Evaluating Ageing Better Isle of Wight:
Participant Journeys

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Age Friendly Island

LOTTERY FUNDED

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Introduction

Ageing Better Isle of Wight is a 5 year partnership funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) that aims to make the Isle of Wight a great place to grow older, encourage better relations between generations, and tackle social isolation and loneliness.

Ageing Better Isle of Wight is a multi-project Programme. Delivered and managed by Age UK Isle of Wight, 16 projects, run by a range of voluntary and community sector and private organisations, have received Ageing Better funding to work to reduce social isolation and increase the health and wellbeing of older people. The projects target different groups (for example carers, men, people with Alzheimer's) and work at different levels tackling isolation as well as preventing it. For more information about the current projects see www.agefriendlyisland.org/our-projects/.

Evaluation and monitoring over the last four years, has shown that the Programme is improving the lives of older people and making the Island a better place to age[1]. Interviews with project leads over the last four years have found that projects actively signpost, refer, complement and work in partnership with each other. Two projects, the Care Navigators and Community Navigators have a specific aim to link people to both Ageing Better and non-Ageing Better projects, services and organisations.

As part of the local evaluation of Ageing Better Isle of Wight, this report seeks to learn more about how the Programme is working by exploring how older people access, participate and move between the projects. It does this through looking at quantitative data of multiple project use, and through in-depth qualitative interviews with individuals who have used more than one project.

This report looks firstly at how many people are participating in more than one project and which projects they are using. It then looks at journeys that older people take through the Programme, including graphic illustrations of four individuals' journeys. It focuses on the key stages needed for people to move between projects, and highlights what enables and supports this movement.

[1] NDTi (2017), Age Friendly Island Local Evaluation: Annual Evaluation Report 16/17 www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/AFI_Evaluation_report_16-17_-_final_31.07.17.pdf
NDTi (2018), Age Friendly Island Local Evaluation: Annual Evaluation Report 17/18 www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/docs/AFI_Evaluation_report_17-18_final.pdf
NDTi (2019), Becoming an Age Friendly Island www.ndti.org.uk/uploads/files/AFI_project_insight_June_2019_final.pdf

1. Patterns of project participation

How many people participate in more than one project?

As part of the Ageing Better national evaluation, older people who participate in a project are asked to complete a questionnaire. This includes a question that asks them to identify which of the other Ageing Better Isle of Wight projects they have experienced. It should be noted that not all projects ask people to complete the questionnaire and only an estimated 8% of people participating with Programme complete one. The information here therefore reflects questionnaire respondents rather than all participants. However, it gives a useful insight into patterns of project use by those people experiencing more than one project.

Between January 2016 and the end of June 2019 there were 1183 questionnaire responses. Of these, 195 respondents, 16.5%, indicated that they had experienced 2 or more projects[2]. Due to the long period of the Programme people may not recall experiencing a project, particularly if it was brief involvement or a one off. Furthermore, people may not always recognise the name of the project; they may for example know the name of the person who supported them, or the name of the organisation. Therefore, this is likely to be an underestimate of the number of people who have used more than one project and the proportion of people participating in more than one project is likely to be more than 16.5%.

How many projects do people participate in?

Table 1 below shows that 142 of the 195 people experienced two projects, 27 people experienced three projects and 17 people experienced four projects. One person experienced eight projects and one person experienced as many as 12 projects – the only projects that this individual did not participate in were the Alzheimer's cafés, Mental Health Peer Support and Olderpreneurs.

[2] Because of a change to the questionnaire people were asked to complete on entry, some people who completed entry questionnaires early in the Programme were not asked which other projects they had experienced. Although the entry questionnaire should capture the experience of the first project an individual has been involved in, there may some cases where it has not (for example if they declined to complete a questionnaire when they became involved in the first project), therefore this may underestimate the proportion of people who have experienced more than one project.

Number of projects experienced	Number of people experiencing this number of projects
2	142
3	27
4	17
5	6
6	1
8	1
12	1

Table 1: Number of projects experienced

Which projects do people participate in?

Table 2 shows which projects the people who have participated in more than one project experienced. Unsurprisingly, given the navigator role of these projects, the projects that the highest number of people experienced were the Community Navigators and the Care Navigators: 42% of people experienced the Community Navigators and 36% of people experienced the Care Navigators. Although we do not know whether these were the first projects these people used, the indication is that these projects are successfully navigating people to other projects.

