



Reducing men's social isolation: engagement and retention

Connect Hackney key messages

The learning below comes from the Connect Hackney programme team which has commissioned over 40 projects for socially isolated older people in the borough, as well as from staff from the commissioned projects.

Voluntary and community groups running activities for older people often find it easier to engage women than men. While men are not a uniform group, research reflects this reality, showing that men are less likely to get involved with organisations which explicitly cater for older people.

In order to find out how to best engage men Connect Hackney funded four projects to test new approaches to reducing men's social isolation: Gillet Square Elders provided support to an informal dominoes club that was already running, as well as offering welfare advice; Hackney Dudes provided weekly activities including music and IT clubs and social outings; Living With Hearing Loss ran hearing checks and support maintaining hearing aids and Brocals offered weekly meet ups including trips and befriending sessions. Each of these projects were evaluated by the University of East London and key findings from this evaluation are shared below.

The full evaluation report is available [here](#).

1. Develop a targeted outreach strategy which includes street outreach

To engage a new client group outreach must be prioritised and budgeted for. Combining street outreach (e.g. at pubs, betting shops and markets) with referral pathways from partner services (including GP surgeries) increases the chance of engaging men not already involved in community activities. Street outreach also allows people to get a better sense of a project than printed materials alone.

2. Invest in marketing and branding

Hiring staff with marketing expertise or contracting this out can help to develop a brand that has a strong male-focused identity. This proved key to the successful recruitment of men.

“And there was a flyer about Brocals, and I liked the name, I like puns... I like word play, so immediately that hooked me... I thought well this is interesting, it's for older gentleman in Hackney...” Participant on Men's Project.

3. Offer purposeful activities

Men are often attracted to purposeful and task-based activities in which they can learn new skills or share existing expertise. Our projects found that having an activity to focus on helped those who were anxious feel welcome and part of the group.

4. Highlight the social element of the project

The opportunity to meet and socialise with other people can be a strong factor in motivating men to join a group. Alongside running task-based activities projects should offer social outings and unstructured time for people to enjoy being together, in order to strengthen social relationships between participants.

5. Deliver flexible and informal activities

Having a relaxed and informal approach to delivering activities where there is no expectation that people have to attend all sessions can help to engage and retain male participants. Projects without a formal time commitment can be more accessible for men who don't usually participate in community activities. Offering drop-in sessions can be particularly helpful to engaging men with physical and mental health conditions that can flair up and make it harder to get out of the house.

September 2021.

