



Provider Legacy and Sustainability Survey

September 2021

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Introduction

Brightlife was formed in 2015 by a group of organisations from across the public and third sectors in the Cheshire West and Chester area and led by Age UK Cheshire, as the regional delivery partner for the National Lottery Community Fund Ageing Better programme.

The aim of this programme was to reduce loneliness and social isolation for people aged over 50 by enabling them to improve their social connections, to be more engaged in the design of services for their communities and to be recognised for their positive contribution to society. Funding was distributed to 14 regional partnerships across the UK – including Brightlife – to plan, coordinate and deliver services in each area using a range of approaches including contracting local providers, delivering services directly, and funding grassroots activity.

Over the course of 5 years, Brightlife commissioned, delivered, and evaluated a huge range of innovative initiatives to support more than 3,000 older people. Brightlife's commissioned providers have helped us to reach thousands of potentially isolated older people and although our commissioned activities have now come to an end Brightlife has always been very keen to maintain relationships with providers to find out how projects have progressed since our formal contractual relationships ended and particularly in light of the recent coronavirus pandemic. This is the second of three Brightlife Legacy and Sustainability Surveys to be carried out with Brightlife commissioned providers. Our first survey conducted in October 2020 produced some very interesting learning in relation to how organisations have managed the Covid-19 pandemic and the increasing shift to digital methods of delivery.

Brightlife contacted 32 providers representing 50 projects. Three organisations were not contacted as they are no longer delivering services due to Covid-19. Brightlife received a total of 16 responses from 14 organisations (44%), nine of which responded to the first survey and seven (50%) are new respondents. We asked providers to answer a series of questions based on 4 themes:

1. Service Delivery

3. Volunteering

2. Networking

4. Outcomes

Finally, we have compared findings from the first survey against results from this survey and commented on these in the final section; Observations since last survey.

Survey Questions

1. What was the name of your Brightlife project?
2. What is the name of the organisation that delivered the project?
3. Are you currently delivering services/activities?
4. If you answered 'Yes' or 'Partially' to question 3, please give details below, e.g. are you delivering activities that you did not deliver before Covid-19? Has your target audience changed?
5. Have you been able to continue/restart the activities you started out with under Brightlife funding?
6. If you answered 'No' to question 3 do you anticipate resuming your activities sometime in the future?
7. Have you made links with other organisations to enable you to continue to deliver activities?
8. Do you see your organisation continuing for the foreseeable future?
9. Please give details of how you have been able to engage volunteers in any activities since November 2020.
10. What emerging needs amongst older people have you identified? Please give details.
11. How are you helping older people to overcome barriers to re-engaging with your organisation and activities? e.g., how have you adapted your environment to address people's concerns?
12. What have been the most significant outcomes and learning for your organisation, employees, volunteers, and participants since November 2020?
13. Are you happy for Brightlife to contact you regarding your responses to the survey?

94% of respondents were continuing to deliver services either fully or partially. The one provider who is not currently delivering activities anticipated that these would resume sometime in the future.

75% of respondents were continuing to deliver services that they started out with under Brightlife funding either fully or partially.

100% of respondents were confident they would continue for the foreseeable future.