The projects that fewest people experienced are Education 50+ (which stopped in 2017) and Mental Health Peer Support (which stopped in 2018). Isle Find It (an online directory) was used by a small number of people, however, it is unrealistic for people to expect to remember the name of a search website they used, so this is likely to be a significant underestimate.

Project	Number of people experiencing this project	% of people experiencing this project
Community Navigators	82	42
Care Navigators	70	36
Care for Carers	42	22
Digital Inclusion	41	21
SingAbout and Creative Futures	38	19
Olderpreneurs	35	18
Good Neighbour Scheme	35[3]	18
Age Friendly Island Public Forums	35	18
Employment Support	34[4]	17
Alzheimer's Café	32[3]	16
Men in Sheds	25	13
Education 50+	8	4
Isle Find It	6	3
Mental Health Peer Support	4	2

Table 2: Number and percentage of people experiencing each project

[3] It was agreed early in the Programme that the national evaluation questionnaire was not suitable for Alzheimer's Café participants. The GNS project only started using the questionnaire in the last two years of the Programme. Although use of these projects should be picked up through completion of the questionnaire for other projects used it is likely that these figures under report use of these two projects.

[4] The Employment Support project stopped in March 2019

2. Participant journeys

Nine people who had used 2 or more projects were interviewed in-depth to explore their journeys through the Programme: how they heard about, participated in and moved between the projects. Two males and seven females were interviewed, 6 interviews were face to face and 3 interviews were over the phone. The interviews took place in September and October 2019.

Four of the people's journeys are illustrated graphically (see pages 10 to 13). These four journeys have been selected to reflect the range of different types of journeys that people experienced.

A number of important points became clear through the interviews:

Involvement with one project can lead to involvement with another – Although it does not always work in this way, the interviews found that once someone has become involved in one project it can lead to them becoming involved with other projects. For example, **Bob** (page 10) who was feeling lonely and depressed found out about Men in Sheds online. Through his involvement in Men in Sheds he found out about the Public Forum and was introduced to a Community Navigator who came to the shed. The Community Navigator found out about his needs and interests and told him about projects that matched his interests. The initial involvement with Men in Sheds was key to leading on to Bob becoming active in his local community and making new friends. **Kate** (page 11), who was concerned about her memory, became aware of SingAbout through fliers in her village and through information in the library. She then heard about Alzheimer's cafes through people she met at SingAbout.

