

Spreading Our Net

Tackling loneliness in Barton and Winton

Project report 2020-2021



Chris Dabbs and Guy Thompson

December 2021

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Registered Office: Innovation Forum, 51 Frederick Road, Salford M6 6FP.



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Summary

“We all want to live in the place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing things that matter to us.”
(Social Care Future - <https://socialcarefuture.blog/>)

Spreading Our Net originated with community health and social care staff in Eccles and Irlam highlighting that a key challenge for them was the loneliness experienced by many local people that they see.

Spreading Our Net initially ran for 12 months from October 2020 in Barton and Winton, near Eccles. The focus was on not creating anything new, but better connecting what is already there – especially community and local businesses, which are the mainstays of most people’s lives.

This was done, firstly, by scanning and networking in the neighbourhoods (‘wandering with purpose’). Work was then done to identify lonely people and their trusted contacts. To nurture a sustainable approach, local, organic networks were grown and made more complex through identifying and linking ‘connectors’, ‘mavens’ and ‘salespeople’ in the community and all sectors. In this way, the community offer was increased by developing sustainable routes to connect lonely people to community and activities.

In summary, the key learning is:

- There are many lonely people; it can be quite hard to identify them, but it gets easier over time through their trusted contacts.
- Those most likely to be forgotten or ignored should be kept in mind.
- Social connection is influenced by the history, geography and demography of a locality.
- It is more important to focus on strengthening connections between existing assets than on seeking to create new ones.
- There is a small number of people in any community who are critical in creating ‘social capital’: connectors (‘network hubs’); mavens (‘knowledge brokers’); and salespeople (‘persuaders’).
- The roles of community groups, local independent businesses, delivery services and religious/faith organisations are particularly important.
- It is critical to identify meeting spaces that local people actually use – indoors, outdoors and digital. People use them, if made easily available.
- Making the local network more complex and wide-ranging requires patience, time and active facilitation to broker and nurture connections.
- Bonding social capital is easier to develop than bridging social capital.
- Online connections support people to maintain relationships.

Chris Dabbs (Chief Executive)

Guy Thompson (Network Facilitator)

December 2021

1. Background

Social isolation and loneliness¹ are an increasing problem across all age groups in society. Following the recommendations of the [Jo Cox Loneliness Commission](#) (2017), the government published [A Connected Society: a strategy for tackling loneliness](#) (2018). Social isolation and loneliness can cause serious deterioration in mental health, and those in poor health or who have conditions they describe as 'limiting' are at particular risk of feeling lonely more often.

We need a new way of working, at the heart of which is human connection. When people feel supported by strong human relationships, change happens. When we design new systems that make this sort of collaboration feel simple and easy, people want to join in.

"The funny thing about loneliness, though, is it can hit in so many different ways and at different times. I am desperately lonely at the moment and yet rarely alone. I think it's a boredom thing. I think it's to do with feeling detached and isolated." (Chris)

A new relationship is needed between citizens and services for the public: one that meets people's appetite for connection and participation, where power lies in the community and the people in its network, and which offers benefits to both citizens and professionals. There are three key principles:

1. motivation and purpose - help people to connect with what matters to them
2. confidence to act - create opportunities for people to feel more able to make a change
3. social circumstances - understand, and wherever possible, address any barriers that could get in the way of change

The main enablers are:

- supporting staff and sharing leadership
- thinking in systems, not services (that is, delivering a wider menu of options for local people)
- using helpful technology
- balancing individual and collective action

¹ Social isolation and loneliness are distinct but related concepts. 'Loneliness' is the painful subjective feeling – or 'social pain' – that results from a discrepancy between desired and actual social connections. 'Social isolation' is the objective state of having a small network of kin and non-kin relationships and thus few or infrequent interactions with others. Some studies have found only a weak correlation between social isolation and loneliness: socially isolated people are not necessarily lonely and vice versa. How lonely a person feels depends partly on their own and their culture's expectations of relationships. [[Social Isolation and Loneliness Among Older People: advocacy brief](#). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021: 2-3]

We need to identify and utilise all resources available locally, not just those in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

2. Purpose

Spreading Our Net facilitates the increase and strengthening of sustainable local networks between community, voluntary, private and public assets, and improves access to fun, friendships and meaningful activities for local people who are lonely, especially those with limited or no contact with mainstream voluntary agencies or public services.

3. Aim and objectives

The overarching aim of Spreading Our Net is to reduce loneliness and social isolation by encouraging and enabling those who are experiencing loneliness to take part in social and community activities, develop friendships, form social networks and access self-help support.



The objectives to deliver this aim are to:

1. Grow networks that support reducing loneliness and social isolation. This involves local people, VCSE sector, private sector, health care, social care and other public services working together.
2. Develop routes to connect people with their community and activities to reduce loneliness and social isolation.
3. Pro-actively identify those who are lonely or socially isolated across the life course, in particular those unknown to health care or social care services, using innovative approaches and the network (all sectors), such as postal workers, bereavement services, etc.
4. Increase the community offer for those who are lonely or socially isolated through sustainable approaches, such as citizen-led networks, using support from local businesses.
5. Seek to establish and apply learning from networks in other neighbourhoods and other local projects.
6. Ensure the approach enhances and aligns to other current work around loneliness and social isolation in the neighbourhoods.

