



Top Tips for people

who work with
older people in the
community



About these tips

Flourishing Borders is a project that encourages good mental health and wellbeing among older people. That's about feeling well and about feeling better at the times when we do feel down or are finding it harder to cope.

We met people from all over Scottish Borders. We got together at Happiness Habits Cafés, where people found out about what helps people be well and shared their tips on what works for them.

This set of tips are for people who work in community settings. You can have your own Happiness Habits Café, or you can use the ideas here as part of what happens in groups and activities that you support.

We have also produced tips for individual people that share ideas on what helps people have good mental health and wellbeing.

Make good use of local awareness, networking and communication

Every part of Flourishing Borders happened as a partnership with other groups and teams. We think this was the key to the success of the project.

The range of people we worked with included: volunteers who run regular lunch clubs, Care Home Activities Coordinators and managers, Local Area Coordinators, Community Mental Health Teams, Borders Community Capacity Building Team, Healthy Living Network, Local Hub café manager, NHS Mental Health lead, Church Army worker, local Church outreach worker, Housing Association managers and staff, Men's Shed volunteers, Health in Mind coordinator and village hall committee members.

There are networks of people working with older adults in every community, and these networks can be paid and voluntary.

- Use these people to help you, and ask them to tell their friends.
- This is about informal, ordinary networks – people's neighbours and friends – as well as the sort of networks that workers might think of first.
- Volunteers, especially those who live in the area, will have more knowledge, ideas and contacts too.



Use a range of methods to find out what is going on in a local area as well as to reach people once you get started. For us it included: looking at notice boards, asking people in the local shop or Post Office, visiting forums or networking meetings for older adults' groups, using parish and community groups' newsletters, putting up posters, distributing leaflets to every house in a scattered area and posting articles about the café opportunity in local and regional bulletins and newsletters, as well as talking to staff, workers and volunteers and asking them who else we should involve.

Remember that older people are a good source of local knowledge. For example, the time during the cafés was also a way of finding out about the local area, as the older people who attended the cafés brought their stories, feedback and local knowledge.

- Ask members of groups to tell other people they know about the sessions.
- Ask them about which places they use to find out what is happening – which notice boards or shop windows people look at, for example.



Timing – allow for longer than you think

We found that the planning and discussion stage for the set-up phase of the cafés took much longer than we had expected.

Allow enough time to work around the timing that is right for each community group.

- Be flexible around holiday periods, activities that are already organised, and when volunteers and workers have other commitments.
- Give the group enough time for communication with members and other people in the area.
- Think about who else you can with to give enough flexibility if your time is more restricted. This is another way partners and networks can be helpful.

The planning stage often brought together people who had not worked together before. This was great and one of the benefits of the projects was workers getting to know each other and learn what different groups and teams were doing. But this also takes time.

- Build this into the agenda of the planning meetings, with enough time to think about the work you are there to discuss and time to hear what each other is doing.
- You can use these sessions for other discussions, for example to talk about overlaps and opportunities to do existing things differently, time to ask for advice and support about

existing work situations. But watch that workers' needs do not dominate, especially when the planning group also involves older people and other people from community groups.

- You can decide that it is useful to talk about these things regularly and go on meeting as an informal workers' network for good practice and sharing ideas after the planning for this project or session is over.

Find a hook to bring people in

We used food to bring people in and get each session started. Eating together is a great ice breaker and a natural way for conversations to flow.

In our project the sessions centred around tea and scones, home baking, festive treats at a care home, lunch together at the lunch club, soup and sandwiches provided by a local café, and stovies in a community hall.

- Build in food to the activity, especially if it is bringing together people who don't already know each other.
- Use the community networks to find people who can help with the food – sources, cooking and serving it.
- Build this in as an essential part of your plans and budget. If money is tight,

find a cheaper way to do it rather than drop this element. Or ask partners and others in your networks for suggestions.

A few sessions also used an activity that people wanted to do, such as when one of our partners organised New Age Kurling (which happens indoors).

- Listen to what older people in that place what to do.
- This will often be something people have not done before but want to try, rather than something that people already do.
- Don't assume that all older adults will enjoy arts and crafts. Often conditions such as poor eye sight and arthritis make crafts much harder, and craft activity is just not for some people.
- Look for activities that work for people across a wide age range and varying abilities, if people want to draw in a wider mix of local people. The Kurling was good in this way.

Listen with a blank sheet of paper

This is about having an open mind on what you talk about, how the conversations go, and how you record what people say.

The focus for our project was people's mental health and wellbeing. Conversations at the cafés were prompted by some questions that were printed out and placed on the tables. But these questions were a starting point and led to lots of conversations that were more productive for the people involved.

- Listen carefully to the direction the conversation is going, and let it flow.
- It can be a conversation between a group of people or just 2 people talking – whatever works for the people who are there.
- Let people have enough time to explore their ideas and solutions, rather than ask them to respond to suggestions.
- We found that when someone who had dementia or other difficulties was there it was usually the other older people who supported them to be involved and helped them say what they wanted.
- This sort of good conversation mirrors the outcome focussed approach being promoted in health and social care settings. If some people feel they don't have much experience of this sort of conversation, look at how you can help each other by pairing them with people who have more experience as facilitators or in working with individuals in this way.

The actual blank sheet of paper we used was white paper tablecloths in the cafés: these were used by people at the café to write and draw their ideas, which people told us they enjoyed.