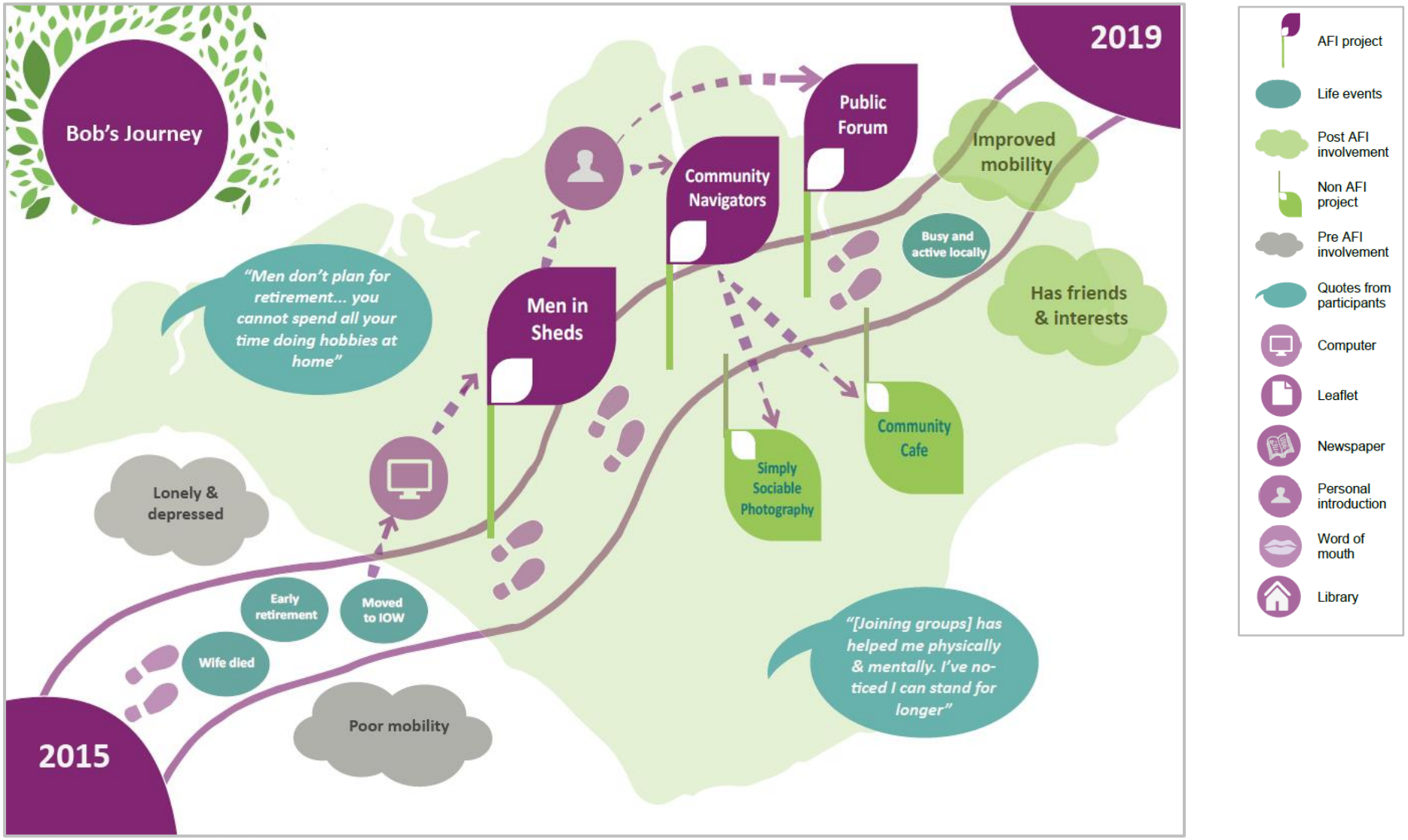
Some journeys "meander" – While there are some more straightforward journeys, such as Bob's and Kate's, for others, involvement with different projects is more disjointed, with people, for example **Jo** (page 12) and **Julia** (page 13) getting involved with projects as and when they have a need or interest.

