

The Story Catcher Project



South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) asked for volunteers to assist in a unique research project to interview and record the experiences of members of community-based programmes aimed at combatting loneliness and isolation in the over 50s in Sheffield. The programmes were funded by a seven-year National Lottery award and were administered by Age Better. There was a total of seven volunteers, including us SU3A members Samina Aslam and Martin Harvey, and collectively we were the “Story Catchers”.

Projects: The leaders of small community projects such as the creation of a tuneless music choir, a “chair bound” exercise class, and a social café were interviewed 2-3 times over a period of time to “catch” their stories: The reasons why they created their project, what support they had, how they felt and the outcomes.

Training: Sheffield Hallam University provided comprehensive training in interview and research techniques as well as the ethical demands of being involved in such a project. We were also trained in how to use recording equipment.

The Interviews: Working in teams of two, Story Catchers recorded the experience of those involved whose stories were then transcribed. After each round of interviews Story Catchers met with the research team led by Dr S Peck, SYHA, to discuss the interviews, review the data and plan the next interviews.

Presentation of Findings: A gathering of all the nationwide stakeholders, including the lottery clients and interviewees was held in February 2020 to present the published report - “All the stories we never would have heard”.



Conclusion: Participants’ involvement in their projects was overwhelmingly positive in helping with their confidence and well-being. The study showed the importance of friendship and social networks for older people as well as the barriers that have to be overcome.

Dr Peck (left), SU3A members Martin Harvey and Samina Aslam with fellow Story Catchers