Responses

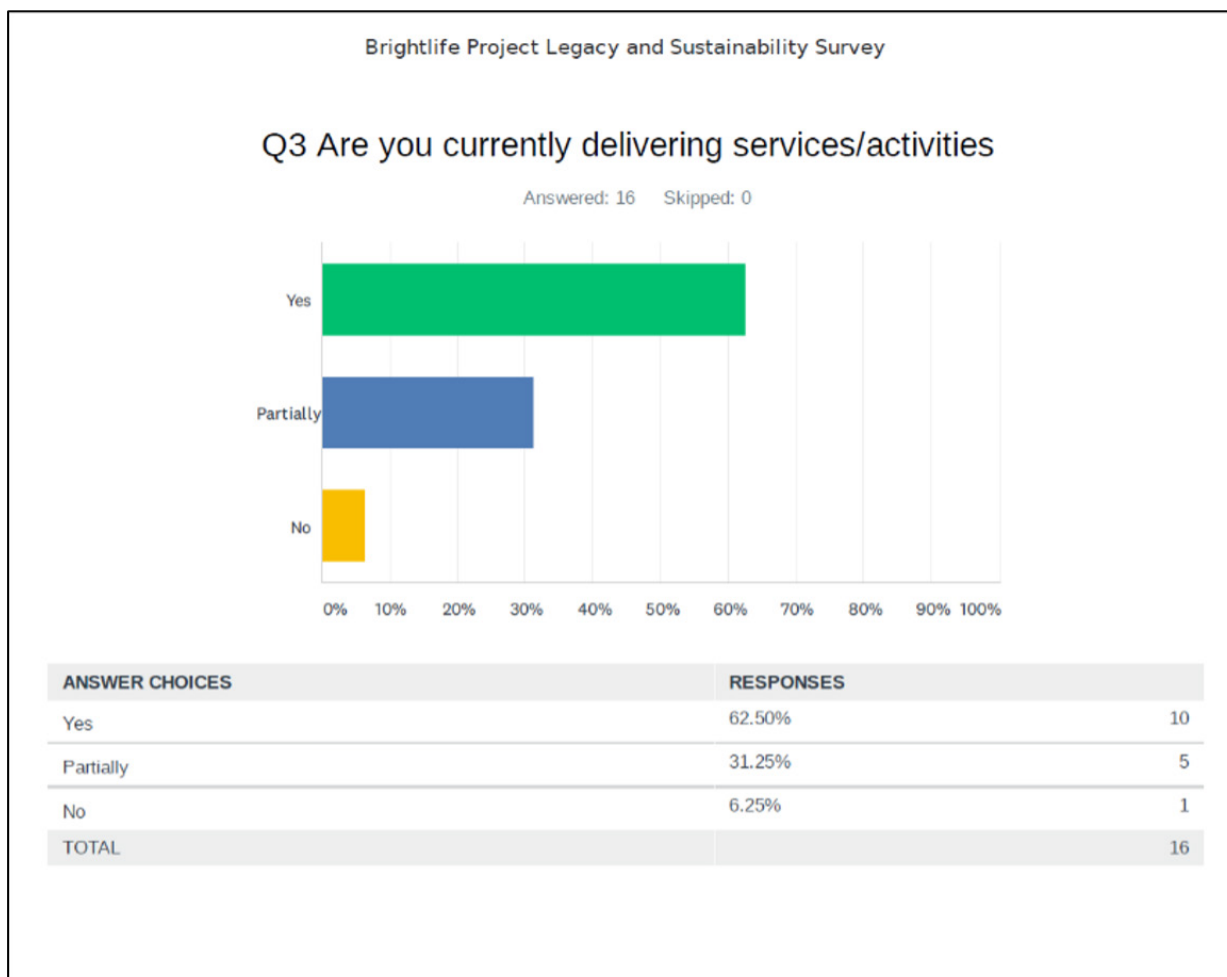
Due to the pandemic service delivery for many organisations has changed and has had to adapt to comply with the current Covid-19 restrictions. The results below are based on 16 responses.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Q3. Are you currently delivering services/activities?

For those projects continuing to deliver services we asked

“If you answered ‘Yes’ or ‘Partially’ to question 3, please give details, e.g., are you delivering activities that you did not deliver before Covid-19? Has your target audience changed?”



Providers have made some excellent innovations whilst facing numerous covid related challenges. This is what some organisations said:

“We have continued to deliver all our services and also added in a new service that is a Community Share Hub. Our target audience has stayed the same.”

“We are delivering a Telephone Befriending Project which we established during COVID 19. Our target audience has changed as we have relaxed the age criteria from over 50s”.

“We are also delivering some covid relief sessions funded through the Friends of Countess Country Park. We have more disabled people and a few more elderly people on our sessions now.”

“Other elements ceased entirely and our support for older people in hospital continues through the pandemic.”

