



Final Report

North London Cares and South London Cares Evaluation

John Hitchin, Olivia Petie, and Amanda Norrlander

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Executive Summary

Renaisi was commissioned by The Cares Family in 2018 to undertake a piece of work to explore the impact of their programmes on older and younger people across their London based charities North London Cares and South London Cares. There are currently four programmes that make up The Cares Family's model. This evaluation focussed on Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour.

This research built on Renaisi's previous work for The Cares Family and identified three quality indicators for each programme which, along with the approach of staff, are key to the model and act as the mechanisms of creating change. For social clubs, what mattered most for older and younger participants was sharing time with others; laughing and experiencing new things together; and an environment conducive for building connections. For Love Your Neighbour what mattered to people most were connections built on laughter, friendship and storytelling; bringing the outside world into the home; and receiving practical and emotional support. Since mutual benefit is a key part of The Cares Family's approach, this evaluation also sought to understand the extent to which the two programmes' outcomes are achieved for older and younger neighbours alike.

Through an evaluation of its activities and these core quality indicators, overall The Cares Family model is contributing towards four outcome areas:

Reduced loneliness and isolation – particularly experienced by older neighbours, with younger neighbours largely a well-connected group. Older neighbours connected with others and had something to look forward to or to get them out of the house. For those younger neighbours experiencing loneliness, creating meaningful connections with others and the regularity of seeing their older neighbour through Love Your Neighbour helped them to feel less lonely too.

Improved understanding across intergenerational divides – neighbours described forgetting about the age difference and simply seeing each other as friends. Spending time together in this way allowed older and younger neighbours to hear about different perspectives of life and share stories which changed perceptions of those of a different generation.

A sense of belonging – being part of the social clubs gave older and younger neighbours a sense of belonging to a group or a community as they felt welcome and enjoyed the shared experience with others. Younger neighbours experienced a sense that they were 'giving back' and thus felt they belonged to their local community.

An increased connection to self – largely relating to having a space day-to-day to relax and be one's self. For older neighbours this was related to being treated as an individual; and for younger neighbours this was juxtaposed with their day-to-day lives of living and working in London.

Measuring the direct programme outcomes quantitatively proved challenging, and results were mixed. In part, this was due to the outcomes needing some refining to more closely align with programme activities and The Cares Family's overall model; different definitions of language and terms used; and the scope of The Cares Family's work in an individual's life. However, this research also highlighted the wider

challenges of measuring change through a community-based model such as this – particularly in many of the subjective and contested areas such as loneliness and wellbeing. Based on this research, quantitative methods alone are not currently able to describe The Cares Family’s outcomes, as responses to pro forma questions frequently didn’t reflect the richer qualitative data.

Outcomes are, therefore, articulated largely through findings from the qualitative methods where those findings are also supported in the more limited quantitative data findings.

As a result of this research, this report recommends that The Cares Family:

- Consider that while the model adopts a mutual approach, with target impact on both older and younger people, the outcomes are not necessarily symmetrical – specific impacts may be different for older and younger people who have different starting points, motivations, and experiences.
- Focus on the quality indicators and particularly those identified as core to the model in future delivery and when expanding to new areas.
- Consider the various ways in which people engage with The Cares Family’s activities and how these impact upon their achievement of stated outcomes.
- Consider refining and narrowing some of the stated programme outcomes.
- Use this experience to contribute to debates on impact measurement approaches to community-led work on isolation and connection, and to continue to experiment with more embedded and creative qualitative evaluation approaches capable of capturing the fullness of the work.

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Introduction



The Cares Family is a group of charities that began in north London with an ambition to bring together people of different generations to socialise and spend time together. In 2014, South London Cares started and over the course of 2017 and 2018 The Cares Family expanded from its London base to build Manchester Cares and Liverpool Cares.

The research

Renaissi was commissioned at the start of 2018 to undertake an impact evaluation of The Cares Family's work to help them demonstrate how they are meeting their core objectives. The Cares Family commissioned this work to capture, track and analyse their impact in each of its city locations and as a whole Family.

This first year of the evaluation focussed on the two more established organisations, North London Cares and South London Cares. This sought to answer the following questions across these two locations:

1. To what extent are the programme's outcomes being achieved for both older and younger neighbours alike?
2. How does The Cares Family model work or not work towards achieving these outcomes?
3. What can we learn about measuring these outcomes in these two specific settings, geographies and contexts?

The Cares Family model

There are four programmes that make up the delivery model of The Cares Family, and this evaluation focussed on evaluating the Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes specifically. It did not look at the Outreach or Community Fundraising sides of the work:

Social clubs	Love Your Neighbour
These bring together groups of younger and older neighbours to take part in fun activities and socialise. They are aimed at both older people who can get out of the house, and who want to interact with other older neighbours, and younger people who want to feel part of the community.	This focuses on one-to-one friendships between older and younger neighbours sharing time within the home and wider community. The Cares Family brings together older and younger neighbours to share time and create friendships across generations.

<p><u>North London Cares</u></p> <p>270 social clubs, attended 5,719 times by older and younger people in 2018.</p> <p><u>South London Cares</u></p> <p>244 social clubs, attended 6,384 times by older and younger people in 2018.</p>	<p><u>North London Cares</u></p> <p>128 matched friendships in 2018.</p> <p><u>South London Cares</u></p> <p>152 matched friendships in 2018.</p>
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Previous research

Renaissi previously undertook an evaluation of The Cares Family’s work in 2016, in which a theory of change was developed and desired outcomes for older and younger neighbours were identified and articulated. Just as important was the codification of a set of quality indicators which related to the Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes. The approach of The Cares Family is similar across all its programmes. However, the previous work found that the quality indicators for the Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes looked slightly different.