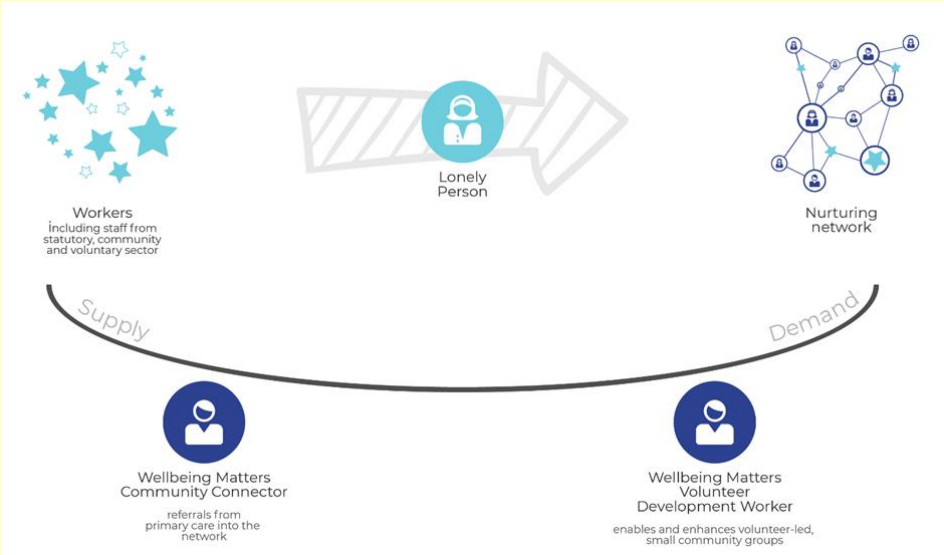
This centres on a 'cycle of action' that enables people to take action with three critical factors: sense of purpose; confidence to act; and life circumstances. Spreading Our Net is intended to create sustainable approaches: it builds on the principle of connecting people (citizens and organisations within the networks) using community assets and drawing on local businesses that share aims of having supportive communities.

The scope of Spreading Our Net is not restricted to a particular age group and therefore includes families, single parents, single adults, older people, etc. - specifically those not yet or less engaged with their communities or services for the public.

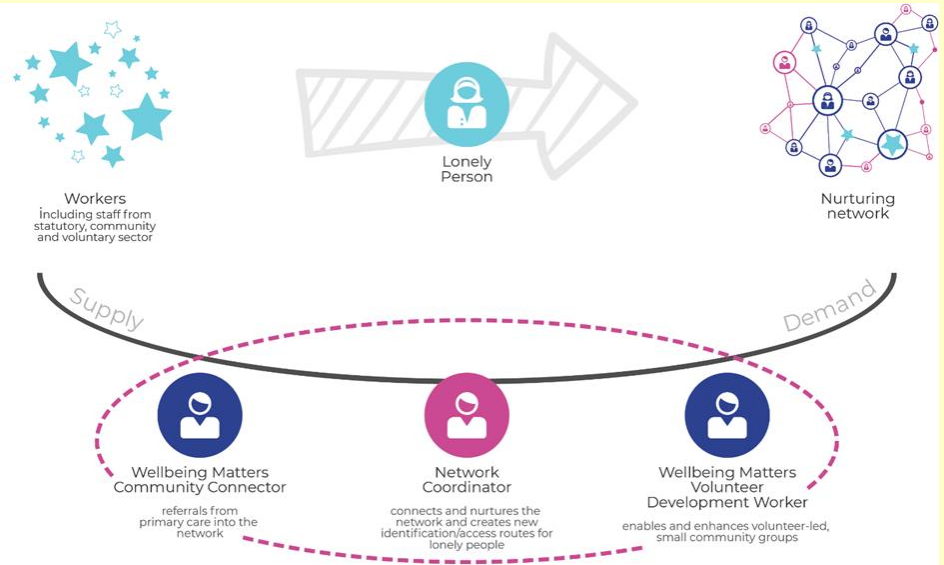
This early intervention approach was intended to work alongside the [Wellbeing Matters](#) programme, which is a person and community-centred approach to well-being, employing a Community Connector and Volunteer Development Worker in each of the five health neighbourhoods in Salford. The role for Spreading Our Net is shown as *Network Facilitation* in the second diagram in section 4 below.

4. System change

Current system:



System for Spreading Our Net:



5. Principles

Social capital is a culmination of the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and to work together. In Spreading Our Net, we consider both:

- bonding social capital – social networks between socially homogeneous groups of people ('mixing with people who are like you')
- bridging social capital – social networks between socially heterogeneous groups of people ('mixing with people who do not look like you')



Change happens when people feel supported by **strong human relationships**. Spreading Our Net therefore takes a relational approach, focused on nurturing positive human connection and relationships. Its task is to make collaboration feel attractive, easy and fun. Appropriate positive framing of the language used is therefore very important.

The real social circumstances of lonely and socially isolated people means that there must primarily be **direct engagement**, rather than relying only on more formal service and organisational responses or on off-putting bureaucratic systems.

The approach was designed assuming that Spreading Our Net was time-limited to just one year in the first instance and would not continue after its end-date. Social change, however, takes time; hence, the primary focus was on **strengthening links** between what already existed in the neighbourhoods, rather than on creating new assets (see Appendix 1). This involves strengthening both bonding and bridging social capital.

The relationship-building inherent in Spreading Our Net is an art, not a science. Inevitably, some things worked and other things did not – for Spreading Our Net and for local people, it was clear that it is OK to 'fail' sometimes, so long as there is **learning** from it.

6. Learning from networks elsewhere and other local projects

As part of their induction, the Network Facilitator **explored the learning** from networks and other local projects in Irlam and Cadishead, which neighbour Barton and Winton.

Through Unlimited Potential's membership of the Eccles and Irlam [Neighbourhood](#) Leadership Group (part of [Salford Together](#)), we already had learning about networks in Irlam and Cadishead. Our membership provided useful contacts for the Network Facilitator to learn what works there and why.

There was also learning gained from [Wellbeing Matters](#) through the Community Connector ([Unlimited Potential](#)) and the Volunteering Development Worker ([Salford CVS](#)), with whom the Network Facilitator created an informal complementary team (see Appendix 2).

At the start of the project in late October and early November 2020, the Network Facilitator drew on learning from neighbourhood anchors and key local agencies in Irlam and Cadishead. They had a range of in-depth conversations with key people in the public and voluntary sectors with an overview of the area (see Appendix 4). We recognised that, in the limited time available, this would not give a comprehensive view of social capital in Irlam and Cadishead, but it did offer some themes and learning.