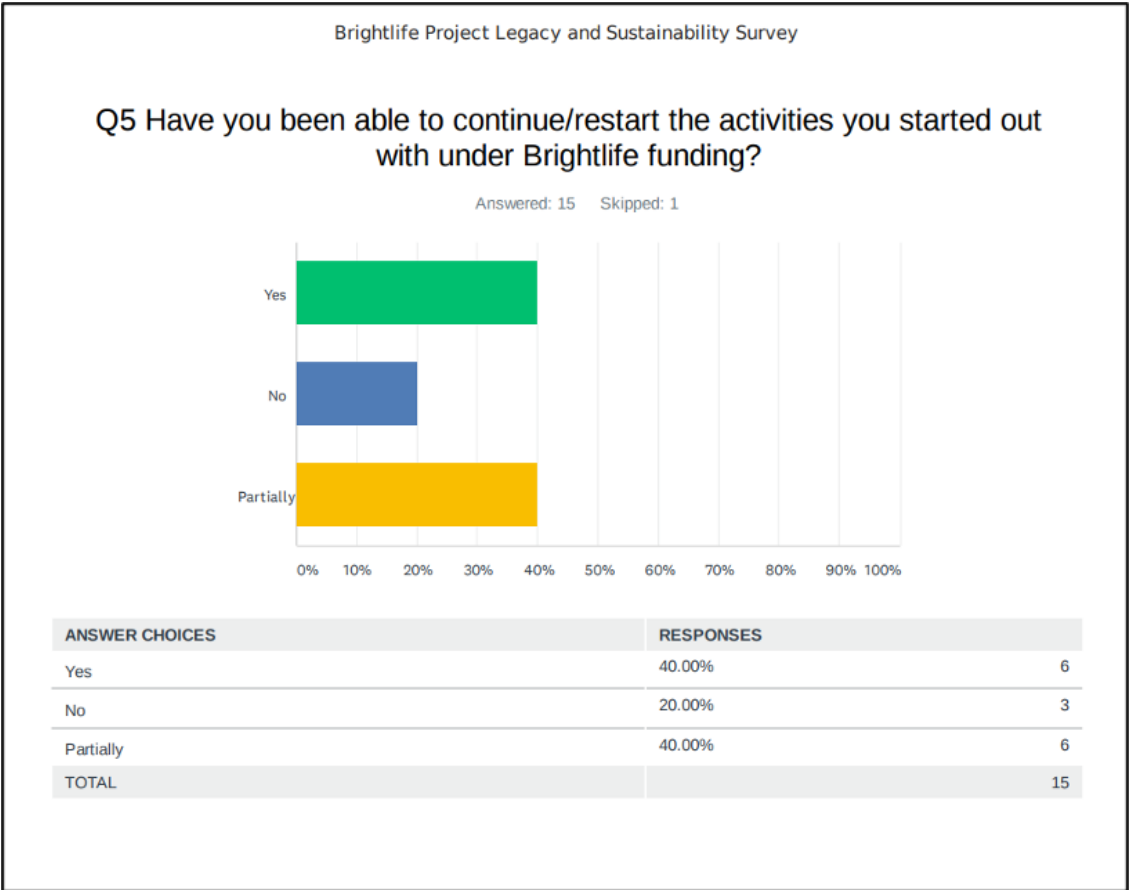
“We continued to deliver throughout lockdown, albeit slightly differently - staff worked from home, our ESOL classes went online. We did however start back classroom based in Autumn, when the schools went back and we started up some other activities to support asylum seekers who were trapped in initial accommodation because of the pandemic. We started a weekly drop in and specific ESOL classes which continued throughout the pandemic.”

The Meet and Eat project have adapted its delivery method and now takes lunches out to participants.



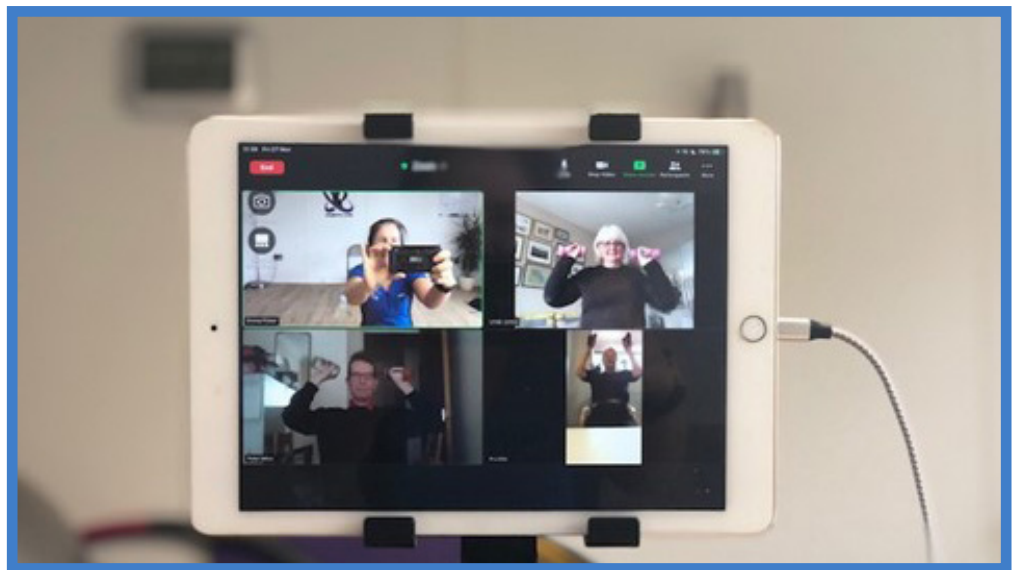
Responses

Q5. Have you been able to continue/restart the activities you started out with under Brightlife funding?