Social club indicators	Love Your Neighbour indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring older and younger neighbours together to share time, laughter and new experiences • Offer challenging, discursive, inquisitive and trusted environments • Offer something to look forward to day-to-day • Provide a fun, familiar, equal, welcome environment • Are energetic, creative and challenging • Are based on shared personality, interests and stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring laughter and friendship – and the outside world – into the home • Connect people to the rapidly changing world around them • Offer people practical and emotional support • Help people to feel the community cares • Offer pause, reflection and shared storytelling leading to richer lives.

Whilst the activities, delivery, and quality indicators are slightly different between the programmes, the desired outcomes from involvement with The Cares Family are consistent. The following aspired outcomes were considered to apply across both programmes, and across older and younger neighbours alike:

- Reduced loneliness and isolation
- Increased wellbeing
- Increased connection to people, place and themselves
- Increased social confidence
- Increased confidence to engage with new things
- Increased sense of power over things affecting their lives
- Improved understanding across divides
- Increased sense of belonging to an intergenerational group.

It is these outcomes, in this context of delivery, that this study sought to better understand, and hopefully measure.

This report

This document sets out the key findings from the first year of Renaisi's study, and draws conclusions and recommendations from them. It looks first at the model, and then tries to understand the connection between the model and outcomes for participants. It does not present every finding from the whole study. Rather, it draws on qualitative research conducted through ethnographic and observational methods, a series of workshops and paired interviews, and qualitative survey responses. Additional quantitative data was gathered through a survey of both older and younger neighbours and has been drawn upon where relevant. For a more detailed methodology and the corresponding quantitative dataset to this report, refer to the separate methodological and data documents.

The Cares Family's programme model

There is plenty of evidence to support the idea that the approach a charity or programme takes in working with individuals in the community matters just as much, if not more so, than the codification of the model: how you do something matters as much as what you do.

For The Cares Family, this was the human approach taken to supporting and connecting people. The experiences neighbours have with North London Cares and South London Cares really matter – the activities they do, but more importantly their interactions and the feelings those interactions evoke are key to creating change.

This first section of the report, therefore, looks at the quality indicators for the programmes in detail, and how the experiences of younger and older neighbours are shaped across the two programmes studied.

Whilst the research found evidence of all the quality indicators being achieved, some in particular were at the very core of the Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes' impact. These key tenets of the work helped to shape neighbours' experiences and emerged frequently in the qualitative research.

Social clubs



Social Clubs – three words describing The Cares Family

There are three core elements which appeared key as mechanisms for creating change within social clubs at North London Cares and South London Cares. These were:

- Bringing older and younger neighbours together to share time, laughter and new experiences;
- Based on shared personality, interests and stories;
- Providing a fun, familiar, equal, welcome environment.

These three quality indicators shaped the experiences of the older and younger neighbours and are explored below.

Sharing time

Central to The Cares Family model is bringing together older and younger neighbours to take part in activities and connect with one another. Social clubs, occurring five or six times a week in each location, bring together younger neighbours (volunteers) with older neighbours in a variety of locations to hang out, socialise, and take part in activities. Both older and younger neighbours saw social clubs as allowing them to meet and connect with people different from themselves, particularly in relation to age, who they might not otherwise meet:

'What other organisation gives an older person like me the chance to converse and interact with people much younger than me?' Older neighbour (ON), social clubs (SC)

People valued mixing with others from different generations to them, and for many this was a reason they were interested in getting involved in the programme. For both groups, this was particularly emphasised in contrast to their usual social circles – often due to the nature of most other programmes targeting older people; or due to the limited social circles of younger people who have moved from elsewhere to live in London:

'Otherwise you don't get chance to talk to [younger people] because clubs I go to are all over 55s which means generally over 65s. So, we don't get the variety of young people [elsewhere].' ON SC

'A lot of my friends [in London] are Irish and in our thirties, but ... families are back home. So, I don't have conversations with grandparents and parents, I'm talking to the same people ... and that's great but you're in a bubble. I miss the chats with ... different generations – so that's why I come here, it's not for you guys, it's for me.' Younger neighbour (YN), SC

Shared laughter and new experiences

Social clubs will usually revolve around cultural and social activities such as film nights, quiz sessions, dance classes, technology workshops and arts and crafts. By the nature of the activities and the structure of social clubs, younger and older neighbours are brought together to share time and new experiences. People laugh, have a good time and appear to enjoy the clubs:

'I also think the variety of things you do together, like do you remember when we did the puppetry together? Do you remember, the hand puppets? And it was just a different thing to do...and creative and everybody had a good laugh about it as well.' YN SC

'Sometimes I look round the room and am astounded by all the smiling faces, laughter and conversation. I don't know any other organisation that brings so many people from so many walks of life together.' YN SC

Additionally, the activities were mutually enjoyable and brought both older and younger neighbours together to share experiences:

'I mean there's a real effort made not to do the traditional elderly activities like bingo or the type of stuff you would have found in day centres or whatever. I like the fact that it does focus on stuff that is something both older people and younger people will enjoy.' YN SC

An environment for connection

The activities are key in bringing people together to share experiences and bond. However, for most, it was less important what the activity was – rather, the interactions and connections those activities enabled were the draw. People enjoyed telling and hearing stories from one another, learning about each other's lives and finding shared interests:

'Having been involved for quite some time, I've developed real friendships with some of the [other] older neighbours – and coming to social clubs, spending time, chatting about our lives has become part of my routine.' ON SC

