

IMPACT EVALUATION 2011-2014 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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1. About North London Cares

North London Cares (NLC) is a small start-up charity which mobilises young professionals to volunteer to support their older neighbours in Camden and Islington with a little extra time, practical help, social connection and human companionship.

The charity's objectives are to reduce loneliness and isolation amongst older people (and younger people alike); to improve the wellbeing, confidence and resilience of all participants, in order that they can feel valued and comfortable in the rapidly changing modern world; and to bridge social and generational divides for the benefit of the community at large.

The charity aims to connect people who might not ordinarily interact, in order to soften the unsettling effects of globalisation, gentrification, digitisation, migration, the London housing bubble, and other factors which have accelerated isolation and social division in the two target boroughs.

NLC works through two core projects. Its regular Social Clubs bring older people together with young professionals to share time, skills, new experiences and cultural exchange in groups. Meanwhile, its Love Your Neighbour (LYN) project matches individual older people to individual volunteers to build one-to-one relationships, often in people's homes. Interactions are always built to benefit all participants – the young professionals and the older neighbours.

- In the 3 years since its launch in August 2011 NLC has signed-up 700 volunteers to work with 900 older neighbours;
- Between September 2013 and August 2014 volunteers hosted 266 Social Clubs, shared 2,700 meals with older neighbours, created 12,800 new interactions and added 4,000 hours to the community – 800 of which were one-to-one hours;
- A new sister charity, South London Cares (SLC), was created in August 2014;
- NLC and SLC now have a combined workforce of six, and are in growing demand.

2. This project

It is in this context that this research project sought to establish the impact of the charity's work amongst those who participate. NLC gets a lot of positive anecdotal feedback, but so far there has not been a definitive, quantitative impact evaluation – or a detailed exploration of different funding, marketing, recruitment and structural options. The work was funded by Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, in order to help build an evidence base that would help the charity to develop in the future, both in north London and beyond.

The aims of this project were therefore:

- To give a robust, statistical basis for the work NLC is doing;
- To explore the scope for expanding and improving the charity in different ways.

This was done using qualitative and quantitative methods, outlined in detail in the chart to the right. *Please note that, NLC being a small charity, sample sizes were often low.*

Group	Method	Number
Young professionals	Online survey	138
	In-depth interviews	4
	Focus groups	6
	Case Studies	2
Older neighbours	Face-to-face survey	139
	Focus groups	20
	Case Studies	6

3. The people NLC works with

The table to the right shows the typical older neighbour and the typical younger person within the NLC network, according to the research.

These findings show the extent to which NLC is reaching its intended 'target audience' among both age groups.

- Older neighbours were more than two thirds female and young professionals were more than three quarters female;
- 51% of older neighbours were over 80 and 42% of young professionals were in the second half of their twenties;
- 67% of older neighbours lived alone – a figure which is twice the national average for over 65s¹;
- 24% of older neighbours 'Almost never' go to social activities except through NLC;
- Young professional volunteers were most likely to work in the private sector (53%) as opposed to the public sector (29%) or third sector (18%) – although the voluntary sector is still over-represented;

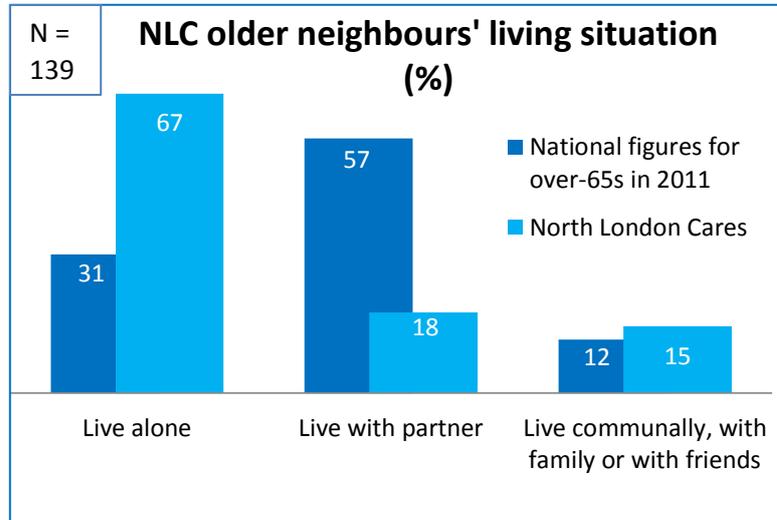


NLC typical older neighbour	NLC typical volunteer
78.6 years old	29.7 years old
Female (69%)	Female (78%)
Lives alone (67%)	Lives with other adults (37%) or a partner (34%)
Lives in Camden or Islington (91%) – strong chance they were born in one of the two boroughs (25%)	Lives outside Islington or Camden (62%) – bilingual, having moved around (51%)
Most likely to live in Local Authority housing (59%)	Most likely to be a private sector tenant (60%)
Retired	Full-time – employed (63%)
Lives on a state pension of £5,881 (supplemented in some cases by a small amount of savings)	Earns £31,837 a year – although pays a lot of this on rent
Not necessarily much contact with younger people (44%)	Not much contact with older people (77%)

