



# The older Person's Listening Project



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES  
Iechyd Cyhoeddus  
Cymru  
Public Health  
Wales



GIG  
CYMRU  
NHS  
WALES  
Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Cwm Taf  
University Health Board

Bethan Smith

## About the Project

The Older Person's Listening Project is a Participatory Action Research project that has to date involved over 40 'volunteer listeners' including local individuals and staff from over 25 organisations; from the third sector, public health, housing and county borough councils. Everyone involved shared the common belief that older people are highly valuable members of our communities, with experiences and knowledge that should be listened to, shared and acted upon. However, evidence shows that a lot of older people in our communities are often subject to loneliness and isolation.

The issue of loneliness and isolation is a complex one, which affects people differently, and has a wide range of causes and different impacts. The Listening Project has been engaging with over 50's and recording their experiences using a tool called SenseMaker®. Unlike traditional consultation, SenseMaker® is used to capture and make sense of what matters most to people, making research more about people than the researcher's agenda; whilst still generating strong evidence to support and guide the work of the third sector and to advocate the voices of community members at a strategic level.

## In practice, what does this look like?

Some Volunteer Listeners have chosen to collect stories on a one-to-one basis, much like a casual conversation; whilst others have chosen to hold group discussions. Organisations and community members alike have used the project to engage with new people, with feedback from one volunteer stating that *"I may have made some friends for life!"* Others choosing to use the project to engage with their existing beneficiaries and service users, with feedback including *"I found the project insightful, it enabled me to have discussions with participants to better understand their issues."*

The project begins by asking a broad question, in this case: "Tell us what it is like for you, living in this community?" The prompt is kept intentionally broad so as to capture narratives on the topic from different perspective, allowing the respondent to discuss what matters to them without leading questions. This also ensures that the engagement and data capture framework is flexible enough to be relevant and useful to the diverse range of organisations involved. This project has not only been about data capture, it has encouraged organisations to ask the right questions, with the survey having been developed to provide a holistic approach based on Assets Based Community Development.

After sharing their story, participants are asked to give their story a title and plot on some charts (known as triads) what the story means to them. For example, who is responsible for their story or experience, what emotions they felt? This allows for pattern analysis and statistical evidence to support the narrative data, as well as reinforcing the meanings behind the story, preventing the stories from being misconstrued. By being able to share stories that are attributed meaning by the respondent, it provides a strong tool for advocacy and representation.

When looked at collectively, the charts can provide a snap shot of public opinion, with patterns and clusters providing an insight into collectively held beliefs, perceptions and experiences. This has allowed us to identify emerging themes (as this article will go on to discuss), whilst empowering the community to provide their own explanations and to identify solutions, to facilitate co-design and co-productive working. 'Triads' are designed to address specific research questions and are translated into numbers and statistics that are useful for informing strategy, reporting and evaluation.

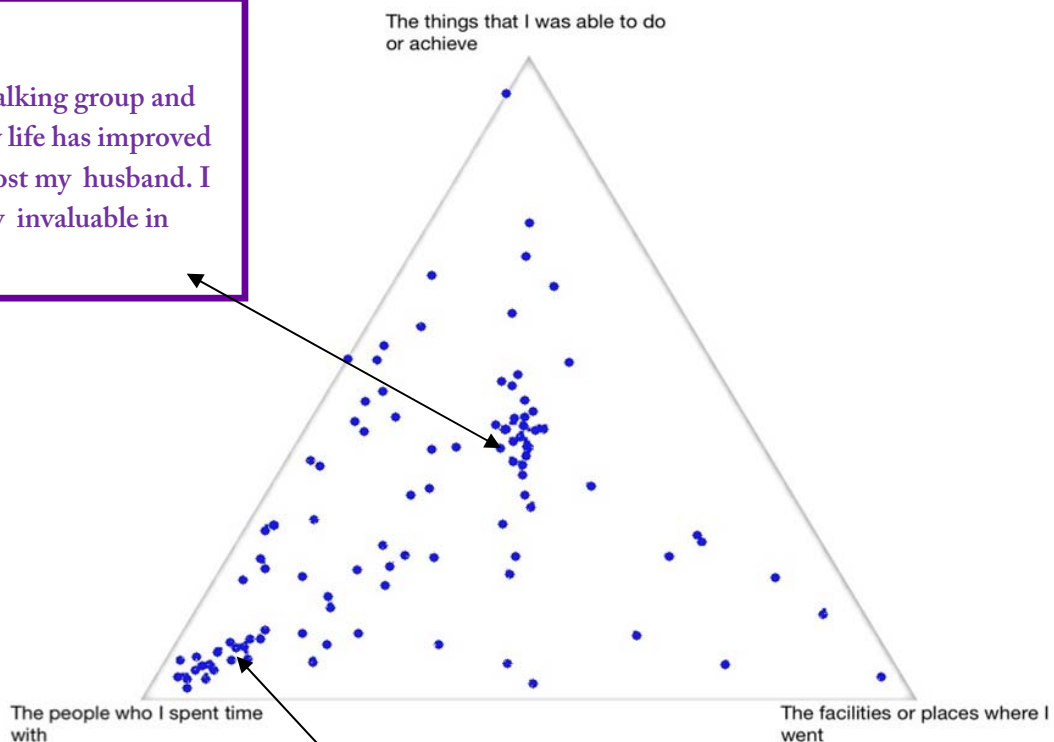
Triads works like a three dimensional sliding scale, with plots in the corners signifying a strong relationship to the named agent, and plots in the centre signifying a combination of the three.