'I think the social clubs are really special. They provide an opportunity to bond with members of your community who you would never normally meet...I love hearing about other people's stories, particularly as they are so different to my own.' YN SC

Observations and the feedback from neighbours highlighted that the approach of The Cares Family staff in creating a certain environment was key to facilitating these conversations and connections. Staff were observed encouraging new people to join groups, actively encouraging people of different backgrounds and generations to mix, and getting to know individuals and who they are as people. Because of this, the environment at social clubs was largely perceived as being one which was open, welcoming, and equal – encouraging groups to mix with one another:

'I think the neighbours are great, good fun and easy to talk to or listen to whichever is more required...but the environment that is created by staff really helps facilitate this and enables the neighbours to be themselves and come out of their shells in a safe environment.' YN SC

'We could all say what we've done in our life, and the art of conversation is not a thing from the past it is a thing that's there to be used. That's one thing I like about London Cares, you can come there and be open, you can talk to anyone.' ON SC

Love Your Neighbour



Love Your Neighbour – three words describing The Cares Family

This study found particularly strong support for three of the Love Your Neighbour quality indicators, which are all part of the approach. These were:

- Bringing laughter and friendships – and the outside world – into the home;
- Offering pause, reflection and shared storytelling leading to richer lives;
- Offering people practical and emotional support.

Connection built on laughter, friendships and storytelling

One of the core purposes of the Love Your Neighbour programme is to bring people together to create friendships across generations. The Cares Family aims to match people based on their interests and personalities to help foster connections and ensure the friendship is meaningful. The neighbours felt that this matching process was done well by the teams at North London Cares and South London Cares, and that they were treated as individuals:

'I met the South London Cares team beforehand, so they could get to know me a bit before pairing me up with someone. I was impressed with this as it showed it was thought out.' YN,
Love Your Neighbour (LYN)

'I felt that the team had taken real care in pairing me up with someone where we would both enjoy each other's company' YN LYN

Both older and younger neighbours described spending time with their Love Your Neighbour match like spending time with any other friend in their lives. Especially in the Love Your Neighbour podcast sessions facilitated for this evaluation, matches spoke to each other in a relaxed manner – cracked inside jokes, laughed a lot, hugged and told stories about the time they had spent together.

'I love coming here on a Wednesday ... When I come here, it's just like seeing anyone else really. Obviously, you're a bit older, but because we've got a lot in common, it's like I'm sitting here and chatting with a mate. A nice way to spend time really.' YN LYN

'From that moment, right through until now the friendship has grown and grown and grown. It's so beautiful.' ON LYN

Neighbours enjoy each other's company and have developed jokes, interests and rituals together, such as always having 'the usual' cocktail every week or attending arts events.

'I come here on a Wednesday, just to come and chat. Because we get on quite well and we can chat about stuff. We end up talking about things that I wouldn't talk about with my friends. Different things that perhaps I wouldn't usually talk about [like aliens].' YN LYN

Bringing the outside world in

Love Your Neighbour is aimed at older people who may have restricted mobility or another reason they may struggle to leave their home. Love Your Neighbour friends spend time together on a regular or ad hoc basis – they receive a £40 budget from The Cares Family to spend on games, takeaways, films or other experiences. Volunteers sometimes help with practical things such as shopping, cooking and gardening, but the main purpose of the match is to share fun activities like playing cards or sharing a cup of tea or cocktail. Older neighbours saw this interaction and the opportunity for someone to come to their house to do something with them as something to look forward to in their week, bringing change and breaking up their day:

'It's sort of a landmark in the middle of the week. Something to look forward to.' ON LYN

Some older neighbours also described how their younger neighbours sent them postcards or called them when away for the time of their regular meeting, ensuring that they are still connected to the outside world:

'She went to Romania for holidays and sent me a postcard.' ON LYN

However, the Love Your Neighbour programme does not only bring the outside world into the home, but it also brings neighbours out of their homes. Whilst many of those involved in the programme are unable to leave their homes much, if at all, many still have some mobility and younger neighbours supported older neighbours to get outside. Neighbours described meeting up for a pint or a meal at a pub, and exploring arts and cultural events together.

'[My younger neighbour] and I, we took to going to cultural events, or out for a nosh. We have done interesting things.' ON LYN

Providing practical and emotional support

Being part of Love Your Neighbour provides practical and emotional support, for older and younger neighbours. Older neighbours benefited from practical support – for example, describing how their younger neighbours have assisted them with things such as food shopping, ordering things online, or buying a new taxi card.

'[My younger neighbour] helped me with the computer, bought shopping for me sometimes, and the people that phone me ... they ask me what I need and so it's important.' ON LYN

This support came not only from the younger neighbours, but also from the staff teams at both North London Cares and South London Cares. The Cares Family's approach of being supportive, present and personal appears to be important for older neighbours' experience of being part of the Love Your Neighbour programme. Older neighbours benefited from this approach through both practical and emotional support – for example receiving help with housing issues or having someone just a phone call away.

'They have been as supportive as they can be. For example, [The Cares Family staff] came by to visit me and later he helped me with a personal situation. He rang afterwards to check as well. You can ring them up and get help, you can ask and they would help you.' ON LYN

'I feel if you need anything you would get it.' ON LYN

Both older and younger neighbours described how their neighbours have supported them on an emotional level through giving advice on things such as bigger life decisions, growing older or relationships.

