

Unlocking Connection: a summary

7 keys for unlocking social connections
within communities

Since 2021, Meta has partnered with the Connection Coalition to provide small grants to members who want to test ideas and ways to build connections and community through the pandemic and beyond. In the second round of grants in 2022, we gave a total of £10,000 to 10 Connection Coalition members. By bringing together and summarising our learning from the 2022 programme, this report aims to achieve the following:

- Share the main learnings that emerged on creating connections and where to find further resources and inspiration.
- Paint a bigger picture of the work organisations are doing, particularly the challenges faced and the opportunities available.
- Highlight the work of the participating Connection Coalition members.

Through our test-and-learn approach, we have identified 7 keys for connection which, when considered and applied, have shown themselves to unlock connections between people. These keys are grounded in community experiences and activities and were taken from conversations and learning shared throughout the programme (January - June 2022). This report is aimed at those directly delivering work to create and maintain social connections, but we hope it will also be of use to those in the wider sector including funders and policy-makers.

You can find out more about the Connection Coalition and read the full report complete with resources and case studies [here](#).

OUR COLLABORATORS

In January 2022, we invited Connection Coalition members to apply for funding to test ideas and methods of creating meaningful connections. We envisaged the grants being used by members either for something they'd wanted to do for a while but not had the right time or motivation, or for an evolution of existing work that allowed testing of an idea. These were the 10 successful applicants chosen for the programme:

All the Small Things CiC

used arts and crafts to encourage local residents to reflect on their own personal identity and heritage and that of others in North Staffordshire.

Books Beyond Words CIO

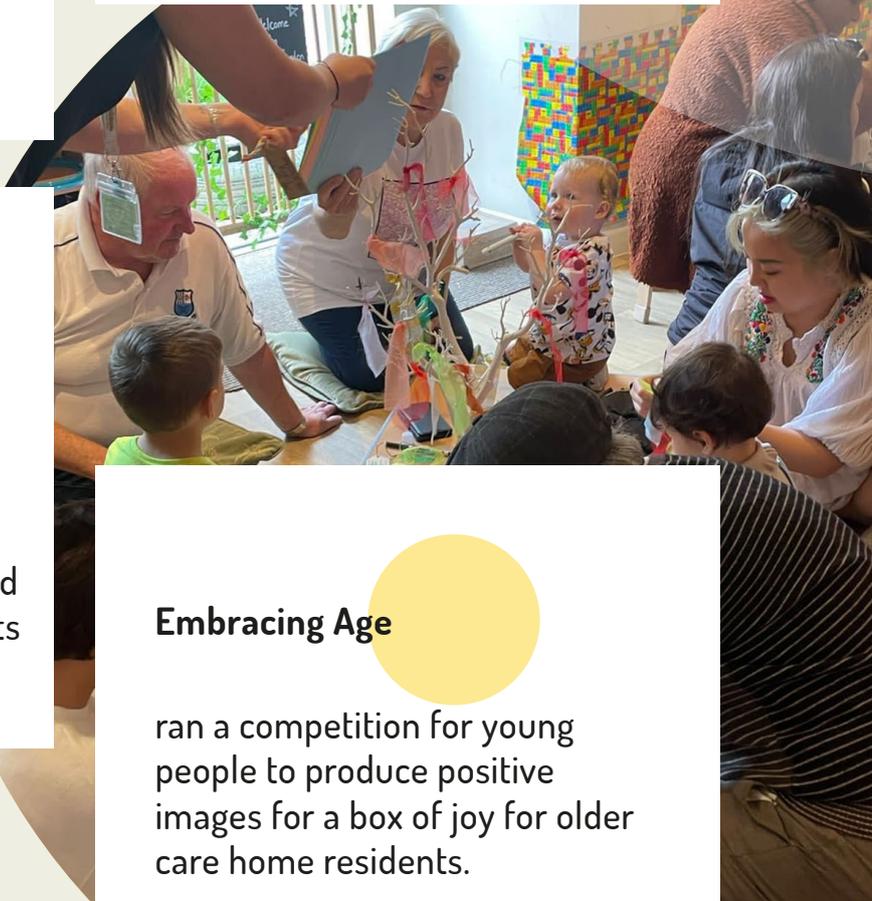
extended their book club for those with learning disabilities.

Civil Society Consulting CIC

recruited more Kindness Connectors for their mentoring scheme - which supports refugees, those from newly arrived communities and vulnerable adults experiencing social isolation.

Embracing Age

ran a competition for young people to produce positive images for a box of joy for older care home residents.





Parasol

organised community events in Calderdale on justice-based themes, including disability and health.

