

Executive Summary

This analysis report explores the data collected over the course of the Travelling Companions pilot programme between June 2022 and July 2023. The Travelling Companions pilot tested whether a new, evidence-based intervention could reduce older people's feelings of loneliness. Loneliness is defined as 'the feeling experienced when people are unable to have the meaningful conversations and interactions that they desire and need'¹. We predicted that supporting older people to access transport, get out and about and become more confident making journeys, would help them to build and maintain meaningful relationships, and in-turn tackle loneliness.

The target group for this service was any older person experiencing loneliness and social isolation that needed support to get out and about. We looked to engage individuals who were physically capable of independent travel and who wanted to make journeys but were not doing so, as we believed we could make the biggest difference to these individuals.

In regard to the sample of 320 older people that engaged with the programme:

- 66.3% were aged between 70 – 89 years old.
- 70.6% reported having at least one physical or mental health problem or disability.
- 66.9% lived alone.
- 73.4% were retired.

These older people were supported by 80 Travelling Companions, who worked with them to achieve their travel-related goals and encourage them towards independence. We estimate that approximately 85% of these Travelling Companions were volunteers.

Overall, 679 sessions were delivered to 209 clients, meaning the average number of sessions each client received was between 3 and 4. Local Age UKs reported that they typically offered sessions once per fortnight to clients, meaning that clients received sessions for an average of between 6-8 weeks.

When analysing the aims older people made at the beginning of the programme, and the contents of the sessions delivered, we can assume that:

- Making journeys by bus and walking are the most popular transport modalities.
- In the majority of cases, older people wished to utilise this service to learn how to travel to a specific destination (i.e., a service, activity or club).
- The most popular referrals that were made after older people finished their Travelling Companions sessions were Age UK clubs (i.e., lunch/coffee club, knitting and allotment classes, Men in Sheds groups), befriending services and exercise classes.

In terms of the difference the service made to the clients, we asked them a series of questions before and after taking part in their Travelling Companion sessions. We have 159 full responses, which demonstrate that:

- 44.6% increased their level of reported social interaction.
- On average, the number of journeys completed per week by active travel increased from 0.22 to 1.46.
- On average, the number of journeys completed per week by public transport increased from 0.5 to 1.08.
- Overall, travel-related confidence increased, and travel-related anxiety decreased.
- Importantly, the intervention observed a change in mean combined loneliness score. Before the intervention, the sample had a mean loneliness score of 6.51. This dropped to 5.25 after the intervention. The change in mean score is 1.25, which represents a statistically significant difference and suggests that we can be 95% confident that the intervention supported older people to reduce their feelings of loneliness.