The project team then **reviewed the learning** from these conversations about Irlam and Cadishead, particularly in relation to its applicability to Barton and Winton. The learning was related to these main enablers:

- supporting staff and sharing leadership
- thinking in systems, not services
- using helpful technology
- balancing individual and collective action

Consideration was also given to the distinct and complementary roles played by community, voluntary, private and public organisations, and to hyperlocal use of digital media, in Irlam and Cadishead.

Key learning that emerged from the conversations about Irlam and Cadishead was:

Enablers	Barriers
<i>social capital</i>	
Irlam and Cadishead are close-knit and have a very specific identity.	The nature of Irlam and Cadishead is peculiar to its history and geography.
Bonding social capital is strong.	Bridging social capital is weak (and tends to be described only in terms of race and ethnicity).
<i>supporting staff and sharing leadership</i>	
There are lots of people who are willing to get involved.	Leadership and focus is lacking.
Having a community anchor institution can be helpful.	
<i>thinking in systems, not services</i>	
Many agencies are 'doing their own thing'.	There is insufficient information sharing between agencies.
There are lots of things going on.	Getting communications to people is a barrier: often, people do not know about what is going on.
<i>using helpful technology</i>	
Digital media (Facebook groups, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.) is very strong, for those who use it.	Digital media is excluding for those who do not use it (due to lack of skills, equipment or data).
Digital (including gaming) is an opportunity to develop bridging social capital.	Transport and logistics are key barriers.
<i>balancing individual and collective action</i>	
Much activity is tied to agencies.	Much less activity is being driven by communities.
There are specific places where people meet up (leisure centre, parks, railway station, community hall, garden centre, etc.).	Some meeting places may feel exclusive to some parts of the local population.

There was also learning from what people did not talk about, especially:

- little reference to social isolation (other than people living on farmland)
- little reference to the role of businesses in social capital (except for donations)
- very few references to religion or the role of religious groups or organisations
- no mention of domestic abuse/violence
- little reference to disabled people or lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people
- almost no mention of being part of the City of Salford

This learning from Irlam and Cadishead was then used to **inform the exact approach, priorities and operational work plan** of the Network Facilitator for Barton and Winton. This offered potential to compare later the progress made there with the circumstances in Irlam and Cadishead.

The key factors appeared to be:

1. Being aware of the influence of the history and geography of a locality.
2. Keeping in mind who is most likely to be forgotten or ignored.
3. Seeing bridging social capital not only in terms of race and ethnicity.
4. The activity of agencies can be both inclusive and exclusive for different people.
5. Three distinct 'worlds' of agencies/professionals, local meeting spaces (physical, digital), and the role of local businesses (beyond donations).
6. The distinct role of religious groups and organisations.
7. The presence or absence of a community anchor institution.
8. Facilitating effective communication with local people, and between organisations, is critical.
9. Local use of digital media (including gaming) can be an enabler and a barrier for different people.

7. Aligning to other local work on loneliness and social isolation

We drew on the contacts and networks that Unlimited Potential had developed in Barton and Winton during its previous 13 years of working in the area. (See Appendix 5).

We also benefitted from the information and knowledge that was provided to the Network Facilitator by the members of the Eccles and Irlam **Neighbourhood Leadership Group**, run by [Salford Together](#).

We also checked on any **current work** in the community, voluntary, private or public sectors around loneliness and social isolation in Barton and Winton with key contacts, such as [Wellbeing Matters](#), [Salford CVS](#), [The Business Group Salford](#), [ForHousing](#), and the Neighbourhood Manager and the Neighbourhood Development Officer for Eccles at [Salford City Council](#).

Through our local and citywide connections, the Network Facilitator **liaised with any other current or planned activity around loneliness and social isolation** in Barton and Winton. They explored how Spreading Our Net could complement it as part of a local system.



8. Scanning and networking in the neighbourhoods

The first key step in the Spreading Our Net project in Barton and Winton was **scanning and networking in the neighbourhoods** (in all sectors and on digital media) between mid-November 2020 and mid-January 2021. We eventually described this as 'wandering with purpose', using active observational techniques.

During this period, the Network Facilitator physically explored on foot every part of Barton and Winton, considering not only geographical communities, but also digital networks and communities of identity, and identifying local meeting spaces (physical, digital, commercial and religious).

The COVID-19 regulations and guidance both hindered this (with some locations closed, for example) and enhanced it (for instance, with a greater emphasis on the use of local amenities and delivery services). Informal groups also took action and networked together, for example, to make and deliver food to people who were isolated or 'shielding'.