For Example: "If telling us about your community what makes you feels good, what makes you feel that way?"

113 participants linked their stories to feeling positive

#### Friendship

Since going to walking group and old age group my life has improved having recently lost my husband. I find the company invaluable in mind and body.



#### Existence

I have family around me, I spent most of my life down the mines, driving double ecker buses, working for the RAF and working as a police officer at the Royal Mint. I have met lots of people along the way. I like dancing and a friend of mine encouraged me to join classes. I did go four times a week but a change in the bus timetable meant that I can now only go two times.

Triads such as this one can be presented using a time lapse to show development and changes of beliefs and experiences, making this tool useful for evaluating the effects of an intervention and identifying early warning signals or successes.

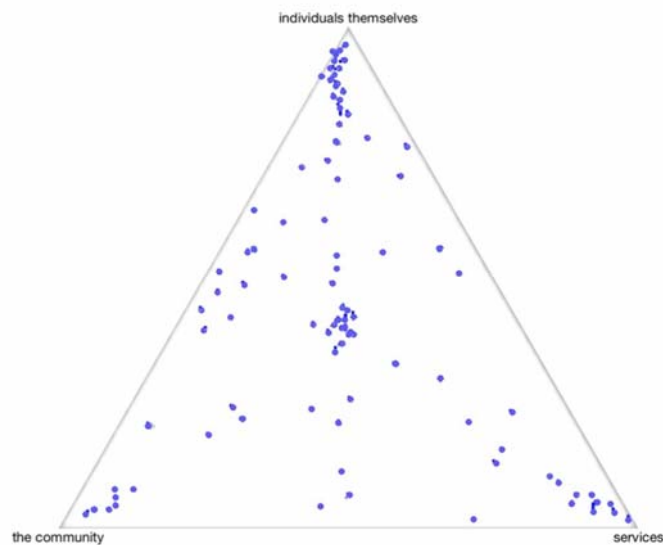
Respondents are then asked some questions, these are intentionally strengths based in order to identify and map the assets within our communities. These include questions such as “What really matters to you, living in this community?” and “Do you have any skills, experience, interests or knowledge you would like to share with others?” The data from these questions provides us with valuable information to build upon the existing strengths using an Asset Based Community Development approach, likewise also encouraging respondents to reflect upon and value their communities.

## What is SenseMaker® ?

Using Sense Maker software, the project makes optimal use of both qualitative (experiences, opinions and explanations) and quantitative data (numbers and statistics), allowing for trends to be identified, whilst also providing real life stories to gain a contextual understanding and explain the emerging patterns in real terms.

When collating the data, it is possible to analyse the data set as a whole or based upon characteristics such as area, age or organisation, allowing specific data to be reported almost instantly to inform decision making and support co-design. Ultimately, providing older people with the opportunity to shape their community and the services they use.

**In my story, responsibility lies with:**



Underpinned by cognitive science and innovative methodological design, SenseMaker® provides the project with powerful analytical tools, yet is delivered through a flexible and user friendly interface, including options to collect stories using IOS and android devices, web links or using pen and paper.

## So what have we found out so far?

When analysing the data from the first round of data collection, People shared stories and experiences relating to a vast range of issues; both good and bad. However, the following themes were most prominent.

- The importance of social networks and friendship
- Transport
- Experiences of loneliness and isolation in the evening
- Information availability/ accessibility
- Sustainability of day centres

As explained by the stories and statistics overleaf.

### Loneliness and Isolation

"It's very lonely for people like me who have never been married or have no family around here...Just last week I got in touch with Lifeline, I didn't feel right, I wasn't sick but I thought why should I put up with feeling like this. I felt nervous and tense and had nowhere else to turn. Lifeline sent a doctor to my house, he arrived at half one in the morning. He checked my blood pressure and reassured me that I was ok, but I just felt better for him coming to see me and being in the company of someone who actually cared for me. My neighbours are all friendly, but they only speak to me if they need something, I would really like for them to just stop by for a cup of tea and to spend some time with them."

"...The communal lounge is only allowed to be used when the scheme manager is on site. It would be much better to allow us more access as we would love evening classes, as this is when the majority of us are on our own; Isolated in our own homes"

"The local day centre is good, it means I can have a good hot meal every day and no cleaning; its first class. I go swimming nearly every day, it keeps me going."

49% of participants reported that word of mouth was their sole or primary source of community information.