Three providers say they have been unable to continue/restart the activities they started out with under Brightlife funding, but they all envisaged their organisation would continue for the foreseeable future

Although one provider said they were unable to continue with their original Brightlife activities, they reported that some of their catering activities have continued under different guises as they continue to reach out to help rural communities on a much reduced scale and another provider anticipated their Brightlife activities would be able to resume sometime in the future.

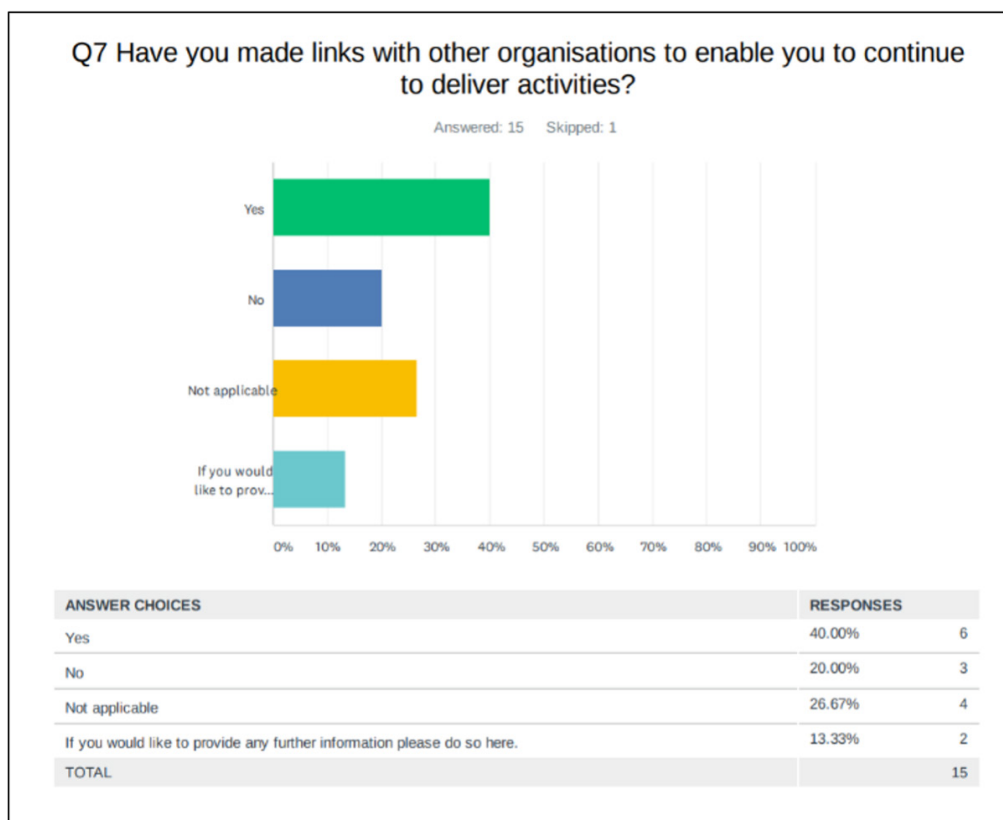


Networking

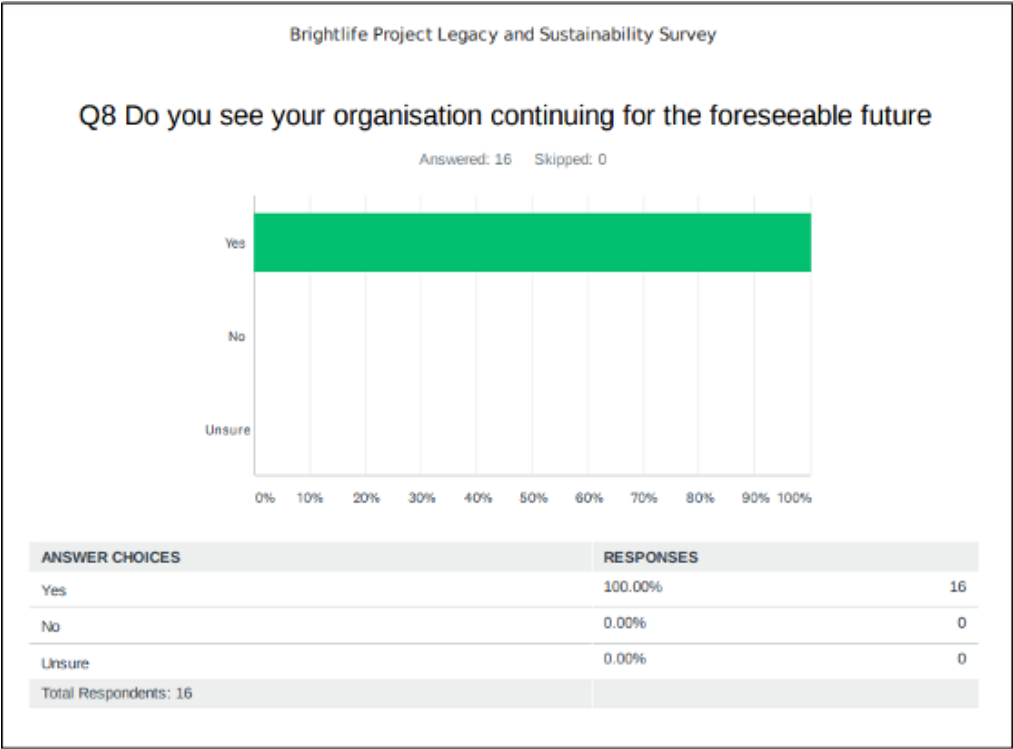
Q7. Have you made links with other organisations to enable you to continue to deliver activities?

The three providers who said they had not made links with other organisations confirmed that they thought they would continue for the foreseeable future.

One provider reported they were able to engage with other local organisations who had changed their business focus due to the pandemic.



Q8. Do you see your organisation continuing for the foreseeable future?



Fortunately, 100% of our respondents envisaged their organisation continuing for the foreseeable future.

Providers have been proactive and successful in applying for additional funding to enable them to continue their activities, and one organisation received funds for a mental wellbeing project which will build on the success of the wellbeing bags distributed during the pandemic. A provider that uses community venues, moved to smaller premises to maintain cost effectiveness.

Volunteers

Q9. Please give details of how you have been able to engage volunteers in any activities since November 2020.

There was a mixed response to this question and the level of volunteer engagement largely depended on the type of service being delivered. Volunteers continue to play a vital role in delivering telephone befriending and online activities.

A range of providers found it possible to continue with their volunteer engagement despite covid restrictions.