'We talk about everything ... and [my older neighbour] is everything you have in a friend and I've had a bit of a tough time recently and he's been, you know, a really good friend.' YN LYN

'It gives you a form of emotional security. When you're crippled like this, people think you're brain dead ... I don't look for support from anybody. But emotional support yes, I will miss [my younger neighbour], but don't tell her that.' ON LYN

For younger people, this element of the programme meant that they felt they were giving back to their communities – being there for someone else and offering their support. The notion that they were being helpful and a support to someone seemed particularly important for their participation in the Love Your Neighbour programme:

'I feel great mentally for just being there for my neighbour. It's nice to do something for someone that you know will make their day.' YN LYN

The outcomes of the model

A survey of neighbours was designed to measure the outcomes of The Cares Family model, with mixed-method analysis to support and understand this. Analysis of this quantitative research data revealed three themes:

- It was **not possible to be certain about change** in any outcome areas due to a combination of project scale and factors which prevented quantitative measurement of this type of work. Based on this research and Renaisi's previous evaluation of The Cares Family and other community organisations, quantitative methods alone are not currently able to describe the outcomes of The Cares Family's approach.
- **Some of The Cares Family's presently stated outcomes may not be quite right** – either they are not happening, or they're happening in a different way to how they are currently articulated. Language is so important in being clear about the outcomes and how different groups experience them.
- Some outcomes are **observable in the qualitative research, but the quantitative measure didn't pick this up**. This is due to a combination of the other two findings.

Causes of the measurement challenge

Firstly, The Cares Family's stated outcomes are difficult to measure in a quantitative way due to their subjective and contested nature, and there is currently much debate across the sector about how to measure and quantify wellbeing and loneliness. Partly this is about language and definition (see below), but it also about an uncertainty around what precise outcomes programmes are working towards, and a preference for avoiding negative language when asking questions.

When measuring outcomes such as these, standard measures such as those used in national datasets are ineffective in measuring impact at a programme or community level. This is often due to centrally-set questions seeking to measure wider aspects of a person's life, which can be an unhelpful proxy for a programme which may only make up a small part of an individual's life.

Finally, the language and terms used to consider these areas of people's lives are often abstract, unrelatable and open to different interpretations. For example, older neighbours were far less likely to categorise someone they know as a 'friend' than younger neighbours, influencing the responses to certain questions.

Recommendations for finding new ways to overcome these evaluation challenges in future are stated in the final section of this report.

Four shared, but asymmetrical outcome areas

Despite these challenges there were four stated outcomes which this evaluation found that The Cares Family model is contributing towards in various ways. These are:

1. Reduced loneliness and isolation
2. Improved understanding across intergenerational divides
3. A sense of belonging
4. An increased connection to self

However, the outcomes were experienced differently by older neighbours and younger neighbours due to the differences in their needs, circumstances, experiences and preferred language. Similarly, whilst The Cares Family works towards the same outcomes for both the Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes, these are not felt in a symmetrical way. The experiences of older and younger neighbours on these two programmes looks different, and so the way that these outcomes are experienced is also different. This next section of the report seeks to explore these.

Reduced loneliness and isolation

Whilst it is designed to reduce loneliness in both older and younger neighbours alike, there was only quantitative evidence that The Cares Family model is dealing with loneliness and isolation in older neighbours, and that young people see themselves more as volunteers. The distinction between loneliness and isolation is important to note throughout this section, with loneliness referring to the quality of a person's social connections and their subjective feeling of these in relation to how they would like them to be. Isolation, however, refers largely to the number of social connections a person has in their life.

Older neighbours often appeared to be experiencing both loneliness and isolation, whereas younger neighbours were well-connected so were not experiencing isolation and largely weren't experiencing loneliness either. This was due to the differing needs and starting points of each group, and the demographics of younger neighbours. For older neighbours, however, attending North London Cares or South London Cares gave them a reason to get out of the house, replaced social connections they may have otherwise lost, and gave them a sense of knowing someone was there for them.

Experiences of loneliness and isolation

The quantitative data suggests that the older neighbours The Cares Family is working with meet the target demographic group – older neighbours are more likely to be experiencing loneliness than a specially commissioned polled group (a representative sample of individuals in two neighbouring London boroughs that match the profile of older neighbours in The Cares Family). Using the Campaign to End Loneliness measurement scores where 0 is not lonely at all and 10 is very lonely, older neighbours attending North London Cares and South London Cares social clubs had a mean score of 3.3, compared to 2.1 for the polled group.

Conforming with most research on the relationship between loneliness and isolation, the existing relationships in an older person's life also matter – with those living without a partner or spouse showing increased loneliness and isolation in comparison to those who are living with a partner/spouse, and

those living with a partner/spouse and family members. Some described how The Cares Family provides them with someone to call and someone to chat to, as their family and friends live far away.

However, not all older neighbours in The Cares Family are isolated – many had lots of other meaningful connections in their lives through family and friends or joining other initiatives or local clubs. These older neighbours expressed that they have a big safety net already and that The Cares Family is more of a pleasant add-on. Additionally, the qualitative research suggested that some of those older neighbours engaged are the sorts of people who would likely have joined *something*, whether or not this was The Cares Family's programmes. They tend to be quite active in the way they search for things to engage with and often have other things they go to. Whilst for some this may mean that they have never felt particularly isolated or lonely, for others it could demonstrate a recognition and agency to do something about it and get involved in things:

'I'm going to other things than [this]. You can do so many things to not be isolated. I go to six different places. I'm never indoors, my kids say that "you're just like a bee".' ON SC

Additionally, the quantitative data suggests that most younger volunteers are not themselves experiencing loneliness and isolation, with the group on the whole proving to be less lonely, with a mean of 2.7, in comparison to their polled comparison group, with a mean of 3.3. This was reflected in the demographics of the younger neighbours engaged across both programmes – of which 56% had lived in London more than 5 years, and 39% are homeowners. This suggests that they are less transient and more settled than anticipated, thus making them less susceptible to isolation. The qualitative data reflects this finding and suggests that younger neighbours are less likely to be experiencing isolation:

'I absolutely love this organisation and what it does – I think I've recruited about five or more friends to sign up! But while I enjoy being part of the organisation, I think I'm lucky to not be experiencing loneliness myself at the moment – so in that way, I suppose I could get by without South London Cares.' YN SC

The reason for these differences may be due to the recruitment processes and target audiences for the two demographics. For the older neighbours North London Cares and South London Cares use outreach and engagement across their target boroughs and link up with local services such as community centres, local supermarkets, and GP surgeries. As such those who engage are motivated to combat their own loneliness, fill their time or meet new people. Younger neighbours, however, actively seek out Cares Family volunteering opportunities or have heard about them through social media or word of mouth. Motivations for getting involved seemed to be largely based around wanting to help the community.

The way younger neighbours engage with North London Cares and South London Cares is also different to how older neighbours engage, and so their expectations are different. Younger neighbours are recruited into the role of volunteer and look to offer their time through a flexible volunteering programme which matches their schedules:

'I don't get involved as often as I'd like, as my evenings tend to fill up quite quickly and many of the clubs are understandably of an afternoon.' YN SC

This suggests that the younger neighbours often have work colleagues and other people around them, which may give them a higher baseline in terms of feeling less lonely while for older neighbours The Cares Family can play a bigger part in their lives. This was reflected in the data on how neighbours engage with North London Cares and South London Cares – only 9% of the social club volunteers come once a week or more to The Cares Family’s activities, compared to 30% of the older neighbours.

Combatting loneliness and isolation in older neighbours

The quantitative data suggests that there is a relationship between how frequently an older neighbour is involved in The Cares Family’s activities and their responses to the three indicator questions on loneliness and isolation. The average loneliness score for those older neighbours coming once a week or more was 2.99, compared to a higher mean score of 3.33 for the group on the whole. This suggests that there is something about being part of activities frequently which means older neighbours are less likely to be experiencing loneliness. This is backed by the qualitative data, in which older neighbours specifically spoke about how they associated attending clubs with feeling less lonely – it gave them something to do, a reason to get out of the house and an opportunity to meet new people:

‘I got really lonely. The only place I went was to the supermarket and the library. South London Cares saved my life, I would’ve been housebound. You have a purpose to get up in the morning.’ ON SC

‘I really enjoy North London Cares as it gets me out and about, meeting new friends young and old.’ ON SC

For older people involved in Love Your Neighbour, the visits from their younger neighbour provided something to look forward to. On a basic level, this represented one of the few points of contact with another person in a week, but for most this was also a point to look forward to – as a time which would be filled with deep connection, fun and laughter:

‘I don’t see a lot of people and she comes every week and I look forward to it.’ ON LYN

For many, attending social clubs or being a part of the Love Your Neighbour programme was filling a gap when a spouse had passed away or they’d stopped working and felt a reduction in their social connection. For those on the Love Your Neighbour programme, having someone to visit and check on them each week was also able to offer the sort of support a family member might have offered after people in an older neighbour’s network may have died or when family lives far away.

‘I lost my wife and I got involved with South London Cares one year after her death. It gave me a chance to get out.’ ON SC

‘I sometimes see my family, and I am a semi-regular at a pub, usually on a Tuesday, but I was very glad when [my younger neighbour] and I hit it off. I can talk to her about things that I would normally discuss with the family.’ ON LYN

Older neighbours also described the benefits of knowing that their younger neighbour was thinking about them or coming to chat:

'Definitely mentally and emotionally I feel better that there are humans out there thinking about me.' ON LYN

'I couldn't be without my young neighbour. She's on holiday this week and I miss her.' ON LYN

Additionally, older neighbours described feeling less lonely and better emotionally when knowing they have someone to call and count on when they need help – this was also in relation to the staff at North London Cares and South London Cares, not just their younger neighbour:

'It's nice to know that there is someone who I could get in touch with and call if I needed to.' ON LYN

Combatting loneliness and isolation in younger neighbours

For those younger neighbours who were experiencing loneliness, they associated attending The Cares Family's social clubs with reducing this. Some were experiencing loneliness and expressed the challenges of making friends in London, and being part of North London Cares and South London Cares helped provide them with more meaningful connections:

'It makes me feel less alone, and more engaged, it is also nice not to be stuck on social media for an evening.' YN SC

'I think loneliness is a huge problem in London, for the elderly and also for young people. I've lived in the city for four years now and still feel that it's incredibly hard to meet people. I don't really class myself as a volunteer at South London Cares because the older neighbours help me as much as I help them.' YN SC

Both older and younger neighbours described feeling good about spending time with a friend on a regular basis. Some younger neighbours described having recently moved to London; having the regularity of seeing their older neighbour made them feel less lonely, adding to the relationships they have at work. Younger neighbours described living busy lives and rarely seeing their other friends as often as their older neighbour – for some the relationship with their neighbour represented a steady base in their lives.

'I haven't made any friends since I moved back to London just over two years ago. I have friends who are colleagues who I've met through work, but (a) I don't see them as often as I see [my older neighbour] and (b) we talk about work and that's fine to a point [...] But I haven't made any other friends in London apart from [my older neighbour]. Like, a proper friend.' YN LYN

Improved understanding across intergenerational divides

Bringing together older and younger neighbours is a core element of The Cares Family's approach, and this is something which is highly valued by those who attend. Whilst the intended outcomes sought to address other divides as well – including digital, attitudinal and cultural divides – the evaluation found little evidence of major impact in these areas. Additionally, this was an outcome for which the

quantitative evidence was varied, largely down to definitions of the word 'friends' – with older neighbours and younger neighbours having different interpretations of the words, and thus their relationships built through being a part of The Cares Family. However, the qualitative research highlighted how The Cares Family clearly builds meaningful connections across two generations, and in doing so helps to improve understanding and change preconceptions between older and younger neighbours.