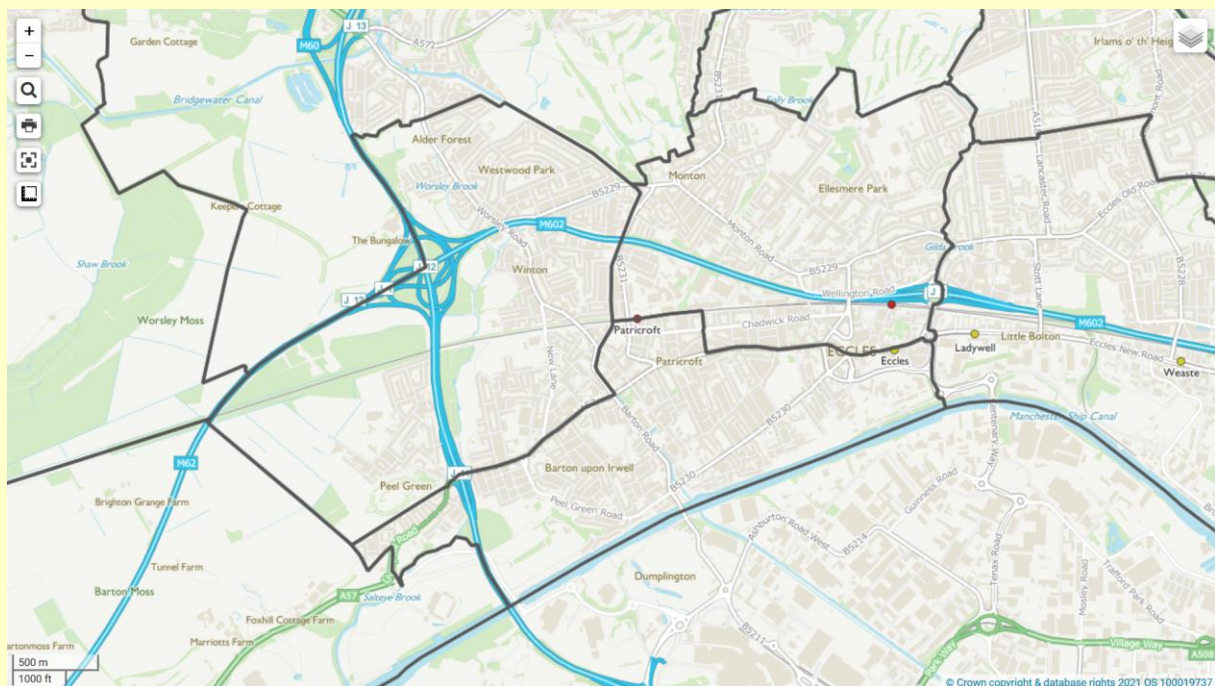


Figure 1: map of Barton and Winton

This exploration included:

- geographical neighbourhoods:
 - Barton: Barton-upon-Irwell; Patricroft; Trafford Road; Barton Lane
 - Winton: Alder Forest; Westwood Park; Brookhouse; Peel Green
- communities of identity:
 - Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities (both longstanding such as the Yemeni population, and newer such as African and east European populations)

- carers
- D/deaf people
- faith communities
- lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people
- people with hearing impairments
- people with learning difficulties
- people with visual impairments
- young families
- digital networks: common interest groups, and groups specific to communities of identity, on different platforms (including gaming)
- community network: local meetings of community groups, which themselves can otherwise be isolated

Through this initial scanning and networking, the Network Facilitator **built understanding of existing social capital** in Barton and Winton and where there might be weaknesses or barriers. This included engaging with community, voluntary, private and public organisations, and clarifying local use of digital media.

The project team **reviewed the learning** from this scanning and networking in Barton and Winton. This learning was related to **social capital**: the culmination of the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and to work together. We considered both:

- bonding social capital – social networks between socially homogeneous groups of people
- bridging social capital – social networks between socially heterogeneous groups of people (‘mixing with people who do not look like you’)

Consideration was also given to the distinct and complementary roles played by community, voluntary, private and public organisations, and to hyperlocal use of digital media, in Barton and Winton.

Key learning that emerged was:

- Social capital seems quite strong in parts of Barton and Winton – especially bonding social capital, but also some bridging social capital.
- There are some ‘natural’ links through common interests, such as children, pets, food, shops, etc.
- The COVID-19 situation increased social interaction within neighbourhoods, and the exploration of local green and blue spaces.
- Some local people are very isolated, including many older people and those people labelled ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ who were ‘shielding’.
- Some communities of identity create their bonding social capital far beyond Barton and Winton.

“When me and my family went for a little walk in the woods, we ... decided we could turn our walks into collecting materials to use for our projects.” (Maria)

- Due to the COVID-19 situation, it was difficult to discern the role of faith communities and institutions, but they support some community-based activities, although the current level of activity possibly varies by the age profile of different faiths.
- Many local businesses play an important social role: many small local shops act as hubs and/or social networking spaces; others have been missed due to enforced closures.
- Delivery and transport workers connect and build rapport with many local people.
- Local people use a diversity of digital spaces, with common interest groups on different platforms, and younger people using gaming for social connection and bonding.
- The VCSE sector enables a range of voluntary and community action.
- Some public services play a social role, such as schools, and community health and social care professionals.

“When you go to a shop and have more of a chat with someone serving you, it gives you that much better social interaction that may make someone’s day!” (Kerry).

All of the learning to date was used to inform the next stages of the project in Barton and Winton: identifying those people across the life course who are lonely and their trusted contacts; and growing networks to support reducing loneliness and social isolation.

9. Identify people who are lonely and their trusted contacts

This key work was done in Barton and Winton in February and March 2021, in parallel with starting to grow networks that support reducing loneliness and social isolation (see section 10). Given the size of the project’s geographical area, the initial focus was in Winton and Patricroft, before later moving on to the other parts of Barton.

Throughout the life course, people who are lonely or socially isolated still have contacts, however few or infrequent. The Network Facilitator **identified the strongest and most frequent contacts** that lonely or socially isolated people already have in their daily lives, whether in the community, voluntary, private or public sectors. Within any neighbourhood, these might, for example, include:

- people who run hyperlocal digital media groups/networks
- milk/postal delivery workers who frequently go to people’s front doors
- transport providers, such as taxi drivers
- nurseries and primary schools
- cafés, food outlets, shops, supermarkets and pubs where single adults are frequent customers
- barbers and hairdressers, where there is time to chat
- people from churches, mosques, temples and other faith organisations
- public service workers in the community, such as police community support officers, district nurses, social workers and housing officers

The Network Facilitator then **considered which contacts identified might be key trusted points of entry** into local networks of assets and activities that matter to them (so providing motivation and purpose), especially where people might sense a possibility of fun, friendship or purpose. They also **considered which contacts might presently be barriers** (in all sectors).

Using trusted contacts who can identify and engage lonely or socially isolated people and enabling them to have the confidence to act and to make a change spreads the net of possible contact points, and creates a greater diversity of individual and collective action. The Network Facilitator helped to **raise the contacts' awareness of loneliness and social isolation and their potential to be alongside people** and easily help (without trying to 'fix' them). We confirmed that tea and coffee are important tools!