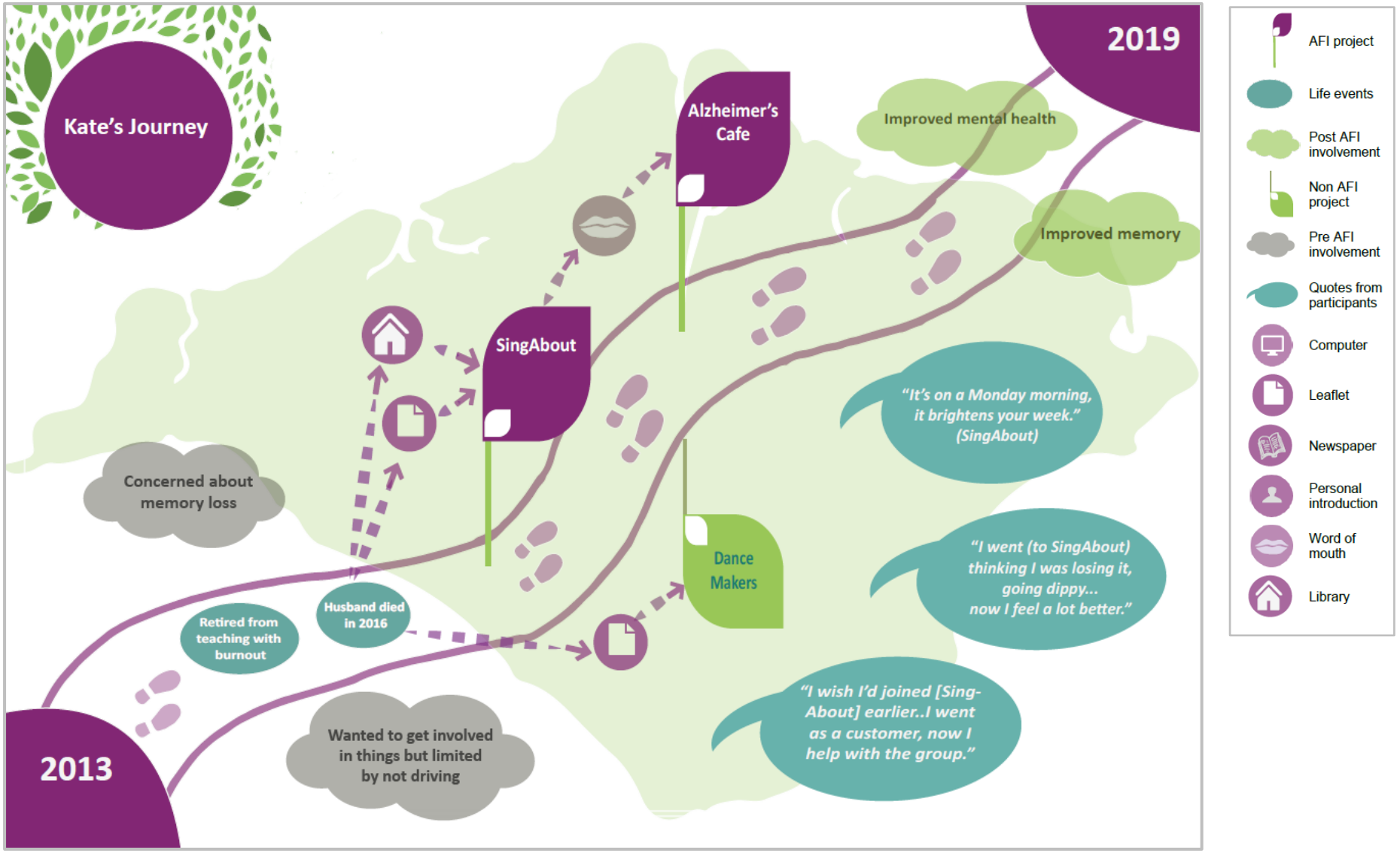
Not everyone who uses multiple projects is isolated – Some people who have been involved with a number of the projects are busy, active, community minded people, for example **Julia** (page 13). For these people the opportunity to be active and involved in their local community through Ageing Better and non-Ageing Better projects is likely to be working at a preventative level maintaining their local networks and their wellbeing.

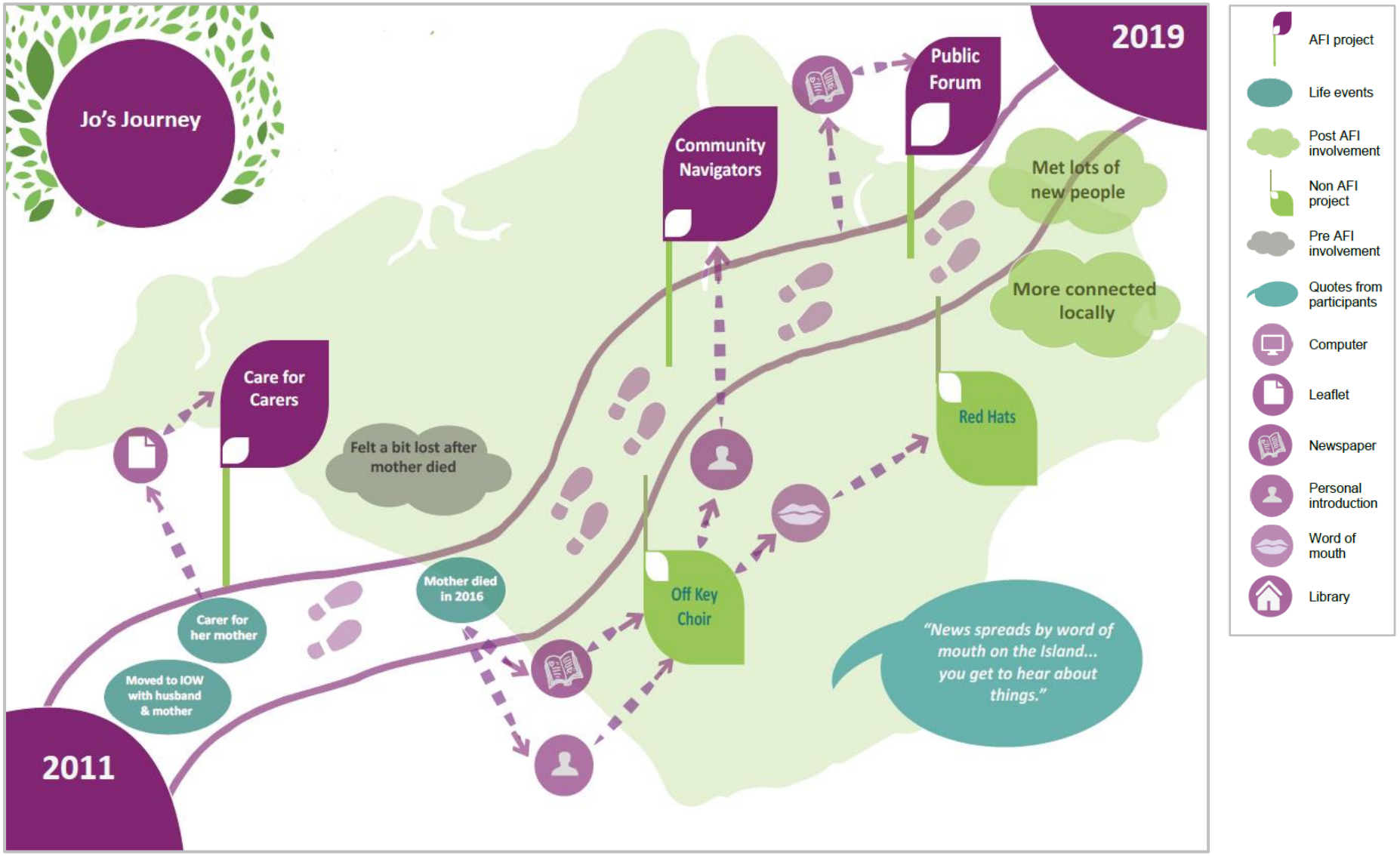
The importance of navigators – It was clear through the interviews that navigators have an important and active role to play in: identifying people; getting to know individuals and their interests and needs; providing very personalised information; providing practical support to get to projects and groups; as well as setting up groups themselves when a need has been

