine me on a bike?” (Group laughing)

“If you’re in pain, then you won’t want to exercise.”

Can you suggest any other changes that would make a positive difference to your health and wellbeing. What should the West Lancashire partnership be focusing on to make a positive difference to your life?

Support for the group

As the group were fairly new, they were not in a position to get constituted, have a bank account and bid for funds. The Greenhill Community Hub kindly gave the group four weeks room use for free, but the individual members now have to pay to attend and to cover the costs of refreshments. Attendees were okay with covering these costs but would really value the opportunity to bid for funds to help cover transport costs and trips out. From a social prescribing perspective, the group appeared to already provide real positive impact for those involved, but felt they could achieve so much more if properly supported. The group felt that by

meeting, they were able to support one another more - rather than have to rely so heavily on local health services.

Increased awareness from health professionals

The group shared experiences of misdiagnosis and late diagnosis of Fibromyalgia. Comments were made around a lack of awareness from health professionals around the condition, and the stigma attached to 'invisible' pain. *"I know more about it than they do."*

Keeping Healthy

"I'd like to go swimming - that really helps - I don't feel the pain when I exercise in water, but the local swimming pool is too cold." (Others nodding)

"As a group we have talked about using somewhere like Twinkle House where they have a hydrotherapy pool, but it is too costly and the group doesn't have the resources."

"I'd be paranoid about my size though if we went to a pool." In response, another group member said *"... but we could all go together, so wouldn't feel so self-conscious."*

Subsequent update - September 2020: The group are hoping to return to the Greenhill Hub from late September. Members have kept in touch via Facebook and other social media platforms during the pandemic.

U3A Aughton and Ormskirk
 Participants -
 Healthwatch Lancashire

The importance to keep learning different things throughout your life.
 Keeping active.
 Keeping busy and contributing.
 Staying socially connected.
 Keeping positive.
 Restrictions such as transport and others due to health, being a carer, bereavement and losing touch with friends, limited people’s ability to stay healthy and happy.
 Improving public transport and helping people to stay connected, such as supporting local groups like the U3A, helping older people become digitally active and connecting individuals.
 Providing more information and awareness of opportunities.



We visited the U3A group in Aughton on Thursday 5th March. There were over a hundred people in attendance across two large meeting rooms. The group session was a coffee morning for members running from 9:30am - 11:30am, with information and craft stalls. Information about our visit and other notices were shared with all group members at 10am. There was a visiting speaker in another adjoining room, and this session began at 10:30am. Healthwatch staff and volunteers spoke to individuals and small groups throughout the morning session. The majority of participants that we spoke to were women, aged over 65 years.

What things currently help you or might help you to feel happier or improve your life?

Keeping learning

Many people highlighted the importance of keeping mentally active and learning new skills.

“For me I need to have an intellectual challenge - to keep me still mentally active. This group provides so many different aspects and things to get involved with. We have a newsletter three times a year - with a noticeboard of events. We have a website too.”

“Keeping learning and thinking! I attend the art group, music group and science group as well as computer group. I like attending talks and meeting with others”

“I come here to U3A. I like the wine evening and local history.”

“I moved to this area from Manchester when I retired and decided that I wanted to return to study. I am doing a degree course part-time over 6 years with the Open University. It's really important to me - if I wasn't doing this, I would just be watching television. I needed something to keep me going. I am the oldest person there but that's not a problem for me. The research study that I'm undertaking is directly linking with the U3A group. I'm trying to find out if using IT or having access to IT helps older adults to keep in touch and be less socially isolated. I'm really interested in how people combat loneliness in later years.”

Keeping active

Physical activity was important for the people we spoke to as well.

“We walk less often than we used to, but I keep active and I'm grateful that we can be.”

“I like to attend ‘aerobics for the over 50s’. They also have chair-based exercise”

“I enjoy gardening, exercising like Zumba, yoga and Pilates. I love being in the garden and doing heavy work.”

“I'm now exercising too.”

“I go to the gym and yoga. I like rambling, I do that regularly.”