We drew on knowledge about effective approaches to frame language and to engage with lonely or socially isolated people, and shared this in simple verbal, physical or digital ways with those with whom they were most likely to have contact. For example, a message such as "if someone is struggling, try asking them to help you" works particularly well with many men.

10. Grow networks to support reducing loneliness and social isolation

This key work was done in Barton and Winton in February and March 2021, in parallel with the identification of trusted contacts of people who are lonely or socially isolated (see section 9). Given the size of the project's geographical area, the initial focus was in Winton and Patricroft, before moving on to the other parts of Barton.

This work took account of: geographical neighbourhoods; communities of identity; and digital networks.

The COVID-19 regulations and guidance continued to both hinder this (with some locations closed, for example) and enhance it (for instance, with a greater emphasis on the role of local amenities and delivery services).

To grow networks, the Network Facilitator **identified three types of people** in particular, from within all sectors (community, voluntary, private and public):

- *Connectors* ('network hubs') – people in the community who know large numbers of different people and who are in the habit of making introductions.
- *Mavens* ('knowledge brokers') – people in the community who accumulate and trade knowledge, want to help people and can start word-of-mouth epidemics.
- *Salespeople* ('persuaders') – charismatic people in the community with powerful negotiation skills, both verbal and non-verbal, that make others want to agree with them.



There is a relatively small number of these people, but they are key to making local networking easy, attractive, social and timely² (and fun), and also to having a sustainable system after the end of direct Spreading Our Net activity.

The Network Facilitator therefore **sought out and linked the individual connectors, mavens and salespeople** from all sectors who were rooted in the neighbourhoods as key elements in sustaining the approach, and in providing co-operative leadership.

² Service O. et al. (2014), *EAST: Four Simple Ways to Apply Behavioural Insights*, London: Behavioural Insights Team - <https://www.bi.team/publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioural-insights/>

The Network Facilitator also **linked, in person and/or digitally, trusted points of contact to connectors, mavens and salespeople** (in all sectors), as appropriate.

“We can take a horse to water, but we can’t make it drink’, but as long as we are doing our absolute utmost to make sure there is water to drink, hopefully we can encourage more uptake.” (Paul)

11. Increase the community offer by developing sustainable routes to connect lonely people to community and activities

From April 2021, the project started on the work to increase the community offer by developing sustainable routes to connect people who are lonely or socially isolated to their community and activities.

This started with:

- raising key trusted contacts’ awareness of social isolation and their potential to be alongside people (all sectors)
- continuing to seek out and link the individual connectors, mavens and salespeople (all sectors)
- linking, in person and/or digitally, trusted points of contact to connectors, mavens and salespeople (all sectors)

We had a good diversity amongst people identified early on. This is really important for a complex and wide-ranging network.



The Network Facilitator worked closely with connectors, mavens and salespeople and enable them to **share leadership**, both in person and digitally.

Through these routes, the Network Facilitator **facilitated and nurtured new connections**, creating both bonding and bridging social capital. For both efficiency and sustainability, their primary focus was on

strengthening links between what already existed in the neighbourhoods, rather than on creating new assets.

More trusted points of contact should consequently **increase and improve the routes available to local people**, and thus create a denser network of contacts in each neighbourhood. This does not involve formal 'assessments', 'interventions' or 'referrals', but use of simple framing and signposting through human connection.

It is critical both that the routes lead to local assets and activities that people are likely to trust, and also that the approach gives equitable weight to these in the community, voluntary, private and public sectors.

Routes must look attractive to people who are lonely or socially isolated, so an emphasis on fun and enjoyment is essential. As appropriate, we drew learning from approaches such as [Camerados](#), which enable people to get through tough times by looking out for each other, and from use of environments such as '[public living rooms](#)' (somewhere to go, relax, chat and look out for each other – without organisational agendas – and where some think fairy lights are essential!)

"I think quite open groups would be a good thing. Trying different venues for food and drinks and catch-ups. No set agenda, just a chance to meet and natter." (Zoë)

The Network Facilitator **nurtured a stronger, organic network in each neighbourhood**, linking assets and activities in all sectors that are attractive to and offering fun, friendship and purpose for lonely or socially isolated people. This creates a wider and deeper menu of options for local people, many of which they are likely to be unaware. There is scope to collaborate with established assets, such as:

- connectors, mavens and salespeople within the community
- neighbourhood anchor organisations in the voluntary and faith sectors
- promotion of, and perhaps sponsorship by, local businesses that are active participants, helping them to generate new customers and trade, thus supporting socially responsible business
- locally-based public facilities, such as libraries, schools, parks, leisure centres, fire stations, social housing hubs and health centres



"I also think creative outlets are vital ... Writing was huge for me in my last recovery." (Megan)

The Network Facilitator identified **digital media most likely to be used** by lonely or socially isolated people, and encouraged local moderators to sustain or create hyperlocal groups and networks, using simple evidence-based language and techniques that attract and engage others.

The project also identified existing **environments and spaces** where people do or could engage safely (not least spaces used by young people). We kept in mind the possibility of creating new ones, if necessary.

The prevailing COVID-19 situation affected the work to increase the community offer. Practically, some patience was required, especially when so many local businesses were closed due to COVID-19 protection measures. The changes in COVID-19 circumstances (such as people restarting jobs and businesses) affected people's focus and behaviour. For example, some local people said that they were not going to come out, because they had become accustomed to staying at home during the COVID-19 situation. However, many people were in better spirits: people looking out for and supporting each other seemed to continue beyond the COVID-19 protection measures to some degree, and many people steadily gathered together more often.

Key learning that emerged from the six months of network facilitation (April to September 2021) was:

Identifying people who are lonely and their trusted contacts:

- There are many lonely people, some of who are on medication, etc. for anxiety and depression.
- It can be quite hard to identify individual people who are lonely or socially isolated, although it steadily gets easier over time.
- Trusted contacts are easier to identify than anticipated, actively supporting people (with shopping, nails, etc.).

