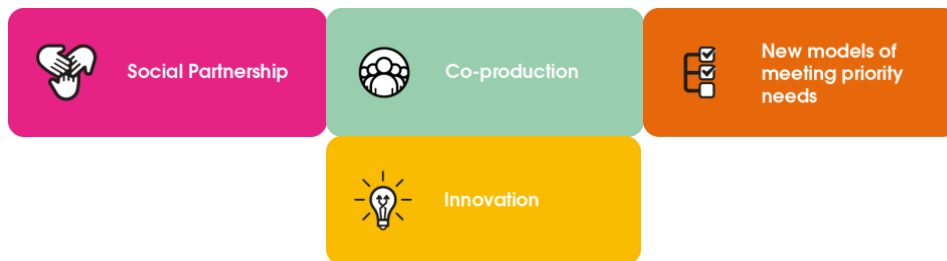




Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

COMMUNITY



Unlimited Potential

Spreading Our Net

“We all want to live in the place we call home with the people and things that we love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing things that matter to us.”
(Social Care Future - <https://socialcarefuture.blog/>)

Spreading Our Net originated with community health and social care staff in Eccles and Irlam (in Salford) highlighting that a key challenge for them was the loneliness experienced by many local people that they see.

Spreading Our Net initially ran for 12 months from October 2020 in Barton and Winton, near Eccles. The focus was on not creating anything new, but better connecting what is already there – especially community and local businesses, which are the mainstays of most people’s lives.

This was done, firstly, by scanning and networking in the neighbourhoods (‘wandering with purpose’). Work was then done to identify lonely people and their trusted contacts. To nurture a sustainable approach, local, organic networks were grown and made more complex through identifying and linking ‘connectors’, ‘mavens’ and ‘salespeople’ in the community and all sectors. In this way, the community offer was increased by developing sustainable routes to connect lonely people to community and activities.

In summary, the key learning was:

- There are many lonely people; it can be quite hard to identify them, but it gets easier over time through their trusted contacts.
 - Those most likely to be forgotten or ignored should be kept in mind.
 - Social connection is influenced by the history, geography and demography of a locality.
 - It is more important to focus on strengthening connections between existing assets than on seeking to create new ones.
 - There is a small number of people in any community who are critical in creating 'social capital': connectors ('network hubs'); mavens ('knowledge brokers'); and salespeople ('persuaders').
 - The roles of community groups, local independent businesses, delivery services and religious/faith organisations are particularly important.
 - It is critical to identify meeting spaces that local people actually use – indoors, outdoors and digital. People use them, if made easily available.
 - Making the local network more complex and wide-ranging requires patience, time and active facilitation to broker and nurture connections.
 - Bonding social capital is easier to develop than bridging social capital.
 - Online connections support people to maintain relationships.
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