

## A Warm Welcome Approach: Funders Briefing

As part of its work to address loneliness and social isolation among older adults, Ageing Better in Camden (ABC) developed a **Warm Welcome Approach** which aims to recruit new members into groups, as well as retain them as they age.

The Warm Welcome Approach recognises that while it is important to find an activity that someone enjoys, if we want those activities to support older people to connect to their local community and develop strong enough ties to support them when faced with the challenges of ageing, then a Warm Welcome is vital.

Developed in partnership with older people and over 25 community organisations funded by ABC, it promotes good practice and an understanding that while all older people deserve a Warm Welcome, some may need it to engage and remain connected. Essentially, a Warm Welcome acts as a gateway to a sense of belonging for people in their local community.

### Why is a Warm Welcome Approach needed?

Loneliness and isolation – particularly when it persists over time – can cause people to lose confidence in social situations. Because of this, we know that simply making activities available in the community won't be enough to engage the most lonely and isolated people. While for some people group activities will never be of interest, for many a Warm Welcome can make the difference in enabling them to overcome the barriers to getting involved and then staying involved.

By making sure older people feel welcome, safe, and develop a sense of belonging in a group setting, we are ensuring that they have a community to rely on, if and when they need it.

### What is a Warm Welcome?

Our approach is rooted in the experience of the older person. It is also based on insight into **how** groups function and the challenges that come from running a truly inclusive, accessible activity.

A Warm Welcome creates a welcoming, inclusive, and socially supportive environment of new and established group members; it could be described as the ‘pull’ to involve older people in groups and activities. It is even more important for older people who are socially isolated or lonely as they will often struggle to join and interact with groups. Those who have slightly higher needs around mental health or other issues will also require support to engage with community activities.

The diversity of the group is a crucial factor to our approach – from the super organiser to the chatty member, from the quiet creative to the tea maker – all roles add to the success of the group. They can fulfil important roles that encourage and support others, like being a ‘meeter and greeter’ when people arrive, or a cake baker to share treats and skills with others. A Warm Welcome is also important in maintaining connections and supporting people to stay part of the group as they face some of the challenges of ageing, such as increased frailty, dementia, hospital stays, and bereavement.

The approach was delivered by our partners across Camden and they shared their experiences to co-produce a Warm Welcome toolkit, which can be downloaded for free [here](#). ABC also produced a [practitioner’s guide](#) which explains the elements, also based on the delivery partners expertise.



The toolkit covers the 10 key areas above and is packed with top tips and case studies to ensure that activities are being provided in a way that helps to support older people to become and remain engaged with an activity or group.

### **What difference does it make?**

ABC carried out a research project running focus groups with older people who attended our Warm Welcome activities to gather their views on this approach. This research explored what makes community groups welcoming and why this matters. Participants identified a range of factors which are key to creating a welcoming atmosphere.

*“I think if it’s taken you great courage to go to that group in the first place and if it’s not welcoming when you’re going, it could put you off for quite a long while even turning up to a class.”*

These factors included meeting and greeting, introductions, seating arrangements, opportunities for social interaction and relationship building. Participants felt that this has a positive impact on their wellbeing, and on their continued attendance in community groups where there are opportunities to increase social contact and decrease loneliness. The report can be found at [ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/warm-welcome-approach](http://ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/warm-welcome-approach).

*“Sometimes when someone doesn’t turn up when they do come the following session, someone will ask ‘so what happened to you, where were you?’ so you’ve got that camaraderie going on.”*

In addition, Traverse, ABC’s independent evaluation partner, carried out research into whether ABC activities were supporting people to make social connections and develop a sense of belonging. They found that they were and that the Warm Welcome Approach was a key part of this.

*“No matter what the topic is on the day, or what the club is, that’s secondary to people coming out to have a chat... It’s about having a consistent thing in their diary that is not a hospital appointment; for lots of people it’s just nice to have a space to forget their troubles.”*

The full Traverse report can be found [here](#).

### **Funders – a key partner**

Funders are a key partner in the drive to ensure that all activities provided for older people provide a Warm Welcome as one of the barriers to doing so is

lack of resources. Although this is not an approach which requires intensive funding, it does require additional staff time and capacity to provide the wrap around support needed to ensure a Warm Welcome happens.

ABC identified two essential areas for funding to ensure a Warm Welcome is facilitated, which are outlined below. This should help to understand how the Warm Welcome fits together, which will be followed by a more detailed breakdown of potential questions and funding needs.

**Service design** – in order to ensure you are creating a Warm Welcome, or ‘pull’ for new joiners, you need to think about how the service is designed. One example is maintaining connection via regular communications including reminder phone calls for those who need it. For some this may be every week if they have memory loss or depression. For others it may be communication following a life event such as an illness or bereavement, both of which are common times for people to drop out of groups as they haven’t attended for a while. This requires staff time to make calls or support volunteers to make calls. They need a quiet space and time to listen and chat to people if necessary.