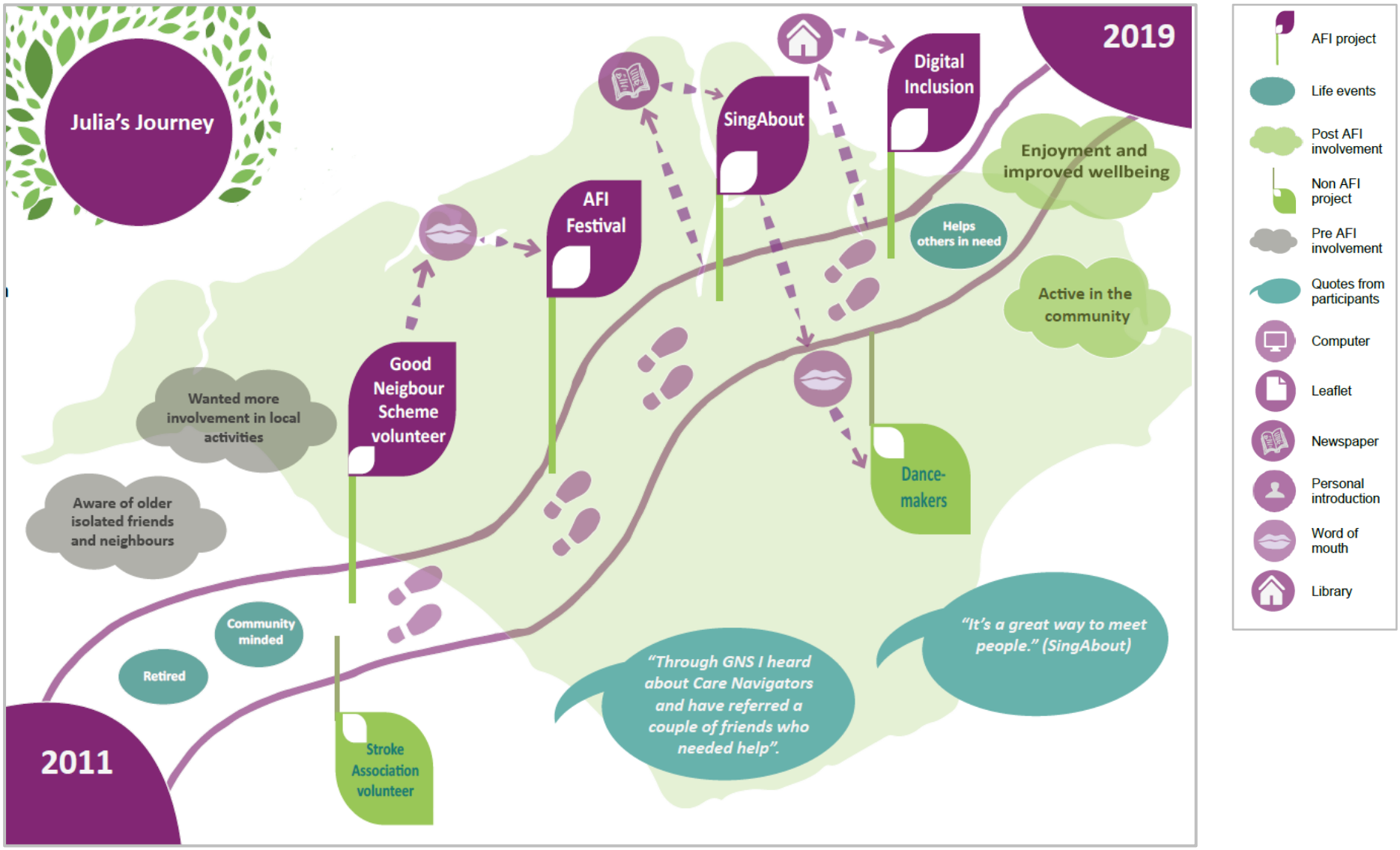
identified (e.g. **Jo** page 12 who goes to a "pitch up" group run by the Community Navigators). Interestingly, as well as the professional Care Navigators and Community Navigators some of the people interviewed were acting as informal navigators themselves, for example **Julia** (page 13) who refers friends and neighbours to projects she finds out about.