Growing networks to support reducing loneliness and social isolation:

- With connectors, mavens and salespeople, the approach is important – a basic narrative is needed. Most see Spreading Our Net as positive. What is important is carefully framing very clear messages and making these relevant to these key people.
- What are critical is getting out to where people are (physical or digital) and then doing active listening.
- People open up more in person, rather by phone or online – especially with active listening and allowing silences.
- It is important to recognise the other pressures and priorities in people's lives.
- Many independent local businesses are very community-oriented and want to interact with local people.

- Many delivery people are engaging but, as customer demand increases, there are more delivery people and therefore often less opportunity to develop ongoing relationships.

Increasing the community offer by developing sustainable routes:

- Brokering introductions steadily builds awareness and other introductions, which lead to bonds forming, with some light facilitation.
- Mutual benefit is important as a factor to maintain connections and activities.
- Salespeople need a key message to 'sell'.
- Intelligence is important for trusted contacts – if they are more aware of where to find out what is available locally, they are more likely to facilitate connections. Trusted contacts need to know the mavens (as sources of this local knowledge).
- Online connection between key people helps to maintain connections.
- Bonding social capital is easier to develop than bridging social capital. The former tends to be ripe in neighbourhoods; the latter requires more time and effort.
- Many connectors, mavens and salespeople mix in similar circles and do similar things, and may recognise each other, but often do not know each other well. What is key is getting them together, especially when they are from diverse backgrounds (bridging social capital). Getting together those similar to each other (bonding social capital) is much less necessary, as they are much more likely to know each other.
- Making community networks more complex increases the number of likely links and the number of potential connections.
- Planting the seeds, and nurturing the soil, eventually leads to flowering, but this takes time and patience.
- Making the local network more complex and wide-ranging requires active facilitation. This makes it as easy as possible for knowledge to transfer and new connections to be made.
- As the work evolves, it is critical to get the right balance and timing between growing networks that support reducing loneliness and social isolation, and developing sustainable routes to connect people who are lonely or socially isolated to community and activities.



“We are now going to continue to record the Masses for the community and also use this for weddings and funerals to enable the wider community to join in if they are unable to attend in person.” (Dom, Holy Cross Church)

- People will use spaces (indoors or outdoors), if they are made available – such as the use of green and blue spaces during the COVID-19 situation. The majority of this use tends to be bonding social capital.
- Local digital connections are important, even when physical spaces are available. This is especially important for some people to stay part of the community, such as some disabled people.



12. Develop and promote local branding for the approach

Although not necessary during the first year of Spreading Our Net in Barton and Winton, a Network Facilitator might, in some form, **develop and promote local branding** for the approach in each neighbourhood, if possible and appropriate. This would reflect and celebrate the collective local action being taken across the sectors and offering the possibility of highlighting individual actions and stories.

13. Monitoring and learning

Ongoing learning is essential for an approach like Spreading Our Net. This was captured through various means, including:

- reflection and learning with the key people engaged
- feedback from participating connectors, mavens and salespeople
- qualitative feedback from local people³
- one-to-one supervision with the Network Facilitator
- liaison and review with the Eccles and Irlam [Neighbourhood](#) Leadership Group, run by [Salford Together](#)

During the year of the project, there were bimonthly opportunities to update and to explore learning from Spreading Our Net with the Eccles and Irlam Neighbourhood Leadership Group, and to further draw on any learning from Irlam and Cadishead and other local projects as the work in Barton and Winton developed.

Within Unlimited Potential, the learning was regularly shared with and reviewed by its Innovation Committee. As our community benefit society is part of the co-operative movement, it has also been relayed to both our members and our staff.

The project **collected outcome measures to assess impact:**

³ In the future, quantitative assessment with local people using [outcomes stars](#) might be possible.

The number and type of connectors, mavens and salespeople identified and engaged:	
• connectors ('network hubs') – people in the community who know large numbers of different people and who are in the habit of making introductions	11
• mavens ('knowledge brokers') – people in the community who accumulate and trade knowledge, want to help people and can start word-of-mouth epidemics	9
• salespeople ('persuaders') – charismatic people in the community with powerful negotiation skills, both verbal and non-verbal, that make others want to agree with them	7



These individuals were diverse in age, religion/belief and sexual orientation. By sex, connectors were 63.6% female/36.4% male, mavens were 55.6% female/44.4% male, and salespeople were 42.9% female/57.1% male. Across all three categories, 14.8% were from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background.

The number and type of agencies linked in to local networks , by sector:	
• private sector	27
• statutory sector	6
• VCSE sector	31
• religion or belief	15

We also identified 25 hyperlocal digital meeting spaces.

We collected:

- case studies of networking and knowledge/awareness of the networks
- case studies of impact on people (reduced loneliness or social isolation)
- examples of improvement of bonding social capital
- examples of improvement in bridging social capital

Extracts from these have been reflected throughout this report.