Another important aspect of service design is creating space at the end of a session for a coffee and chat. This is especially relevant if it is an activity without much chatting time, such as an exercise class. This means participants can spend time getting to know each other and friendships can develop.

**Staff skills** are also vitally important in creating a Warm Welcome. All staff involved, including centre managers, receptionists, tutors or group facilitators, have a role to play in making sure groups are friendly and inclusive and our research has shown this needs to be done proactively. This requires funding for team meetings and sessions which allow this approach to be actively embedded in the culture. In addition, staff need to have the skills and support to manage difficult dynamics and conflict. To do this effectively and not to the detriment of their own mental health there needs to be funding for training, staff supervision, and time for them to attend relevant networks.

### **Key questions and funding needs**

The ABC Warm Welcome toolkit covers the key aspects of the approach in 10 clear chapters ([ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/warmwelcome](http://ageingbetterincamden.org.uk/warmwelcome)).

The table below shows each chapter heading with some potential prompt questions and funding requirements which you should consider in grant applications and budgets. It may not be relevant to cover all areas or all questions, however, depending on what activities the application covers.

Questions	Funding need
<b>1. Information about your activity</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you produce flyers for your activities as well as promote them online?</li> <li>Do you ensure that there is a map, phone number, clear description of the activity and the name of the person running the group included?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cost of photocopying paper flyers.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Meeting and Greeting</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does your receptionist have the capacity to greet people as they arrive at the centre and have they received training/induction in their role as first 'meeter and greeter'?</li> <li>Do all your groups have a nominated 'meeter and greeter' for new people?</li> <li>Are all those who deliver activities, both staff and external providers, aware of their role as host when people arrive?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sufficient capacity for Reception to talk to people who are arriving, rather than having to be on the phone or completing other admin tasks on the computer.</li> <li>Comprehensive induction for internal staff and external providers to ensure all are aware of their role in welcoming people to the venue/activity.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Introductions and icebreakers</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you ensure all new joiners are introduced to an established member when they arrive?</li> <li>Do you do a round of introductions at the start of a class?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding for staff or tutors to be available 15 minutes before the activity to facilitate introductions.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Seating arrangements and time for chatting</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do staff keep an eye out for 'seat saving' which can lead to cliques</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small refreshment budget and the cost of the tutor/member of staff for an additional 20-30 minutes.</li> </ul>

<p>and new people feeling unwelcome?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do staff actively manage seating arrangements at activities?</li> <li>• Do you provide time for a coffee and chat before or after activities where there is no time for chatting during the group, such as an exercise class or a film club?</li> </ul>	
<b>5. A sense of belonging and ownership</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have a range of volunteer roles available for your participants - from informal, such as making tea for other members, to formal, such as being part of your committee or running an activity?</li> <li>• Do you have an agreed code of conduct which members and participants have co-created?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient staff time outside of delivering activities to support volunteer recruitment and spend time getting to know participants and understand how they wish to contribute.</li> </ul>
<b>6. Older people in the lead</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you consult older people on what activities they would like to attend?</li> <li>• Do you take time to get to know new joiners so you understand their hobbies and interests?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient staff time outside of delivering activities to facilitate consultations, spend time getting to know participants and designing and planning new activities which older people have suggested.</li> </ul>
<b>7. Creating a warm welcome ethos across the organisation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do all staff understand their role in creating a warm welcome in the organisation? Is it covered in induction?</li> <li>• Is the warm welcome ethos of the organisation discussed and reflected on at team meetings/planning sessions/away days?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient management costs/core allocation to allow for regular team time.</li> </ul>
<b>8. Behaviour that challenges</b>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the staff team have the opportunity to discuss difficult situations that have occurred in groups or activities they are running. Do they receive regular one-to-one support sessions with their manager?</li> <li>• Do staff receive training - internal or external - on managing behaviour that challenges?</li> <li>• Do you have a code of conduct which clearly states expected behaviour?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient management costs/core allocation to allow for regular team time and one-to-one sessions.</li> <li>• Sufficient training budgets.</li> </ul>
<b>9. Working with older men</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have a strategy to engage older men with your activities?</li> <li>• Do you understand the barriers that older men face around engaging with activities?</li> <li>• Do you have men only groups?</li> <li>• Learning from the ABC Outreach Team on <a href="#">working with older men</a> might be useful.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging with men takes significantly more time and therefore additional funding needs to be allocated to support men's work.</li> <li>• Specific funding for men's activities, with lower targets can support community organisations to focus on engaging with men.</li> </ul>
<b>10. Keeping in touch</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do staff have time to call participants ahead of the meetings, or supervise volunteers to make calls?</li> <li>• Do staff or volunteers understand the importance of checking with people who have not attended for a while?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient staff time is funded to supervise volunteers or to make calls themselves.</li> </ul>

More information on the Warm Welcome Approach, the lessons learned, or the independent evaluation of the ABC programme over the past seven years can be found at [ageingbetterincamden.org.uk](http://ageingbetterincamden.org.uk).