There is healthy cross-organisation movement – People are involved in both Ageing Better and non-Ageing Better projects and word of mouth and personal introductions work both ways. It is clear that professionals involved, such as Care Navigators and Community Navigators, and project leads, are working for the benefit of older people and referring and signposting to projects and organisations whether or not they are part of the Ageing Better Programme.


Bob's Journey
2019
2015
Public Forum
Improved mobility
Community Navigators
Busy and active locally
"Men don't plan for retirement... you cannot spend all your time doing hobbies at home"
Men in Sheds
Has friends & interests
Community Cafe
Simply Sociable Photography
Lonely & depressed
Early retirement
Moved to IOW
Wife died
Poor mobility
"[Joining groups] has helped me physically & mentally. I've noticed I can stand for longer"
AFI project
Life events
Post AFI involvement
Non AFI project
Pre AFI involvement
Quotes from participants
Computer
Leaflet
Newspaper
Personal introduction
Word of mouth
Library


Kate's Journey
2019
2013
Alzheimer's Cafe
SingAbout
Dance Makers
Improved mental health
Improved memory
Concerned about memory loss
Husband died in 2016
Retired from teaching with burnout
Wanted to get involved in things but limited by not driving
"It's on a Monday morning, it brightens your week." (SingAbout)
"I went (to SingAbout) thinking I was losing it, going dippy... now I feel a lot better."
"I wish I'd joined [Sing-About] earlier..I went as a customer, now I help with the group."
AFI project
Life events
Post AFI involvement
Non AFI project
Pre AFI involvement
Quotes from participants
Computer
Leaflet
Newspaper
Personal introduction
Word of mouth
Library


Jo's Journey
2019
2011
Public Forum
Community Navigators
Met lots of new people
More connected locally
Care for Carers
Felt a bit lost after mother died
Red Hats
Mother died in 2016
Off Key Choir
Carer for her mother
Moved to IOW with husband & mother
"News spreads by word of mouth on the Island... you get to hear about things."
AFI project
Life events
Post AFI involvement
Non AFI project
Pre AFI involvement
Quotes from participants
Computer
Leaflet
Newspaper
Personal introduction
Word of mouth
Library

