

# Silver Dreams Fund Learning and Evaluation: Final Report Summary

This is a summary of the Final Report which presents the findings of the evaluation of the Big Lottery Fund's Silver Dreams Fund conducted by Ecorys. For more information about the evaluation please contact:

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## What was the Silver Dreams Fund?

The Silver Dreams Fund was a £10 million programme which sought to address the gaps in provision by challenging organisations to come up with an innovative idea for a project that would "pioneer ways to help vulnerable older people deal more effectively with life-changing events".<sup>1</sup>

Each Silver Dreams Fund project had to demonstrate they reflected all of the following themes:

- **Helping older people to help themselves** - designed to empower older people to find their own solutions by involving them in all aspects of designing, running and managing a project.
- **Working with others** - emphasised the importance of collaborating with other public and private organisations and local people of all ages to meet the needs of older people more effectively.
- **Managing better** - focused on services or activities which will help older people prepare for and manage key transitions in their lives.
- **Volunteering** - unlocked the skills and experiences of older people and encouraged those who are more active to support others.
- **Testing new ways of working** - either by setting up new services or replicating successful services elsewhere but in a different context or in a new way.

A total of **37 projects** were awarded between £50,000 and £200,000 to deliver activities for a period of 12 to 18 months. The Silver Dreams Fund projects were led by a range of voluntary and community sector organisations ranging from national-level and well established organisations to small social enterprises and local community organisations. The funded projects aimed to tackle a range of transitions including bereavement, moving home and making decisions about healthcare. The projects were all delivered to support older people; however, there were a variety of specific target groups

which included the bereaved, those with dementia, older men and those with a particular disability or illness. The types of activities were designed to cater to the needs and preferences of each target group and the transitions they faced. This included peer befriending and advocacy support on hospital wards, volunteered training sessions around personal development and problem-solving skills led by injured former military personnel, development of outdoor skills such as hen keeping, and social activities such as dining groups.



Over **11,350 older people** have taken part in the 37 Silver Dreams Fund projects<sup>2</sup> and more than **101,126 hours of support** have been provided. Over **1,859 volunteers** were involved in the projects contributing more than 47,174 hours of support. Many projects viewed older people's involvement in the design, delivery and evaluation of the projects as an important element of their work.

At the end of the Silver Dreams Fund a number of the pilot projects were awarded up to £1 million each to develop their pioneering ideas into a flagship project. The first stage of the flagship application process began in April 2013 and the **flagship projects** were announced in March 2014. Due to the quality of the applications, available funding was increased to £10 million to enable ten projects to become Silver Dreams Fund Flagships and each will scale up their activities for a further three to four years. The flagship projects are:

Scene Enterprises' In Good Hands project; Care & Repair England's Silverlinks project; Northern Shape's Henpower project; The Older People's Advocacy Alliance's COPA - Cancer, Older People and Advocacy(COPA); Compassion in Dying's End-of Life Rights Community Advocacy (ELRA); The Terrence Higgins Trust's Health, Wealth and Happiness; Age UK Barrow and District's Barrow RespectAbility; Age Concern Durham's Come Dine with Us; Grandparents Plus's Relative Experience; and Aquarius Action's Time of our Life.

## Evaluation approach

Our approach involved both formative and summative elements and was based upon a robust and evidence-based outcome evaluation framework. In addition, we have also undertaken evaluation of the new programme management processes employed by the Big Lottery Fund which has been reported separately.

In summary, the evaluation involved:

- development of an evaluation framework and common indicators to measure outcomes;
- provision of a package of self-evaluation support to projects;
- programme level work to provide independent primary qualitative research and to validate findings from self-evaluations;
- a range of learning activities; and
- analysis and reporting.



<sup>2</sup>Source: monitoring data collated by Ecorys (to April 2014)