We have a volunteer base of 65 of which there has been an active body of 35 over the past year. Our volunteers have been mainly engaged in our telephone befriending service as well as our Chat and Check safety calls. Volunteers have also been engaged in our supported shopping service and in the preparation and distribution of our wellbeing bags.



Ten projects were able to maintain their volunteer engagement and volunteers were involved in a variety of activities including:

Newsletters

Exercise classes

Producing activity bags

Telephone befriending

Peer support

Zoom meet ups

Supported shopping services

Chat and check safety calls

Distributing wellbeing bags

Social media and website updates

We have been delivering a Telephone Befriending Scheme since March 2020 and have continued this project and secured Lottery funding from April 2021 - March 2024. We recruited the services of 250+ volunteers during March 2020 - March 2021 to deliver 'Telephone Befriending' Services to our client referrals.

Unfortunately, four projects reported they were not able to continue their volunteer engagement due to the pandemic. However, on a positive note one project increased their number of volunteers since Brightlife's last survey and has experienced a rise in volunteering amongst young people with learning disabilities.

Volunteer input enabled the Young and Green at Heart project to deliver extra conservation sessions thereby reaching more people in the community.

Outcomes

Undoubtedly the pandemic has impacted people in so many ways, some people coping better than others. To get a sense of how the pandemic has impacted our older members of the community we asked providers:

Q10. What emerging needs amongst older people have you identified?

Mental health, general wellbeing and increased social isolation were just some of the issues highlighted in the survey. People's physical health was also affected with two projects reporting a deterioration in people's mobility and physical strength. This is what organisations said:

"...particularly a need for a men's group in the area."