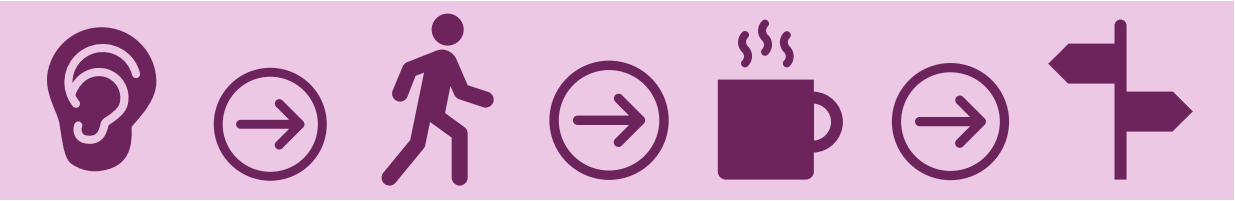

Julia's Journey
2019
2011
AFI Festival
SingAbout
Digital Inclusion
Good Neigbour Scheme volunteer
Stroke Association volunteer
Dance-makers
Enjoyment and improved wellbeing
Helps others in need
Active in the community
Wanted more involvement in local activities
Aware of older isolated friends and neighbours
Community minded
Retired
"Through GNS I heard about Care Navigators and have referred a couple of friends who needed help".
"It's a great way to meet people." (SingAbout)
AFI project
Life events
Post AFI involvement
Non AFI project
Pre AFI involvement
Quotes from participants
Computer
Leaflet
Newspaper
Personal introduction
Word of mouth
Library

3. Key journey stages

In seeking to understand what works to reduce isolation, the key finding from the interviews is that for those who are less connected or more isolated, involvement with one project can lead on to involvement with other projects or groups. As a result of being involved with multiple projects, people's networks increase, they become more involved in their local community and are less isolated.

It is clear therefore, that understanding what enables someone to take the step to becoming involved in the first project is key, as is understanding how people then move on to involvement in other projects.

In order to move from no involvement, to involvement with multiple projects, people need to:



1. Hear about a project **2. Go to a project** **3. Stay at a project** **4. Move to another project**

How do people **hear** about projects?

The interviews found that people found out about projects through a range of means, either through written information:

- **Traditional media** – local newspapers, newsletters, flyers
- **Libraries** – flyers, posters, community librarian
- **Online** – google, emails, social media including Facebook

News spreads by word of mouth on the island, you get to hear about things.

Or through person to person contact:

- **Word of mouth** – personal recommendations, friends, family, neighbours
- **Community Navigators** – presence at range of community venues (e.g. church, WI, libraries, community cafes, Men in Sheds)
- **Informal connectors** – active community minded individuals (e.g. **Julia**) who connect friends and neighbours to projects they become aware of

I have told people at church about the Community Navigators and other projects

People often heard about projects through a number of sources before they made the decision to go. For example, **Kate** had seen fliers round the village and seen information in the library for SingAbout, and **Jo** had read about the choir in the newspaper and was encouraged by a friend to go. It seems that a range of means of sharing information about projects are important, not only because different people use different means, but because some people need to hear about it through a range of sources before they make the decision to go.

What supports people to **go** to a project?

Hearing about and being aware of a project is just the first step. People then need to make the move from knowing about it, to going to it. This is partly about practical transportation:

- **Car**
- **Mobility scooter**
- **Public transport**
- **Walking**
- **Lifts from friends, neighbours and family**
- **Community transport**
- **Community Navigator**

Fortunately, I still drive. We are lacking things to do here.

I hope they don't get rid of the free bus pass, it's really important to me.

My daughter would drive me anywhere

My husband's Care Home put on a mini bus to take us to the Alzheimer's café.

Importantly, it is also about having the confidence to make the first step. While some people are happy to go alone, others had seen a poster or flyer about an activity that interested them but didn't go until they had a 'way in' through:

- **Personal contact** – being invited along by a friend or neighbour
- **Community Navigator, professional or project lead** – being supported to go by a professional

I knew [Community Navigator] anyway…she encouraged me to give it a go, and she gave me a lift.

What supports people to **stay** involved with a project?

Knowing about a project and going for the first time are the first two steps. The interviews found a number of factors that are important in ensuring people stay involved:

- **Groups are welcoming and inclusive** – having made an approach to a group, 'fitting in', and feeling 'comfortable' was important in maintaining involvement
- **Socialising time is built in** – this helped with making people feel welcome, and created opportunities to build connections and make friendships
- **Having a purpose or taking on responsibility** – for some people being involved as more than a participant was important in maintaining involvement
- **Accessing transport** – while people need support to take the first step and go to a group, once they are there people identify others to share lifts with, or the people running the groups support them to find ways of getting there

I was welcomed with open arms…I've made new friends…my life has changed for the better.