“My husband is over 80 and still plays 5-a-side football and table tennis.”

Keeping connected

Everyone we spoke to highlighted the importance of keeping connected with other people and the value of groups such as this one.

“Attending this group (U3A) is important for me - it's about sustaining wellbeing in later life.”

“The U3A group has over 1,800 members which is good.”

“Getting out. When you come to U3A you feel better. It's mixing with people.”

“We're fortunate we have each other (husband and wife). We have a lovely group of friends. We moved from Formby but met lots of people when we moved. People are friendly and talk to each other here at the group.”

“Social interaction with friends”

“For me it's important to get out and see people - that's nice.”

“I visit friends and family. I like to travel.”

“Eating out is our social life.”

Keeping busy and making a contribution

Many of the people we spoke to seemed to have very busy lives with many other commitments as well as taking advantage of the opportunities provided through the U3A group.

“I come here once a week and attend other groups too. I also help with Beavers and volunteer at the hospital shop.”

“Using IT and computers - I run a computer advice session and that's popular.”

“When I'm not involved with this group then I'm seeing friends or looking after grandchildren. I don't have time for anything else.”

“I'm involved in making cards. I also like going on short breaks in our motor home. That makes me happy. We go about once a month. I wouldn't do it on my own but I have a friend that comes. I volunteer for a group in town at the Civic Centre looking after children.”

“I like being involved in U3A management and playing the recorder. I lead the group. I like to work on expanding my range on the recorder and making music.”

Keeping positive

Maintaining a positive outlook and having a 'can-do' mentality was mentioned as important for participants.

"You have to have a positive attitude - not wallowing in your illness. I had a sister who was a hypochondriac and sadly passed away - I think this is what has made me have such a positive outlook".

Keeping healthy

Group members welcomed the contributions of external agencies in advising on keeping healthy in later years.

"Within the group, we also run a series of talks on staying healthy - supported by the CCG - these prove to be popular."

"Attending the U3A group. Watching what I eat too. I would add drinking onto the list - although I realise this might not be regarded as healthy - we drink more at this age".

What stops you doing the above?

Accessibility limitations and health issues

Some participants highlighted how the health and wellbeing of themselves or others affected how they accessed or participated in wider activities.

"I have to think in advance to get to places due to mobility issues. My husband helps me a lot to get to places - so I rely on lifts to get anywhere."

"I have eyesight problems. I am losing my balance and self-confidence and have had falls."

"I'd like to be more active. I read all of the things you're supposed to. My eyesight stops me. I've had both cataracts done but I've developed a problem which is a concern. The hospital is good. The worst thing for me would be not being able to read. I like to read in my own time and it's private."

"At our age various things stop you. I don't get as involved in walking groups as I did because I have a muscle disability. I always liked dancing but I do very little now."

"I'm restricted because my husband can't walk well. So, it holds me back. It frustrated me but I doubt anything can be done there. I do 'dial-a-ride' and take people out and to the hospital. It puts me in a position of the healthy one. It can bring you down but also give you a real lift when you're helping others."

Significant life changes

There was recognition that many people become isolated as a result of major life changes.

“People become disconnected - particularly after the death of spouse. This is a big problem for people coming to groups like this one. I think that loneliness is particularly a problem if a spouse dies and previously, they did everything together. They may have been very active and engaged at that point, but after losing their loved one they don’t know anyone else.”

Lack of motivation or ‘not in their comfort zone’

Linked to health concerns, life changes and other factors, there was an acknowledgement that people can get out of the habit or lost motivation to attend.

“Illness prevents or stops people attending ... but sometimes this is just an excuse, if you get out of the habit of coming along.”

“We’re the sort of people that actively do stuff. I have friends that sit around and moan about things instead of doing things.”

“People don’t know about this group. Some people say this group ‘is a bit posh for me’, but it’s just that they don’t really know people here.”

What causes you most concern within your life?

Public transport

Some people highlighted the challenges of using public transport in order to access core services.