Sharing time, stories, and personal experiences

In the qualitative data, it frequently arose that coming to North London Cares and South London Cares had changed people's perceptions of people from a different generation. This seemed to be experienced in the same way across Love Your Neighbour and Social Clubs.

Spending time with neighbours from a different generation allowed people to hear about different perspectives of life and to share stories. The qualitative data suggests that spending time together and sharing stories and experiences in this way helps to bring a different perspective to various topics in life:

'We laugh a lot. It's nice hearing younger people's views compared with an older person. As I say, 99% I'm talking to people more or less my age. Talking to somebody younger feels wonderful.' ON LYN

'I genuinely enjoy spending time with them and getting a different perspective on the world.'
YN LYN

Despite meeting different people being something which attracted them to The Cares Family in the first place, and the emphasis neighbours placed on meeting people who were different to them, both older and younger neighbours described forgetting about the age difference and simply spending time with a friend/s:

'We were like two kids first time we met. She's a lovely outgoing girl and she would do anything for me. I'm as a young person inside.' ON LYN

Changing perceptions

Prior to being part of The Cares Family some of the older neighbours had not had good opinions of young people, seeing them as unhelpful, uncaring, or self-absorbed. However, spending time with their neighbours helped to change these opinions:

'North London Cares really changed my opinion of younger people. Honestly, I didn't think younger people would really want to be involved with us, and you know, talk to us' ON SC

'I think it's wonderful. I didn't have a very good opinion of youngsters. [...] The way they wait on us, and give us food and drink and all that sort of business. It completely changed my view of youngsters.' ON LYN

This second quote reflects perceptions of a more traditional volunteer model, where volunteers bring assets and use those to help a 'beneficiary'. While this is not part of The Cares Family's approach, it appears to remain key to challenging preconceptions about young people held by older neighbours.

Many of the younger neighbours commented how much they enjoyed hearing the stories and experiences of older neighbours. Learning more about the older neighbours as people, with histories, jokes, personalities and interests, helped younger people to see older neighbours as more than just 'old':

'I think people forget but that's the problem with society, that sometimes people see older people as just older people – forgetting that they've had amazing lives, they've done amazing things and still do.' YN SC

Direct interactions also developed the perceptions younger neighbours had about older people, making them more aware of the challenges some older people face and more empathetic towards them:

'I think I'm a better listener, and I certainly am much more aware of the challenges facing older people, which is an awareness I try to carry with me when I'm out and about.' YN LYN

'It's definitely enriched my life with lots of learning about compassion and aging.' ON LYN

These two changes in perception show that younger neighbours are simultaneously gaining a deeper understanding of the needs and challenges faced by older people and are actively seeking to support these. However, through The Cares Family model, young people are not seeing their role as solely one way, and become more aware of the different lives, stories and experiences of older people.

A multitude of divides

As well as generational divides, The Cares Family's stated desired outcomes also focus on other divides – such as social and attitudinal. However, there was little evidence in this evaluation of bridging divides other than those across intergenerational lines. The approach of North London Cares and South London Cares centred largely on creating a safe, welcoming and fun environment – meaning that conversations of a more difficult nature were normally avoided.

This is not to say that some divides aren't bridged organically, as some of these are implicit in being from different generations. Some of these divides may be less explicitly bridged through the very nature of bringing together two different generations with different perspectives, but it is not explicit in the design of The Cares Family's programmes in the way that intergenerational connection is, and is therefore not identified by those who take part.

A sense of belonging

The Cares Family seeks to create a sense of belonging amongst older and younger people as a core part of its work. The quantitative evidence for this outcome was inconclusive, with the measure not reflecting what came through strongly in the qualitative data. Interestingly, both older and younger neighbours described how being part of North London Cares and South London Cares gave them a sense of belonging not only within the Cares community but also beyond those activities and into in their day to day lives – offering a place where they feel that 'part of something bigger than themselves'.

Belonging to The Cares Family community

For both older and younger neighbours, being part of the social clubs gives them a sense of belonging to a group or a community. However, this sense of belonging was less prevalent for those involved in Love Your Neighbour, whose connections were on more of an individual level. This was emphasised by The Cares Family approach at social clubs – ‘someone smiling at you’, ‘someone saying hi when you arrive’, or ‘someone wishing you a happy birthday’.

‘I love it. I feel part of a community. I have people I see regularly, and I know will be there, who know who I am.’ YN SC

‘I met so many people, and all the people going to South London Cares – it’s like a family gathering where everybody respects each other.’ ON SC

Connections with others are also key to facilitating a sense of belonging on a deeper level. Coming to the clubs helped older and younger people to share their stories, identities and experiences. For younger neighbours this was again contrasted with other areas of their lives, where people are less open and more focussed on digital communication:

‘It was lovely to be welcomed by everyone, and to be invited to get stuck in. It was refreshing for me that the neighbours were willing to talk. Too often in this digital, individual world people remain ignored. It was lovely to engage with the neighbours, swap memories and learn new things. For the first time in a long time I felt a sense of value and belonging.’ YN SC

For older neighbours, this gave them a feeling that they matter and are a whole person:

‘Places like South London Cares are important because they make you feel like you matter and you’re important.’ ON SC

The shared experience of those attending The Cares Family activities also helped to create a sense of belonging, as older neighbours described meeting people similar to them. At a time in their lives when other communities and social circles may have declined, this shared identity helped people to have a sense that they belong:

‘It obviously got me out and it made me feel that I belong somewhere. The people are in similar situation as I am.’ ON SC

However, for other older neighbours, particularly those based in north London, their sense of belonging was linked more to the local community centre where North London Cares’ activities occur, as opposed to North London Cares itself. In these instances, North London Cares was one part of a wider programme of activities in their local centre which they attend and belong to:

‘I belong to Marchmont Community Centre and heard about North London Cares as they were in our facilities.’ ON SC

Belonging to the local community

Younger neighbours in particular described how volunteering with North London Cares or South London Cares had made them feel a sense of belonging and connection to their local area – through meeting people, giving back, visiting new places and connecting to the neighbourhood’s heritage. Whilst this did not necessarily mean their connections in the community extended beyond The Cares Family, which was what this survey sought to measure, being a part of the social clubs did lead to a more abstract sense of belonging to their local community:

‘Since volunteering with North London Cares I actually feel more part of the local community, which is so great.’ YN LYN

This was primarily due to the benefits they found from speaking with older neighbours and hearing stories of the local area. For the younger neighbours who had not grown up in the area, hearing stories and learning about new places helped them to develop an increased sense of belonging:

‘It’s especially lovely to hear about what it was like growing up in/ moving to London in their day, and it really helps in making Islington feel like home.’ YN SC

This was also due to feeling that they are contributing to their local community:

‘It’s a good opportunity to feel like you are helping your wider community and learning about things you didn’t know about and also helping older people.’ YN SC

Older neighbours, however, had quite mixed views of their local area, and attending North London Cares or South London Cares appeared to have little impact on this. Older neighbours reflected a loss of community in their neighbourhood overall and a rise in crime. Older neighbours’ experience of attending North London Cares or South London Cares appeared to have little impact on how connected they felt in relation to belonging to their local area:

‘I have lived where I live for a long time and I go to things in the area, but it varies how I feel. If I’m not in a good place, I don’t feel I belong [to my area] at all.’ ON SC

As such, having a sense of *belonging to The Cares Family* seemed to be increasingly important to older neighbours – as this replaced the lacking sense of belonging to their local community:

‘I have lived in my street for most of 50 years. There are few neighbours that I now know...I am delighted with the opportunity to share ideas and fun with staff and volunteers at North London Cares.’ ON SC

Increased connection to self

The quantitative data suggested that there was a relationship between people coming to The Cares Family’s social clubs frequently and being more likely to feel that they had time in their lives to relax and be themselves. 54% of older neighbours who attended a social club once a week or more strongly agreed that they have enough time in their lives to relax and be themselves, compared to 45% who come to social clubs less than once a month. A similar effect occurs for younger neighbours, with 21% of those

attending at least once a week strongly agreeing, compared to 12% of those who attend less than once a month. This was also reflected in the qualitative data as both older and younger neighbours described feeling connected to themselves as a result of being part of The Cares Family. This manifested itself in three ways.

A space to unwind

For both older and younger neighbours across both the Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes, feeling an increased connection to themselves appeared to be related to having a space where they could take part in activities, build connections, try new things, and find a release from the stresses of life:

'I also struggle to switch off in the big city but the social clubs have allowed me to unwind and find friendships with strangers which is invaluable. It has had a totally positive effect on my life, it is one of the best things I have done since moving to London over three and a half years ago.' YN SC

'Sometimes before going to see my older neighbour, I feel tired and wondering if I will have enough energy to see her. But afterwards I always feel energized and really happy!' YN LYN

Storytelling, identity and perspective

For older neighbours an increased connection to self was related to being treated like an individual, and able to talk about their interests and things which were important to them. Older neighbours particularly enjoyed the opportunity to talk about their lives – rather than their ailments or experiences of growing old. Across both Love Your Neighbour and Social Clubs, older neighbours described feeling comfortable with other neighbours and that they could freely share stories from the past:

'I used to worry about what we should talk about, but I don't anymore. She likes to hear about when I was little, I found pictures I haven't seen in so long from when I was a child.'
ON LYN

This led to older neighbours having an increased sense of self as they reflected on feeling treated as individuals by staff and volunteers who took an interest in their lives. Older neighbours appeared to feel a strong sense of identity, beyond 'just being old':

'They treat me like a normal person...it's such a relief to find something that offers you something you enjoy and not being patronised. I do not want people to have ideas about me just because I'm 93 years old. I think they're a clever lot at [North London Cares] ... they pay a lot of attention to the sort of reality of people's lives and they engage with people to make their lives more enlightened, lively and enjoyable.' ON SC

Through listening to these stories and engaging in meaningful conversations with the older neighbours, this then gave younger neighbours a deeper sense of connection and a wider perspective on their own lives. This was particularly contrasted to younger people's working lives and how they perceived working in London more broadly:

'I love it as it puts life into perspective. My job means that I am very busy and things at work seem stressful but going to social clubs gives me a reason to take my mind of it and talk to people I wouldn't normally talk to.' YN SC

'I love spending time with [my older neighbour]. I see her once a week and if we can't do that I feel a bit lost without her! We are always doing fun things together and I feel like we've become really good friends who support each other. I feel that we both learn from each other and generally just have a really good laugh!' YN LYN

Giving back and a sense of purpose

Additionally, for younger neighbours their role in Love Your Neighbour helped to give them a sense of purpose and feel as though they are giving something back to their community:

'It's extremely rewarding in terms of knowing you're important in someone's life, but equally I gain a lot personally as visiting my neighbour is almost an escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life where I can have an insight into someone's life that is wildly different from my own.' YN LYN

In some cases, the relationship proved to be more challenging, particularly for some younger neighbours whose older neighbours had started to develop dementia, had a bereavement or had mental health issues. However, even when additional challenges were faced by the neighbours, having a sense that they were doing something with a purpose and which would help others could encourage them to continue.