Ready Generations

delivered two events in the North West to explore the setting up of a multigenerational connective network for people living with young onset dementia and their family and friends.

Empowerment Charity

ran a series of workshops and conversations to better understand how mental ill health and bereavement creates feelings of loneliness, with a particular focus on young men and those bereaved by suicide.

Talking Taboos

supported the delivery of the grants, creating a supportive community to offer practical tips and inspiration, while testing their connection toolkit.

Lit Theatre Company

made connections with older people in Nottingham to co-create new theatre in a way that is meaningful and fulfilling to them.

The Wolfpack Project

hosted arts and crafts social groups for lonely or isolated young people in Nottingham.

7 KEYS FOR CONNECTION

As well as giving the small grants to members, we matched projects with other members to collaborate with, and created a community to offer support and inspiration. We facilitated several online spaces for members to connect, reflect on learning, share challenges and offer support. By providing these reflective spaces and listening to what came up we have identified 7 keys for connection which, when considered and applied, have shown themselves to unlock connections between people.



1. Consider your space

The right event space is needed to ensure that people feel safe and relaxed. This doesn't mean high-end buildings which can often feel too formal, but a space intentionally selected to be accessible and facilitate connection.



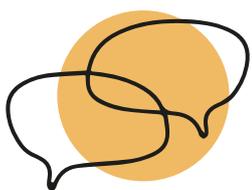
2. Consider your activities

Finding an activity helps make people feel more at ease. It gives people something to focus on, allowing time for conversations and connections to develop naturally. It allows those who might be nervous to participate without having to talk straight away. Activities might include walking, preparing food and eating together or arts and crafts.



3. Remember we can achieve more together - organisations

As activity and event organisers, we can benefit from making connections and collaborating with others. Working with other organisations with shared values enables an exchange of constructive feedback, opportunities and new ideas. Particularly when you're trying to reach new audiences, working with other organisations and groups already known to the people you're trying to connect with can help build trust and understanding.



4. Remember we can achieve more together - the community

Involving communities in the planning and delivery of activities improves outcomes for everyone. One of our collaborators put it best: “exploring this topic with community members helped them to feel invested, feel empowered, heard, and is a creative way to create new ideas and solutions, as well as understand what people really need.” **Empowerment.**



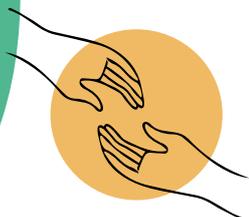
5. Pay attention to the small things

Connections aren't automatically created when you bring people together, it requires intention and attention. Paying attention to the details can help give people reassurance and the tools to help them navigate new connections and experiences.



6. Allow enough time

Building trust, relationships and creating meaningful connections takes time. It needs long-term thinking and is built when we are vulnerable with each other, which happens when we feel safe and valued. Whether it's between you and other organisations, or between participants, allowing enough time for individuals to build trust and relationships will pay off.



7. Identify barriers to participation and how you might overcome them

Anyone can benefit from increasing the number or quality of their social connections. However, we know that certain groups and individuals are more at risk of loneliness and disconnection, and many people face additional barriers when it comes to creating social connections. Doing what you can to identify and minimise barriers for those who would benefit most from your activities can help increase your positive impact and change people's lives.

THE FUTURE: “WE ARE NOT STOPPING!”

We know that overall, Connection Coalition members feel optimistic about their work to build and strengthen connections in their community now and in the future.

The pandemic has raised awareness of individual and community needs for connection, led to an increased demand for services and created a necessity to adapt. In turn, this has increased hope for the future, generating more opportunities for collaboration among community organisations and an increased willingness to test out new ideas. Members are also confident that they are well placed to deliver the needed work, being trusted within communities and experienced in tackling issues of disconnection, loneliness and isolation.

That does not mean that work to create and maintain social connections is without challenges. The 7 keys for connection which emerged through this project are not new ideas and won't come as a surprise to Connection Coalition members. However, finding the time and resources to prioritise these approaches is a challenge when short-term thinking and funding dominates our systems, and social connections are too often not prioritised or considered in designing our places, services and activities. The question we are asking, alongside our members is::

How do we create a world where social connections are understood, valued and prioritised?

If you're interested in creating this world we'd love to hear from you.

Jo Cox Foundation

www.jocoxfoundation.org | info@jocoxfoundation.org

Connection Coalition

www.connectioncoalition.org.uk | hello@connectioncoalition.org.uk

Meta UK Policy team

[Sophie England](#) and [Richard Earley](#)

This report has been written by Zoe Cumberland and Ella Turner from the Jo Cox Foundation. You can find out more about the Connection Coalition and read the full report complete with resources and case studies [here](#).

Designed by [HiloDoes](#)