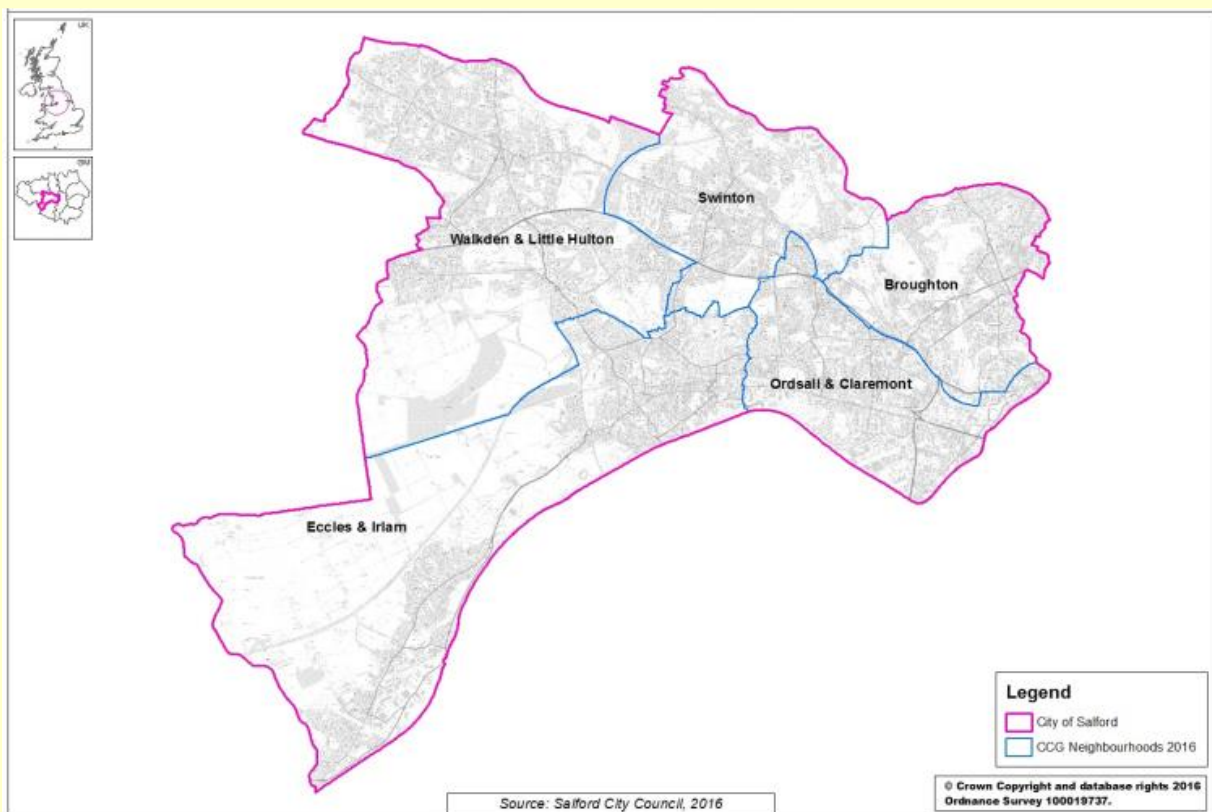
"I think community activities are a great way to tackle loneliness. Things that people can take ownership of and feel like they are making a difference in their own community, rather than something that makes them feel like 'a charity case'." (Karen)

14. Future development

Social change does, of course, take time and patience. While Spreading Our Net has had significant impact in Barton and Winton, it could not in only one year realistically have the fundamental impact for which it has the potential.

To fully nurture this in the neighbourhoods would take more time for active facilitation to make the community networks more complex and wide-ranging with more connections, to fully engage the connectors, mavens and salespeople, and to developing more sustainable routes to connect people who are lonely or socially isolated to community and activities.

Based on this development and the learning from it, there would then be potential to spread effective practice to tackle loneliness and social isolation across the City of Salford.



There is every reason to think that the Spreading Our Net approach would be equally applicable in other neighbourhoods and boroughs across Greater Manchester and further afield.

Appendix 1

References

As well as using on research evidence about tackling loneliness and social isolation from organisations such as Action for Happiness and the Campaign to End Loneliness, for Spreading Our Net, we draw on a range of background knowledge and research on effective network approaches, including:

- Battilana J, Casciaro T. (2013) *The Network Secrets of Great Change Agents* [Harvard Business Review] - <https://hbr.org/2013/07/the-network-secrets-of-great-change-agents>
- Bevan H. (2017) – *Managing Complexity and Uncertainty* - https://www.leadersinhealthcare.com/sites/default/files/slides/M1_Heleen%20Bevan.pdf
- Buurtzorg – *The Buurtzorg Model* - <https://www.buurtzorg.com/about-us/buurtzorgmodel/>
- Case N. – *The Wisdom and/or Madness of Crowds: an interactive guide to human networks* - <https://ncase.me/crowds/>
- Centola D. (2019) – *The Truth about Behaviour Change* [MIT Sloan Management Review]- <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-truth-about-behavioral-change/>
- Dinwoodie D. (2016) *Vertical Leadership. From the Balcony to the Dancefloor* [IEDP] - <https://www.iedp.com/articles/vertical-leadership/>
- Herrero L. (2016) *People who perform and live in Formal Org Land, and people who have make/break power: two different lists* - <https://leandroherrero.com/people-who-perform-and-live-in-formal-org-land-and-people-who-have-makebreak-power-two-different-lists/>
- Keep J., Sang B. (2005), *The Short Guide to the Development of Networks* [NatPaCT - National Primary and Care Trust Programme]
- Project Aristotle [re:Work] - <https://rework.withgoogle.com/print/guides/5721312655835136/>
- Randall S. (2013) - *Leading networks in healthcare. Learning about what works – the theory and the practice* [Health Foundation] - <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/leading-networks-in-healthcare>

Appendix 2

Working alongside and complementing the Wellbeing Matters programme

Unlimited Potential co-designed the Wellbeing Matters programme and is represented on the Wellbeing Matters steering group. Its Chief Executive is one of the joint senior responsible officers for person and community-centred approaches in Salford.

Unlimited Potential is the community anchor for Wellbeing Matters in Eccles and Irlam, is a member of the Eccles and Irlam Neighbourhood Leadership Group run by Salford Together, and employs the Community Connector for the area.