- **Be flexible in how things get written down.** If someone finds writing difficult, one of the other older people in the discussion can write it, or a volunteer can record what people say.

- Have coloured pens, post-it notes, smaller sheets of paper – whatever will make it easy for people.
- Drawings are fine too and may be easier for some people.
- Remember to note the question or topic people are talking about as well as their views on it.

Use the right language

Although we ultimately wanted to find out about people's mental health, we avoided using those words because people told us that they got in the way. Rather we used language like 'what helps you cope when you feel down?', 'what are your top tips for coping?' and 'what do you like to do to keep active?'.

- Take time to find out what language people will find helpful as part of the planning for your sessions.
- Use everyday language.
- Think about ways to reduce stigma and barriers. There is much stigma around talking about mental health, and one way of making it ok to talk about mental health is to use normal language and accessible questions.

Act on what you hear

As part of the cafés we asked people how they felt at the beginning and at the end of the session. We used a sheet that is based on well-established ways of getting feedback and is very easy to use. This gives both the person and the people organising that session immediate feedback on how people are feeling. There are sheets

to download on the Outside the Box website which you can use for your sessions.

After the cafés, we typed up the comments written on the tablecloths. We used these in several ways as part of the project and shared the notes with the partners.

- Use what people have told you for the project or topic that started the work.
- Also think about how other people can act on what people have said – such as ideas for activities they could develop.
- If people have talked about other issues, send this on to people like the Community Planning Team.
- You can also pass on positive feedback about groups and services that people mentioned.

Feedback from one session will help with planning others.

- Use what people said they liked or were less keen on when planning the next thing you do.
- Share with other people you know, as they can use this to help them plan something similar with older people in their area.
- Think about what this tells you about the work that you and other people do with older people.
- Also think about how you – and other people – get feedback on work with older people, as there may be ideas that worked well here.

The Happiness Habits Cafés happened with community groups, so there was a clear way for people who took part to hear about what happened afterwards. Older people were often part of making new activities happen. Some groups also decided to continue having conversations about how people are coping and feeling as part of their usual activities.

- Think about how people will hear about developments, especially if these are going to take some time.
- Keep involving members and other older people in that community in planning and taking forward any follow on activities.

Look for ways for people to build more connections

Being part of our communities and feeling that we are making a contribution are two of the most important factors in people having good mental health and wellbeing.

Many of the Happiness Habits Cafés brought together people who were already linked to a group or activity and others who lived in that area. So the initial sessions were themselves a good way for people to make connections.

- When you are planning something like this with a community group, use the opportunity to invite in other people.
- You can also use this to tell other people about the activities that already happen through the community group.

The cafés created opportunities for local people to tell each other what was going on. People invited each other to join activities that were there but they hadn't known about: examples included a knitting group in Eyemouth and a photography club in Stow.

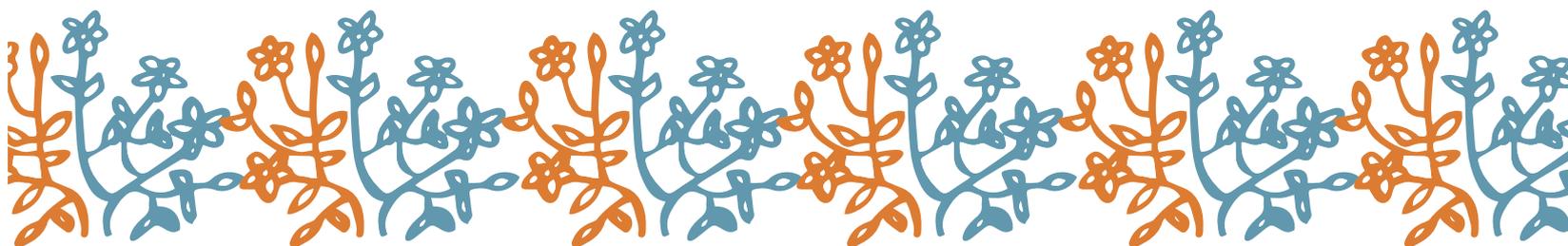
- Build in spaces for people to share the things that they do, so other people can hear about them.
- Listen out for people who are interested in similar things and introduce them to each other.
- If there are a few people who are interested in doing the same thing, remind them that they can get together as friends and do it together.

During the cafés, we listened to people talk about what they had enjoyed during their lives and what they wanted to do now. We tried to set up some taster sessions to reflect these interests. These included some local people getting together in the village pub to have a go at playing ukuleles and percussion, dancing sessions being set up following the cafés, and more New Age Kurling sessions in the first location and at other places that had heard about it.

- You can follow up what people say by finding out about classes or existing groups who do that activity. They may be able to offer a taster session even if they are not based in your local area, which is what happened for the people who wanted to try playing a ukulele.
- Use the networks that other workers and community groups have to find people who can help.

After the first café sessions, one of the partner groups put together a list of all the activities that were going on in and near that village. They shared that with all the people who came along to the Happiness Habits Café and other people in that area, so people can follow up on the community activities that interest them.

- Look for ways to give people the encouragement and information they may need to find more connections and activities within their local area.
- Suggest that people can go along together to try them out, if you think that some people may not have the confidence to do it on their own or face other difficulties.
- Invite along members of other groups to give a taster of what they do as part of the way you follow on from the initial session.





Flourishing Borders

This project was based around Happiness Habits Cafés and starting new activities that people wanted to try. Each session was a partnership between Outside the Box and local groups for members and other older people in that area.

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