“Accessing Southport hospital is difficult if you are not a driver.”

“Public Transport isn’t brilliant. Buses are hourly, not well served to different areas around here.”

“Buses are not frequent so I’m relying on lifts from family.”

“We have our own cars. It’s easier to get in your car outside your door. It’s not as easy with public transport, although train services are quite good, for example to Preston or Wigan.”

Fraud scams

People mentioned being concerned about falling victim to fraud scams through telephone calls and emails.

“Telephone scams. We have quite a lot of scams going around via email such as HMRC and Amazon.”

“Fraud scams. Detecting email viruses online. Having access to safer banking.”

Being able to access eligible services

Accessing eligible services was a concern for people - particularly if this required going online.

“Blue badge holders are refused. I'll give you my experience; I can't use a walking stick because I have a muscle disability but that means when I apply for my blue badge renewal it says I'm not eligible. There's an over reliance on computers. If you go to a library it says it has timed out and then you have to start over again. There's no option to speak to anyone to renew, it has to be done online. I was very upset and I was only renewing my badge.”

“I have a computer phobia.”

Concerns about health and associated limitations

Health problems and managing these was again highlighted as a concern and challenge.

“Everything went south. I had a couple of strokes and found out that I had a blocked artery. I have had an angina attack too and am still having further tests. I was struggling for a while, but I am managing better now - a mixture of getting the right medication, as well as learning to 'accept' my condition - this was the best advice I could have had.” (from a specialist)

“My husband's health. I worry about him and the things we're missing out on - getting out and going to places and walking. It's being able to move from place to place. It restricts what we can do. There's a lack of freedom.”

Fear of an accident at home

There was an increased awareness and concern about having an accident at home and not being able to get help if living alone.

“I worry about having an accident at home. I live in a house on my own. I don't have a big circle of friends. I've been told I should have one of those medical lines on me in case I fall or something. My daughter lives in Australia so it would give her peace of mind. We talk or use face time. If the people on my care list weren't there what would I do? Who would act in my interest?”

Can you suggest any other changes that would make a positive difference to your health and wellbeing?

Helping people to stay connected

The importance of helping people to stay connected and not isolated was highlighted as a challenge in changing times.

“In the past people went to church and that was their community. It’s more difficult now and it’s not easy if you’re not connected already. People might be more connected if they lived in a retirement village, rather than staying in their own homes. I’m doing a research study exploring whether having access to a computer, email and the internet in general can help older people keep connected. There are some good courses to support older people get more familiar with technology and to address other needs (such as visual impairment).”

“Helping people that are new to the area settle in to make new friends. Older people lose confidence to make new friends.”

Improving public transport

Aligned to the concerns raised, there was a request to make improvements to public transport.

“We need more bus routes and more cycle routes.”

“Bus services that are more frequent than one bus per hour.”

“The bus routes stop at 7pm so I’d have to use the train, but it’s harder because it’s further away. We’re encouraged not to use the car.”

“Ormskirk has better public transport. Skelmersdale has very little. You need a car to get about if you live in Skelmersdale.”

Concerns around healthcare services

People mentioned the importance of retaining local health services with changes or potential changes taking place.

“I’d be upset if they closed the hospital.”

“Podiatry treatment is now private since Virgin Care took over the service. Feet are really important to getting around! Many are not having foot care now.”

More facilities and opportunities to exercise

More opportunities to be physically active, as well as being able to access affordable room hire was highlighted as important.

“We could do with more low impact exercise classes, and more venues/buildings with cheap room hire.”

I don't need anything else

Encouragingly some people felt that they did not require any further action at a local level.

“I can't think of anything else. We both moved to flats. It's more convenient.”

“I don't have anything extra (other than this group and my other voluntary activities) that I need - this group is so good such a diverse range of activities - there's a health group and we went to a local history group on Tuesday too.”

“I can manage everything. I have capacity to make what I want happen.”

What should the West Lancashire partnership be focusing on to make a positive difference to your life?