"Despite vaccination people are still worried about engaging with other people and taking part in activities. "

"...increase in unmet needs due to lack of local provision, increased risk of falls due to reduced mobility caused by shielding."

"Enforced isolation creating loneliness."

"There has been an increase in isolation and anxiety and reluctance to participate due to fears of covid 19."

"Strength of the clients has noticeably deteriorated."

"Fluctuating mental health needs was prevalent and continues to be the case."

The message that came through loud and clear was that having experienced lockdown some people were more aware of the need for social interaction.

"After lockdown people are keen to get back to socialising face to face"

"The need to reconnect is ever stronger."

"The prolonged need to stay at home has given them more determination to get out and meet up with people as they recognise the boost to their wellbeing."

"The definite need for social contact with people of all ages."

"A definite desire and need to meet and socialise around a shared experience."

"The need for face-to-face meetings to happen."

At Brightlife we are aware that some people have coped with the pandemic better than others and some people may require additional support to re-engage with activities, so we asked the question:

Q11. How are you helping older people to overcome barriers to re-engaging with your organisation and activities? e.g., how have you adapted your environment to address people's concerns.

The Not Ready Yet Project noted a decline in the mental and physical wellbeing of their members and said, "Our services are being prepared for members who will be anxious about returning to the outside world and also suffering from the effects and stress of being confined for so long with little access to light, exercise and the natural environment."

Some of the innovative ways that projects have overcome barriers to supporting people to re-engage with activities include:

- Telephone befriending
- Doorstep visits
- Change of venue to facilitate social distancing
- Staff wearing personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Creating a covid safe environment and people re-engaging at their own pace
- Smaller group sizes
- 1:1 outdoor sessions i.e., garden visits strolls in the park
- Delivery of resources to homes
- Regular telephone calls
- Zoom to connect with family and friends
- Appropriate risk assessments and ensuring a covid compliant environment
- Members are regularly reviewed to track their wellbeing and address individual concerns or signpost to other support agencies
- Digital training to increase confidence in the use of IT

Outcomes

Q12. What have been the most significant outcomes and learning for your organisation, employees, volunteers, and participants since November 2020?

- A reduction in social isolation.
- Importance of the group to give carers a break after a difficult period of time in lockdown.
- Organisation progressed digitally since the pandemic and are able to provide more services online.
- Consistency is key. Building real relationships and friendships which have continued outside the group has shown that this approach works for some.
- With the right personalised support people can be resilient.
- Networking with other local agencies to address unmet needs.
- Peer support.
- The value of volunteers.
- Greater awareness of the value of social connections.
- To remain flexible, positive, and resilient.
- That we are adaptable and determined to continue regardless of difficulties.
- Matching more people, quicker by using the telephone befriending model, with ability to reach more people to alleviate some of the loneliness and isolation felt by so many.
- We have also learnt that there are benefits to being able to offer both telephone and face to face options to our clients and a blended approach to befriending.
- Projects have discovered the benefit of using online methods of communications and this is something they will take forward into the future.

OBSERVATIONS SINCE OUR LAST SURVEY

The enforced loneliness of the pandemic has created extreme loneliness and fear. Activities that were set up at the onset of the pandemic have been maintained with one provider continuing to delivery predominately online activities, telephone befriending, chat and check safety calls, supported shopping service for those unable to use online shopping, emergency prescription delivery, quarterly newsletters, regular wellbeing bags and since our last survey the creation of an online dementia support group.

For those providers that participated in both surveys we saw that with the recent easing of restrictions, organisations that were not delivering services in October were now beginning to re-establish their activities and recruit volunteers.

The Young and Green at Heart project furloughed staff in October, they have since returned and are now delivering even more sessions than they were pre-covid.

Changing Lives Together has changed their target audience to include people aged under 50's. This additional focus helps to build resilience for the future. Since our last survey one organisation has been able to return to their community venue to deliver services, which at the height of the pandemic was being delivered online via Zoom.

Since moving to a telephone befriending service Age UK Cheshire's Sharing Time project is now five times larger than it was prior to Covid-19. Online activities still feature predominately in methods of delivery.





We would like to thank all the organisations who responded to our survey with their feedback and stories, and especially for their continued support for older people in Cheshire West and Chester in these most challenging of times. Our intention is to repeat the survey in 2022 and we look forward to our Providers contributing and helping us to report the incredible work they do.

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