## Key findings

- **Involving older people** in the design, delivery and development of projects was a key theme and was fully embraced by projects. Projects highlighted the importance of **involving older people at an early stage** in order to ensure that they can be involved throughout the development and delivery of the project. Projects were aware of the **need to be flexible** about how older people can be involved and also provide training and support where this is required. In many cases, **time to encourage older people** to make the transition to being involved was needed. In particular, projects were aware of the need to take steps to ensure that all older people, including more vulnerable groups, can be appropriately involved in different aspects of the design, development and delivery of a project.
- **Volunteering** was a key aspect of the majority of the Silver Dreams Fund projects. Projects learned many lessons from engaging, recruiting and supporting volunteers, particularly adult volunteers. At the outset, it was valuable for the projects to carefully consider the fit between the profile of the volunteers and the needs of the project to ensure that they recruited suitable volunteers. Once they had been through this process projects had to **ensure that their promotion of the volunteer positions was tailored** to the type of volunteer they wanted to attract, such as local newspaper adverts to attract local older volunteers. Projects were also very aware of ensuring that **appropriate training and on-going support was provided** for volunteers, which included providing extra support for volunteers that are new to volunteering or that low confidence. A few projects also learned the **importance of finding different ways of keeping volunteers engaged** in the project if there were gaps in their involvement.
- The Silver Dreams Fund aimed to test the effectiveness of **different delivery models**; however, there were some key lessons from delivering their projects, irrespective of the type of model adopted. Projects found that partners sometimes misunderstood the project's purpose although talking through the project's focus face-to-face tended to overcome this challenge. Projects also become aware that it **takes time to build trust with older people**, particularly more vulnerable groups, such as older people who have been bereaved. An awareness of the type of volunteer and project staff required to effectively deliver a project was also needed. Projects highlighted that face-to-face engagement with volunteers as well as clear marketing materials helped to ensure they recruited suitable volunteers. Through the Silver Dreams Fund, the projects **learned to think creatively about how to ensure staff and volunteers were ready to support new beneficiaries** from the start. Solutions included appointing a paid volunteer coordinator who oversaw the volunteers and could provide short notice support to new beneficiaries if volunteers were unavailable.
- **Partnership working** took a variety of forms during the Silver Dreams Fund. Projects found that formal **partnership working was particularly useful where a specific partner is crucial** to the effective delivery of the project e.g. a delivery partner or an organisation with specialist expertise. In other cases projects found **informal partnerships to be very useful for generating referrals**, and to link with organisations that provide complementary or in kind services or expertise. For both types of partnerships, projects learned that time is needed to find suitable partners and to build trust and mutual understanding, and on-going communication is vital to maintain the partnership.



- The experience of projects was that engagement with the **statutory sector** – particularly the health sector partners – is challenging. This was a common issue across several projects which limited their ability to develop successful partnerships and deliver the activities or project models they had envisaged. These challenges were primarily due to difficulties negotiating complex structures and hierarchies, finding and talking to the right decision maker, obtaining appropriate permissions and buy in for the project model or activity, and being required to gain ethical approval. Issues with data sharing were also a common barrier to progress. There was a need to be aware that these issues are likely to be problematic for projects funded in this area in future (for example, for areas applying for funding under the Ageing Better investment) particularly where statutory partners are not engaged at an early enough stage or with sufficient lead-in time.
- Another aspect of the Silver Dreams Fund was to **challenge perceptions of ageing**. This was not a central focus for many projects although most projects felt that they had challenged perceptions of older people to some extent. In terms of challenging perception's of older people more widely, there were instances of projects proactively working with sections of the community, such as older people sharing their skills with young people and older people becoming assets to the community by growing food to support the local food bank. Changing perceptions of ageing at a regional or national level was recognised to be a very difficult and huge undertaking. However, there were some examples of Silver Dreams Fund projects that had begun to challenge perceptions more widely by **highlighting older people as inspirational figures** and raising awareness of the part older volunteers had played in their work particularly through blog posts and articles in both national and regional press.
- Both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggested that projects helped to **smooth transitions for older people**. Analysis of the shortened Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale revealed statistically significant **increases in respondents' mental wellbeing** for 13 projects which spanned the different types of models identified<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, qualitative evidence illustrated that providing on-going contact with the project and **opportunities for getting out of the house made a huge difference** to beneficiaries irrespective of how the support was delivered. Typically, projects felt that beneficiaries had increased social contact with other people through the Silver Dreams Fund activities. Group sessions and mentoring, whether delivered by volunteers or other beneficiaries, appeared to be particularly effective in improving social contact between older people.
- The **achievement of positive outcomes by older people** as a result of their engagement with projects has potential to reduce their need to access other support or services. Older people survey findings suggest a **reduction in the frequency of use of GP and hospital services** amongst respondents, which illustrates the potential for projects of this type to help to reduce demand for healthcare services by supporting improvements in older people's health and wellbeing. The funded activity appears to have played a significant part in generating a change in these outcomes for older people as when asked to report the extent to which the Silver Dreams Fund contributed to a change in health and wellbeing outcomes, over half of the sample suggested that at least some of the change they experienced had been due to their involvement in the project.
- **Blogging** was a successful aspect of the Silver Dreams Fund. It was also a new approach for many of the projects which led to a number of lessons learned. Projects were keen to involve volunteers and beneficiaries in writing the blog posts but became aware that there was some nervousness about blogging. This was overcome in one instance by **volunteers writing their blog posts down and staff uploading them** on to the project blog. There was also a need to **think about the blog's audience** and the type of blogs they would want to read. Some of the projects posted blogs that were very focused on project delivery while others included think pieces to catch the attention of key stakeholders. Thinking about **how to track the number of readers of the blog** at the outset was also considered to be valuable. A few projects realised towards the end of delivery that it would have been useful to set up Google Analytics to track the number of visitors to their blog in order to demonstrate the value of their blog as a dissemination tool.



<sup>3</sup>Source: older people survey data collated by Ecorys (to April 2014)