

Design in Social Care Programme

Leeds City Council Project Summary

Supporting people living with frailty to manage and have more control over their health and wellbeing

Context

Over the country there are people with frailty living at home. This often means that without additional help and support people struggle with daily living tasks such as preparing food, managing stairs or cleaning the house. It can also be isolating for people as they may struggle getting in and out of the house.

Leeds City Council put forward a bid to join the Design in Social Care Programme to understand the experiences of those living with frailty at home and use this to find ways of supporting them (as well as ways to better support themselves).

The challenge

The city defines frailty as ‘the loss of body resilience, which means that in the case of a physical or mental illness, an accident, or other stressful event, people living with frailty will not bounce back quickly’ (NHS Leeds 2018).

Over [30,000](#) people living in Leeds are registered as living with frailty (and there will be many other not counted in this figure). As well as the daily tasks that are often difficult without additional care and support, people living with frailty have a higher risk of being socially isolated.

Leeds City Council was already working with key partners to support people living with frailty and the Design in Social Care Programme provided an opportunity to inform this with a different approach – one which started from a real understanding of people’s needs and experiences.

What they did

The Leeds Team (which comprised social care, public health and health partners) set out to speak to people known to social care in some way that were living with a mild level of frailty. They undertook semi-structured, in-depth discussions with over 30 individuals finding out about their day to day lives and what was important to them.

The team spoke with people from a variety of settings including coffee mornings at neighbourhood network meetings, recovery hubs and active strength and balance classes.

In addition to the 1-2-1 discussions with people and to supplement their research the team also shadowed and observed home visits undertaken by occupational therapists

What they found

A number of themes emerged from the qualitative research but one of the most prominent themes was around the importance of meaningful connections and relationships with people.

Whilst people attended Neighbourhood Networks, luncheon clubs, or had telephone befrienders they still reported a feeling of loneliness and isolation. Relationships or connections with a level of depth (rather than fleeting / transactional visits) were felt to be important.

"Weekends are tough on my own. If I feel down I will get a taxi to the shopping centre"

Group chat at Neighbourhood Network Tea/Coffee morning.

The team also learned that people don't refer to themselves as 'living with frailty'. Instead, they talk about being able to 'manage' and who can help to 'look after' them when they need support. This was particularly helpful for the discussions that took place as it enabled the team to communicate in a language which resonated with people.

Prototyping solutions and next steps

The Leeds team started prototyping a range of ideas – from intergeneration visits to a pen pal scheme that partnered schools and youth organisations with older people.

One of the ideas being taken forward further is to use a post box to match asks for help with small tasks (e.g. tidying the garden) with offers to help from the community. This prototype is called 'The Little Things' and a local indoor market has already agreed to trial the idea on-site as it continues to be tested and developed.

As well as 'The Little Things' the team has been championing a design approach internally and working with strategic leads on embedding this across social care and the council more broadly.

Since joining the Design in Social Care Programme, Leeds City Council has been successful in securing funding through the LGA's Social Care Digital Innovation Programme which (using a service design approach) funds local areas for digital innovation in social care.



It's the little things that means a lot.

Taking the stigma away from asking for help, our anonymous post box collects asks for help. Help with the little things.

Need a hand tidying the garden? Has something broken unexpectedly? Leaving hospital and need help to get the house ready?

The Little Things is a judgement free community service that matches asks with offers for help in a safe and secure way.

The little things

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