Supporting groups like this one

Aligned to previous comments, the importance of supporting community groups like U3A was mentioned as a priority.

“I think there should be more groups like this one.”

“People at U3A do things in their own ways; they come here, talk and share.”

“There could be more community groups with people of different age groups on different days. People could go for a social afternoon, but not committed to anything - just a social space.”

Helping people to become digitally connected

The importance of supporting digital literacy was highlighted.

“Looking at supporting people to be more connected through IT may be important”.

More retirement villages?

Some people had more wide-ranging suggestions that might help people stay connected in the future.

“Would retirement villages be more supportive for people to reduce social isolation?”

Improving access to healthcare

Improving access to healthcare services - reflecting the needs of older participants - was highlighted by some of the people we spoke to.

“Easy access to hospital care and podiatry care.”

“Digital services and support accessing GP care”

“More text reminders or letters about services.”

“Telephone appointments don't work. I think it's terrible how people are left.”

Reduced cost services

Discounted or low-cost services were suggested as something that would be beneficial.

“Accessibility to services that are low cost.”

Public transport improvements

Improvements to public transport was again highlighted as a local priority for some.

“Getting into Southport Hospital via bus, as at the moment this is a challenge - there are only five buses per day (less frequent than one per hour).”

“Good public transport. We've got to an age where we can't drive. There are a lot of transfers on public transport.”

“Reliable public transport - it's a bit patchy and doesn't run to time.”

Providing more information about opportunities

Finally, the importance of mapping services and providing information about these so that people are aware of what is available was seen to be important - the role of volunteers could support this.

“Create a volunteer booklet of things going on, with opportunities for all ages and interests.”

“Being aware of where people need to go to do things. Mapping provision of services so you know where the gaps are, for example convenience stores, the post office.”

“Focus on volunteering.”

Subsequent update - September 2020:

In terms of continuing their commitment, over 1,500 members (out of 1,800) renewed their membership with the Aughton and Ormskirk U3A at the end of March 2020 despite the fact that none of the face-to-face events and groups were taking place at that time.

Subsequently there has been a great deal of 'on-line' activity amongst the groups with many of them now connecting via Zoom (this involved a challenge for many people at the outset becoming familiar and able at using video calling). Details of these are listed on the website <https://aughton-ormskirk-u3a.co.uk/>.

Several individual smaller groups have communicated by email (poetry, book reading, Italian, Creative Writing) keeping up a programme similar to their regular one and many have connected on Zoom or other platforms. Ukuleles and Recorders have been meeting outside and making music - not together - and lots more have maintained a social contact by phone or email. Some of the outdoor groups have kept doing as much as they were able, some walks, bowls, table tennis (singles).

There is even an associated online exercise group via Zoom (with 200 members - although not all from U3A) which has been popular. The newsletter is now produced as an e-newsletter and has a circulation reaching 91% of the membership. With each edition of the e-newsletter, the number of website hits has increased too. However, it is unclear how many of the members are managing to 'connect' online. The group are happy to be contacted by the West Lancashire Health Partnership group.

<p>Nifty Fifties</p> <p>Participants - Healthwatch Lancashire</p>	<p>Keeping connected and active</p> <p>Improving public transport</p> <p>Helping people to stay connected</p> <p>Supporting local groups and having more of them in the community such as supporting local groups like Nifty Fifties,</p> <p>Providing more information and awareness of opportunities</p> <p>More provision and incentives to get out and stay active</p> <p>More opportunities for education - not just digital</p> <p>Family respite and services to address carers and other needs</p>
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What things currently help you or might help you to feel happier or improve your life?

Keeping connected and active

It was apparent from speaking to the group as a whole and individually that participants really valued the opportunity to stay connected as well as keep physically and mentally active through the Nifty Fifties group and through additional pastimes. In speaking to individuals it seemed that as well as providing ‘on the day activities’ the Nifty Fifties group was the hub for accessing many other events and opportunities at other times too.

“The Nifty 50's is so important and well organised - there's the main hall exercise class and a seated exercise programme in the other room. The whole group comes together at the end for a brew and biscuit and to share any news. Afterwards people can stay on for dancing, badminton and board games!”