'[Older neighbour] isn't an easy neighbour and I definitely feel there have been times I've wanted to give up. But I'm doing this as part of giving back to society hence I keep going.'
YN LYN

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

This research has highlighted some important findings relating to the research questions, set out below.

The Cares Family model

This research found four key things about The Cares Family model and how it works in relation to achieving outcomes for younger and older neighbours alike:

1. The quality indicators from 2016 (see page 1) are still be broadly true – however this study suggests that some are more central to the model than others.
2. The approach of The Cares Family staff team in fostering the type of environment where both older and younger neighbours alike feel supported, cared for and welcome is essential to the efficacy of the work.
3. Whilst the model clearly has dual-benefit, these benefits are not symmetrical. The Cares Family is working with two very different populations living very different lives and engaging with the model in different ways – with younger neighbours recruited as volunteers and older neighbours referred and encouraged to take part as a result of perceived need. The research underlines that, as a result, older and younger neighbours have very different needs, experiences and starting points.
4. The way in which people engage with The Cares Family model matters, particularly for those attending social clubs. How frequently people attend over a period of time appears to matter more than the length time over which they have been involved.

Outcomes and impact

This evaluation sought to measure all the outcomes outlined above, for both older and younger neighbours alike. However, the evidence this gathered was mixed. Some of the **outcomes were harder to identify than others, and particularly hard to see in relation to The Cares Family's ethos and activities**. This was partly due to challenges with measurement outlined below. However, in part this was also because some of The Cares Family's outcomes may need refining or narrowing.

For some outcomes, whilst something may be **happening, it was hard to see how The Cares Family model explicitly contributed** to this. Other outcomes **extend beyond the current scope of what attending North London Cares or South London Cares can do** – there are external factors going on in people's lives that are also at play and attending The Cares Family's activities can make up a very small or a very large part of somebody's life – and everything in between. Finally, **language is key, and terms and definitions are important** – the language and terms used to consider these areas of one's life are nuanced and open to different interpretations of questions.

This research did find that North London Cares and South London Cares are having an impact in the four outcome areas outlined on page 1 of this report – reducing loneliness and isolation; improving understanding across intergenerational divides; deepening a sense of belonging, and increasing connection to self – for both older and younger neighbours alike. But it's important to note that the starting point and experience for each of these outcomes is felt differently by older and younger neighbours.

Measurement

The research highlighted many of the challenges of impact measurement with community programmes and outcomes such as this. **Based on this research, quantitative methods alone are not currently able to describe the outcomes of The Cares Family** because the measures used didn't effectively show change, and often didn't pick up what the qualitative research told us was happening. Relatively small sample sizes exacerbated this. This was due to a number of reasons:

These outcomes are subjective, and the way people interpret the questions and their own lives and emotions varies hugely. People's responses to quantitative measures were often not reflective of their circumstances or what they told us qualitatively about their lives and engagement with The Cares Family.

Many of these outcomes and the measures used to capture impact are contested, and there is currently much debate across the sector about how to quantify wellbeing and loneliness. This research echoes some of the challenges encountered elsewhere and has deliberately sought to navigate these challenges through mixed and more embedded methodologies.

When measuring outcomes such as these, standard measures such as those commonly used in national datasets are ineffective in measuring impact at a programme level. These often seek to measure wider aspects of a person's life, which can be an unhelpful proxy for a programme which may only make up a small part of an individual's life. They do not consider people holistically.

Applying traditional impact measurement techniques to programmes similar to the model of The Cares Family is not sufficient to truly answer questions of impact. The level of diversity involved with the Social Clubs and Love Your Neighbour programmes makes traditional methods unhelpful in truly understanding change. Again, this is why this work has used a variety of methods.

Recommendations

As a result of these conclusions, this report recommends the following to The Cares Family:

Consider how the two different populations engage with your model have different starting points, motivations, and experiences. Cares should try to either develop the symmetry of the model (for example through working with more young people facing loneliness and isolation), or identify and understand these differences further and clarify these in the model (for example recognising that young people may feel a greater sense of belonging to their community as a result of feeling a sense of giving back).

Focus on the most relevant quality indicators in future delivery and when expanding to new areas. For Social Clubs these were bringing older and younger neighbours together to share time, laughter and new experiences; based on shared personality, interests and stories; and providing a fun, familiar, equal, welcome environment. For Love Your Neighbour these were bringing laughter and friendships – and the outside world – into the home; offering pause, reflection and shared storytelling leading to richer lives; offering people practical and emotional support.

Consider the various ways in which people engage with The Cares Family’s activities and how these impact upon their achievement of stated outcomes – for example, aiming to ensure older neighbours experiencing loneliness and isolation are attending social clubs once a week or more, to gain maximum benefit.

Consider refining some of the programme outcomes to ensure that they are more closely aligned to the programme model and activities are within the scope of what The Cares Family can achieve given the varied nature of engagement.

Use the experience of this evaluation to **contribute to debates on impact measurement approaches** to community-led work on isolation and connection, and to continue to experiment with more embedded and creative **qualitative evaluation** methods capable of capturing the fullness of the work.