I was back in company again with men in working clothes. They made me most welcome.

Men in Sheds has given me back a sense of purpose…I go out to talk to other groups, to spread the word about us and I'm linked in with other activities/projects locally

We always have tea and biscuits and a chat…and a great laugh.

How do people **move** on to other projects?

Having participated in one project, people heard about or became involved with other project in four main ways:

- **Through others at the group** – people meeting others at the group who make recommendations to them, or invite them to join them in going to another group
- **Through the group lead** – the project or group lead makes informal suggestions as they get to know people and their needs, or announcements are made about other groups or events
- **Through other project workers or leads attending the project** – for example someone from Care for Carers going to an Alzheimer's café to let people know about what the project can offer, making flyers available at events
- **Through a connector** – a Community Navigator going to projects with the specific aim of linking people to other (Ageing Better and non-Ageing Better) projects

My social life has expanded by getting involved in groups…we help each other and share information.

I joined SingAbout and it has led to many other things...the teacher told me about the AFI forum.

4. Barriers to participation

Through talking to people who we had already identified as being involved in 2 or more projects the interviewees are people who *have* been able to participate, not people who are experiencing the biggest barriers. However, a number of people identified barriers to participating in more projects, identified barriers they had experienced at other times, or identified barriers they have observed others facing.

- **Health and mobility issues** – fluctuating health, physical limitations, illness or injury mean that older people have to take a break or drop out of activities
- **Transport** – linking to the points outlined above, public transport in some parts of the island is poor, making participation difficult or impossible, unless projects are available locally
- **Gatekeepers** - one interviewee with mobility issues is heavily reliant on his daughter who strongly influences what he can get involved in
- **Caring responsibilities** – some interviewees who had cared for a parent, husband or wife did not get involved in anything until after the partner had died
- **Bereavement/depression/low mood** – can make it hard to reach out, take the first step and join in activities/projects
- **Natural reserve/lack of confidence** – feeling daunting going along to something new on your own
- **Clashing multiple projects** – some interviewees felt they were already doing too much and found it hard to fit in all the projects they were involved in

I was housebound after hurting my leg for 2 weeks. I was tearing my hair out.

I can't drive now, getting places is difficult. I've had to stop going to things since my knee replacement.

I hate driving, I only go to things in the village.

It takes a lot of courage to walk in somewhere on your own.

Conclusion

The questionnaire data and the journey mapping interviews have shown that there is healthy movement between projects and organisations working to reduce isolation and improve the wellbeing of older people on the Isle of Wight. It is encouraging and positive to see the way that people use and move between projects, both Ageing Better and non-Ageing Better ones. It is clear that the Ageing Better projects are working to the aims of the Programme outcomes; working to address isolation and improve wellbeing, and directing or supporting people to other projects that will help people to do this. Organisations and projects are not working in silos, and those involved in delivering Ageing Better projects facilitate movement between both other Ageing Better and non-Ageing Better projects and vice versa, in the interests of individual older people.

We have seen that for some people, likely to be the more isolated or less connected people, accessing the first project can be key. Once people access a project, two forms of support kick in. Firstly, they are opened up to an **informal** network of other people participating in the groups. This can lead to them hearing about other projects, having someone to go with or introduce them to new things, or having lifts. Secondly, they are opened up to the more **formal** networks of project leads, workers or volunteers. They can hear about other groups from project leads, be introduced to them through people from other projects coming to visit, or meet a Community Navigator who can inform or introduce them.

This emphasises that projects have a number of key roles in ensuring the Programme works to reduce isolation and improve wellbeing:

1) **Getting people involved in the first place – making sure people hear about the groups and are able to access them**
2) **Ensuring the groups are structured to enable informal networks to flourish**
3) **Ensuring information is shared about other projects by providing it directly, through cross-project working, and through involving Community Navigators**
4) **The navigator projects have a specific role in finding people, identifying needs and interests, supporting people to access groups and facilitating other project use.**

While it is a real positive that involvement in one project can lead to hearing about and becoming involved in other projects, the flip side is that this can exacerbate isolation for those who are unable to, find it difficult to, or don't know how to, take that first step. Access to transport and engaging the most isolated people remain challenges for the Programme.