“This class is the main thing I do. It's absolutely brilliant. If I hadn't found this I don't know what I would have been doing now. Because of the class, I have now got involved in other activities including golf, table tennis and gardening. Nifty Fifties group is self-supporting - through fees charged (£10 a month) that covers everything - staff, venue, refreshments etc. We also organise trips but pay extra for these.”

“Nifty fifties is a great way for older members of society to keep fit and strong.”

“Coming to this group is really important for me.”

“It's really important for me to be able to stay socialising.”

In terms of individual responses, people also mentioned involvement in activities including solo Latino and line dancing, Zumba / Ladyfit, gardening, U3A, reading, gardening, walking and Nordic walking, singing in a choir, playing in a band, scrabble groups, carer break day trips, coffee mornings, visits to the theatre, quizzes, running a bingo club, volunteering with the Rotary Club and the local hospice.

What stops you doing the above?

Lack of transport and alternative options for healthcare

One person mentioned the difficulties associated with getting to health appointments and that alternative locations - even if further afield might be easier to manage if available.

“I can't drive but use the bus. I have to get to Skelmersdale for a lumbar injection pain clinic but there are no public transport options and there's nowhere else to go. Taxi is £30/£40 per month each way. If I could go to Bolton I could stay at my sister's.”

Lack of publicity or information

Lack of information was seen as a barrier for finding out about opportunities.

“Having knowledge of what's available of different activities and groups. For example, craft activities or choirs.”

“There's a lack of publicity for age-related activities and places to visit.”

Not having a 'can-do' mentality or motivation to get involved

During some discussions, there was a view that people needed to develop a positive mind-set to tackle and adapt to their changing situations and have more of a can-do mentality. There was also a view that people were not always motivated to attend groups like this or other wellbeing activities.

“There are things that you can't do anything about. It's a roll of the dice. Things like illnesses and long-term conditions getting worse. It's important to have the mental ability to ride over those things and accept it. Some people have what I'd call "singled out syndrome" where they ask why has this happened to me.”

“There's a lot of self-employed people around here and we're used to adapting to changes and systems. People on 9-5 jobs don't always think outside the box.”

“I think people don't come to things. Not that they don't want to, they just don't. They can't be bothered. Soaps are on in the evening.”

Bad weather

A few people mentioned that weather could be a barrier in terms of venturing out to this group or other activities. It wasn't clear if this was due to safety concerns, or being less motivated about getting involved at these times.

What causes you most concern within your life?

The closure of services like this

There were recurring comments from members of the group highlighting their concerns about the proposed closure of Banks Leisure Centre:

“We need groups like this - they're really important for keeping people connected.”

“We are really scared about this place closing and losing this group. I would miss this so much. For many people who attend, it's the only time they get out - this is the only place they go. Last week we had over a 100 people here and there are people on the waiting list - how could we lose this - it is so important for everyone's wellbeing.”

“This place is a life saver for people - it keeps people in their 70's and 80's out of hospital. Every week we have people sharing information about how to keep healthy and Craig does a health check for anyone who wants one. It's really important - especially for people who have been widowed and may not have anywhere else to go.”

Lack of other services available

Linked to the above point, one person expressed concern that without this session they didn't have other options for herself and her older disabled son. People also mentioned other activities that were not continuing.

“Not having joint activities for my son and me to attend as everything is separate for me and him. Activities are very limited in the winter.”

“Sadly, the health walks are coming to an end in April.”

Public transport and road infrastructure

Public Transport was highlighted as a concern, as well as the problems of poor road infrastructure in the northern parishes.

“The buses have recently changed to an hourly service from every 30 mins. We used to be able to get on the bus prior to 9:30am for 50p. Now we have to pay the full charge if travelling before 9:30am.”

“Very poor roads with regards to heavy articulated lorries that drive through the village of Tarleton. They aren't suitable for such narrow roads. They need to make a new road to divert the heavy traffic.”