Spreading Our Net complemented all three workstreams of the Wellbeing Matters programme:

1. 'Social prescribing' – the Network Facilitator had the same line management as the Community Connector, with a view to developing a Wellbeing Matters team in Eccles and Irlam with the local Volunteer Development Worker (employed by Salford CVS). By taking this approach, we sought to ensure that all three roles were both complementary and integrated, drawing on the skills, knowledge and experience of all three workers. The intention was that the work of the Network Facilitator would increase the routes available to lonely or socially isolated people, not only through current community connecting / 'social prescribing', but also outside of it, creating direct local pathways.
2. 'Invest to Save' VCSE development – working alongside the local Volunteer Development Worker and others in the VCSE sector, the Network Facilitator opened up and created new connections for local VCSE organisations, not only with their peers, but also with private businesses and public agencies. This then offered scope for new volunteering possibilities, innovations and capacity-building.
3. Social and added value – the work of the Network Facilitator contributed to these aims of the 10% Better campaign being run by the Salford Social Value Alliance: more people volunteering; adults feeling more satisfied with their life; fewer inactive people; and, to a degree, people from vulnerable groups accessing new jobs, apprenticeships, training and work experience placements.

Appendix 3

Project plan

Spreading Our Net Project plan													
	2020					2021							
	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Induction of Network Facilitator	█												
Liaise with and drawing learning from Camerados	█												
Establish and apply learning from networks in Irlam and Cadishead and other local projects	█												
Explore the learning from Irlam and Cadishead networks and other local projects (NLT)	█												
Gain learning from Wellbeing Matters (CC, VDW)	█												
Draw learning from key local agencies in Irlam and Cadishead (HDT et al.)	█												
Review learning gathered and its applicability to Barton and Winton (all sectors, digital media)		*											
Develop the approach, priorities and operational work plan for Barton and Winton		*											
Ensure the project enhances and aligns to other current work around social isolation in the neighbourhoods													
Identify existing contacts and networks in Barton and Winton	█												
Obtain information and knowledge from NLG	█												
Check on any current or planned work around social isolation in Barton and Winton	█												
Liaise with any other current or planned work around social isolation in Barton and Winton		█											
Scanning and networking in the neighbourhoods													
Initial scanning and networking in Barton and Winton (all sectors, digital media)		█	█										
Build understanding of social capital in Barton and Winton		█	█										
Identify those people across the life course who are socially isolated, and their trusted contacts													
Identify the strongest and most frequent contacts that socially isolated people already have in their daily lives (all sectors)				█	█	█							
Consider which contacts identified might be key trusted points of entry into local networks of assets and activities (all sectors)				█	█	█							
Consider which contacts identified might be barriers (all sectors)				█	█	█							
Raise key trusted contacts' awareness of social isolation and their potential to be alongside people (all sectors)				█	█	█							
Build and grow networks that support reducing social isolation													
Identify, seek out and link the individual connectors, mavens and salespeople (all sectors)				█	█	█							
Link, in person and/or digitally, trusted points of contact to connectors, mavens and salespeople (all sectors)				█	█	█							
Increase the community offer by developing sustainable routes to connect people who are socially isolated to community and activities													
Enable connectors, mavens and salespeople to share leadership, both in person and digitally							█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Facilitate and nurture new connections (both bonding and bridging social capital)							█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Increase and improve the routes available to local people (through more trusted points of contact)							█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Nurture a stronger, organic network in each neighbourhood, linking assets and activities (all sectors)							█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Identify digital media most likely to be used by socially isolated people				█	█	█							
Encourage local moderators to sustain or create hyperlocal digital groups and networks							█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Develop and promote local branding for the approach													
Develop and promote local branding for the approach in each neighbourhood (if appropriate)					█	█							
Monitoring and learning													
Plan collection of outcome measures to assess project impact	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Ongoing learning	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
One-to-one supervision (Network Facilitator)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Innovation Committee (Unlimited Potential)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Reporting													
Project liaison and review (Eccles and Irlam Neighbourhood Leadership Group)		*		*		*		*		*		*	
Final report													*

Appendix 4

Key people with an overview of Irlam and Cadishead

Tom Bell	Community Development Officer (Swinton, Irlam and Cadishead)	ForHousing
Debbie Campbell	Community Assessment Team	Salford City Council
Anne Fallon	Community Assessment Officer, Adult Social Work Team (Irlam and Cadishead)	Salford City Council
Darren Goulden	Councillor (Irlam) Organiser	Salford City Council Irlam Live
Debs Johnson	Community Connector – Wellbeing Matters	Unlimited Potential
Lewis Nelson	Councillor (Cadishead)	Salford City Council
Beatty Osborne	Volunteering Development Worker	Salford CVS
Tony Prescott	Projects and Operations Manager	Hamilton Davies Trust
Rob Salt	Pedal Away Co-ordinator - Salford	Cycling Projects
Simon Taylor	Senior Youth Work Manager	Salford City Council

Appendix 5

Unlimited Potential

Unlimited Potential has delivered a diversity of projects together with communities in Salford since 2002. Within the area of Eccles, Barton, Winton, Irlam and Cadishead, these have included:

- [Wellbeing Matters](#) (2018-date): connecting people from primary care through social prescribing to community assets and activities.
- [FACT](#) (2017-2019): linking young people to future employment opportunities in growth industries through hackathons (including with Ellesmere Park High School and Salford City Academy).
- [Empower You](#) (2017-2018): supporting disabled people to do physical activity (in partnership with Salford Community Leisure and private providers).
- [Dadly Does It](#) (2016-2017): working with fathers in Winton to create activities that improve the well-being of children and families.
- [Health to Wellbeing Network](#) (2016-2017): piloting community connecting / 'social prescribing' across all general practices in Eccles and Irlam.
- [Being Well Salford](#) (2013-2017): coaching with local people to help them improve their health and well-being.
- [Eccles Together in Health](#) (2015-2016): co-production between primary care and local people to create new health solutions in Barton, Eccles and Winton.
- [Health Trainers](#) (2007-2016): encouraging and supporting healthy lifestyle choices by local people.
- [Smoke-Free Spaces](#) (2007-2015): community-based approach to reducing smoking in homes, vehicles and play areas.
- [Carers Development](#) (2011-2012): developing locally-based carers' support in Irlam and Cadishead.