"I am reliant on buses, this is ok but it means I can't travel too far or attend any early morning events/ appointments. I am diabetic and this has stopped me attending clinic sometimes."

"I also worry for older people who rely on buses. They stop at 17:40 so some people have no choice but to be at home after this time."

14% of people made a substantial indication towards feeling alone and 6% made extreme indications towards feeling alone.

57% of participants identified the themes of friendship, social networks and a sense of community spirit as what mattered most to them, whilst 19% identified safety; and 18% of people identified transport or service accessibility.

### The Sporting Valley

"We are a proud valley, but I wish the council would stop making cuts. There are less and less people using the day centre, there used to be about sixty a day, now there are about twenty. With less people attending it justifies the council making the cuts. People need to show support for their services. I am a member of the Rhondda Rugby Club, and the sport around here keeps the community close."

## How do we use these stories?

The data collected has been collated, and the findings fed back to the 'Cwm Taf Older Person's Coproduction Network' and community groups. This has sought to inform the policy and practices of member groups, and assist in the co-production of services; providing an opportunity to better design services based on local needs, create more opportunities older people to get involved with the community and voluntary sector, and make better use of the resources available. The network was developed to include individuals from local communities, the third sector and statutory services; all of whom are concerned with the wellbeing of over 50's.

The Cwm Taf Older Person's Coproduction Network was set up with the following intentions:

- ◇ To capture community information through the third sector and the Listening Project in order to identify what matters to older people, gaps in services, and to identify and build on the strengths of older people, communities and the third sector.
- ◇ Bringing together older people and service providers to discuss and work together to tackle identified issues; drawing upon the range of expertise, experiences and resources of the Network.
- ◇ Where necessary, to identify priorities and opportunities, particularly for early intervention and prevention services to improve wellbeing, supporting third sector groups to collaborate to address the issues and to apply for funding if required.
- ◇ Advocating for older people at a strategic level where there are issues that cannot be dealt with by the Network alone.
- ◇ Learning from each other, sharing good practice, particularly around coproduction and Asset Based Community Development.
- ◇ Connecting, networking and collaborating.

## What has been done so far?

To date, just over 10% of participants have been signposted into existing services or groups, having identified specific needs or requests for information.

Having presented these issues accompanied by the supporting data, delegates at the Older Person's Coproduction Network in May 2016 took part in facilitated workshops to discuss the findings. In summary, these issues were generally agreed upon as priorities, with the issue of transport being raised as the biggest concern for older people and older persons service providers; particularly as transport can have collateral impact upon other issues such as loneliness in the evening, accessing information and services, and community safety

(as highlighted by the stories we have collected). In addition, the issue of mental health was raised on multiple occasions in workshops, and there was strong support to further explore this issue.

Following on from this, a survey was carried out three weeks after presenting the findings, where 77% of respondents reported that the information from the presentations or workshops had informed or impacted upon their subsequent work. Some organisations have agreed to provide more accessible activities in the evening and many organisations have decided to incorporate the Listening Project into their work in order to better understand their beneficiaries and tailor their services with users in mind; the results of which will continue to inform the network.

### Feedback from Volunteer Listeners

"What I learnt is that a lot of older people are not just concerned about themselves. They are concerned about younger people and the community at large."

"It became a group discussion regarding various other issues that had become a challenge for them in their life, which I feel could lead to further conversations regarding maintaining independence and older peoples services in general, being tweaked and catered for in a much more person focused and co-productive manner."

"I found the project insightful; it enabled me to have discussions with participants to better understand their issues."

"The people I interviewed seem to really enjoy telling their story and have someone that was interested in listening to them."

### Feedback from Participants

"It's nice to have someone take interest in me and what I do"

"It's great to give people a voice and I would like to see some real change because of it!"

"It is a very good idea to help keep people involved in their communities."

"Makes me feel happy, it's nice to talk to you."

### Feedback on the Project

"The listening project - I have talked about how wonderful this is as a methodology - long term hope/goal that we can use this."

"and I'm fascinated by the Sense Maker software for your Listening Project."

"I have particularly enjoyed hearing about 'The Listening Project.'"

"we have these kind of conversations with our service users day to day, but the difficulty is turning these stories into tangible data; your project does this perfectly."

Multiple requests have since been made to present the project as good practice, including at national events and Welsh Assembly Government.

## What is the future for The Listening Project in Cwm Taf?

Continuing from the success of the Older Person's Listening Project, attendees from the Older Person's Network have requested to develop a SenseMaker® project on the topic of Mental Health and Wellbeing. This was raised in the CwmTaf Mental Health forum and is now being developed in collaboration with Interlink and Cwm Taf Mental Health Forum partners.

As for the Older Person's Listening Project, the initial data capture can be used as a baseline, and the project can continue and grow. This will allow us to inform, monitor and evaluate third sector interventions, and to further encourage engagement and user focused service design.

For a more in-depth account of the project and its findings, please contact Bethan Smith at Interlink on: 01443 846 200 or [bsmith@interlinkrct.org.uk](mailto:bsmith@interlinkrct.org.uk)