GP Practice closure

There was concern shared about changes to primary care service provision in the locality:

“I'm really worried that there isn't now a GP Practice in Hesketh Bank - there used to be one (Dr Mark Hindle - he was really good). The old practice building is standing empty which is really annoying. Local residents have to go two miles to Tarleton which is alright if you drive, but more difficult if you don't. They're also building another 200 houses in our area too.”

Can you suggest any other changes that would make a positive difference to your health and wellbeing?

More provision and incentives to get out and stay active

There was particular interest from group members that we spoke to in having access to other leisure facilities as well as incentives to support people to stay active:

“Swimming facilities near to the village would be good.”

“Churches are an ideal mechanism for doing things, even if you're not religious.”

“Subsidised gym memberships and subsidies for clubs and other facilities to encourage activity would be useful.”

Family respite and services to address other needs

People that we spoke with mentioned caring for other family members as a potential barrier for keeping engaged in activities - both for themselves and their loved ones. Opportunities for respite or activities that could be done in unison as well as tailored activities to meet other needs were identified as important.

“Probably more support to care for my husband but there's not a bucket full of cash to use. The NHS don't have the staff or even voluntary systems. I'm realistic. Business and the economy are struggling.”

“I'm a carer to my disabled son who is in his 40's. He is limited to services/social activities as my husband and I can't always assist him. We need more activities for adults with disabilities.”



More pro-active health services

Some people commented on challenges to accessing appointments with GP's but also the need for more pro-active action from GP Practices to keep and stay well.

“We need more GP time slots.”

“There needs to be preventative measures from Tarleton Group Practice including follow up calls for regular check-ups.”

Improved public transport

With the limitations of public transport in these more rural districts, there were suggestions for widening community transport options.

“Having community transport for going shopping as well as hospital patient transport. We have a scheme called 'dial-a-ride' but you have to have severe mobility issues to qualify for this.”

More opportunities for education - not just digital

Staying mentally active was important, and opportunities to access education for older adults were highlighted as important, but not everyone had access to or wanted to do things on online.

“We need more information regarding education opportunities for seniors. The key is information - not only online!”

What should the West Lancashire partnership be focusing on to make a positive difference to your life?

Recognising the importance and value of local facilities

The threatened closure of Banks Leisure Centre was a recurring theme and obviously a big concern for those attending this group. Many of the people we spoke with had further suggestions and additional comments about this.

“My main concern is the threat of the closure of this leisure centre. We understand that there aren't enough people attending at other times - so it's losing money. But this group is so successful - it would be a great loss if it was stopped. There's a school across the way, and all the Mums park in the leisure centre car park and drop their kids off. They could come and use this centre after dropping off their children - that would bring more business in. They need to target more groups to use this centre, rather than letting it just be closed.”

“Keep this centre running! Serco are pulling out and this place may close. There's nowhere else to go around here - where else could you accommodate a hundred people exercising. Unfortunately, we see the accountants choosing the quick return to sell the land for housing but this place is an investment in the community's future health which will cost much more.”

“Please make sure that they don't close Banks Leisure Centre - we need places like this to stay healthy and well.”

More visiting speakers and information at groups like these

It was felt that this group was a good place to share information with so many people attending, but that there were few visiting speakers and that this might be a missed opportunity to share important information.

“We could do with more guest speakers at monthly meetings so we feel better informed. Different topics such as local groups, education, research topics.”

More groups like these

Aligned to the comments about how much people valued this group, there were also suggestions that this model could be replicated elsewhere as it worked so well for local residents.

“They need to provide facilities like here at Banks Leisure Centre to cater for older citizens. Nifty’s is an excellent service.”

Subsequent update - September 2020:

Sadly, the group have been unable to meet since March, despite the re-opening of the leisure centre. The group lead has been contacting all 130 group members by telephone every month during the pandemic to keep in touch. In addition, the group has organised three Macmillan Coffee Mornings (restricted numbers). The group are happy to be contacted by West Lancashire Partnership.