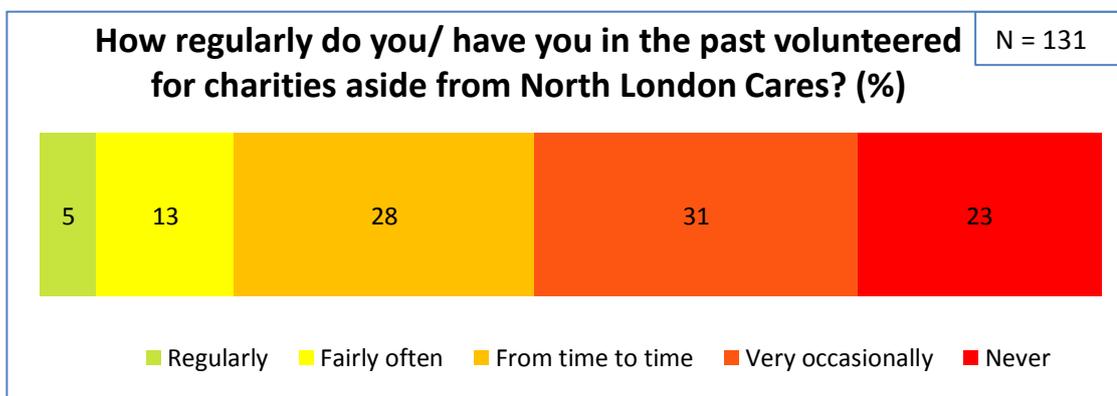
¹ http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_325486.pdf (p.7)

- This is reflected in combined 'Most of the time' or 'All of the time' loneliness levels of 37% prior to interactions with NLC² – nearly four times the national average³ – demonstrating the atomising and alienating nature of inner-city London life;

- Older neighbours were overwhelmingly likely to live in local authority housing (59%) compared to 4% of young professionals – illustrating the sense of two communities divided by the housing market;



- Volunteers earned nearly £32,000 pa, significantly higher than average figures for their age group⁴, suggesting they are an educated and affluent demographic;
- The volunteers are time poor and, like many in their age group, were not drawn to traditional voluntary work – only 18% had volunteered on any kind of regular basis in the past, compared to a national average (recorded in 2009) of 26%⁵;



² A figure which rises to 53% when we include those who have 'Occasionally' experienced loneliness since getting older

³ http://www.fote.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2014_03-FOTE-Future-of-Loneliness-Report-low-res-without-crops.pdf (p.10)

⁴ http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_368928.pdf (p.5)

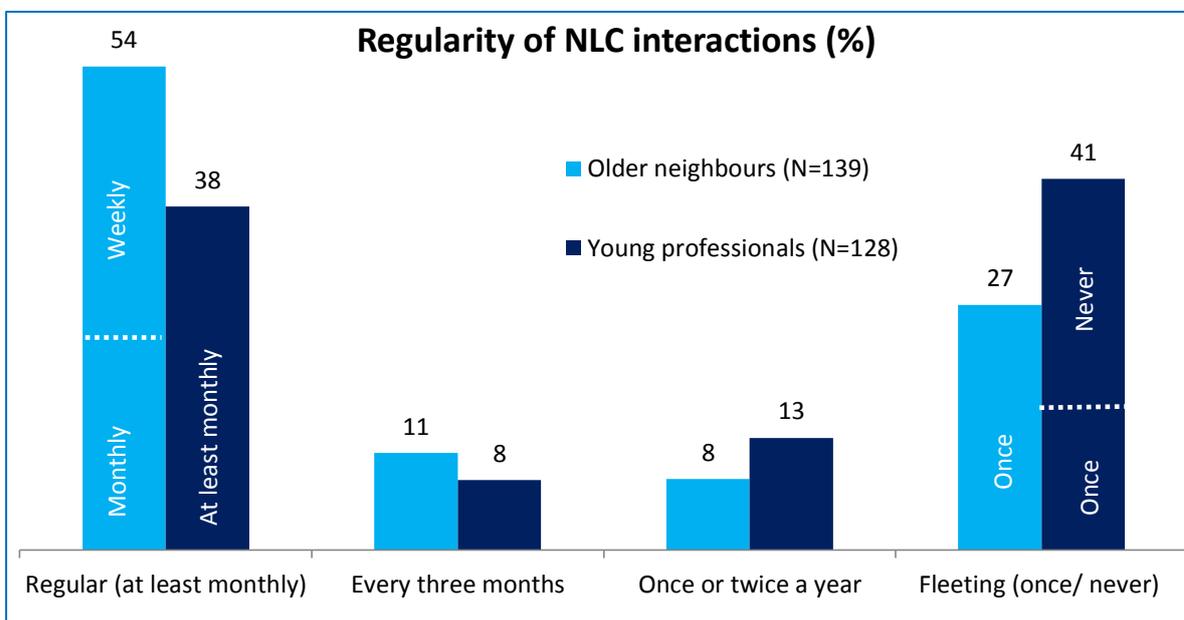
⁵ <http://dclg.ptfs-europe.com/AWDData/Library1/Departmental%20Publications/Communities%20and%20Local%20Government/2010/2008-09+citizenship+survey~volunteering+and+charitable+giving+topic+report.pdf> (p.5)

- Nearly half of the older people NLC works with (44%) started out with a low view of young people, and more than three quarters of regular volunteers (77%) started out with low or no contact with older people – before participating with NLC;
- Most of NLC's young professionals (62%) actually live outside the two boroughs compared to just 9% of older neighbours, and while 25% of older neighbours were born in Camden and Islington the young professionals are much more international-facing, with 51% being bilingual;
- Two thirds of the older people surveyed (68%) have had low wellbeing since getting older, either as a result of unhappiness, poor health or both – of these 38% say the lack of social contact is the main barrier.

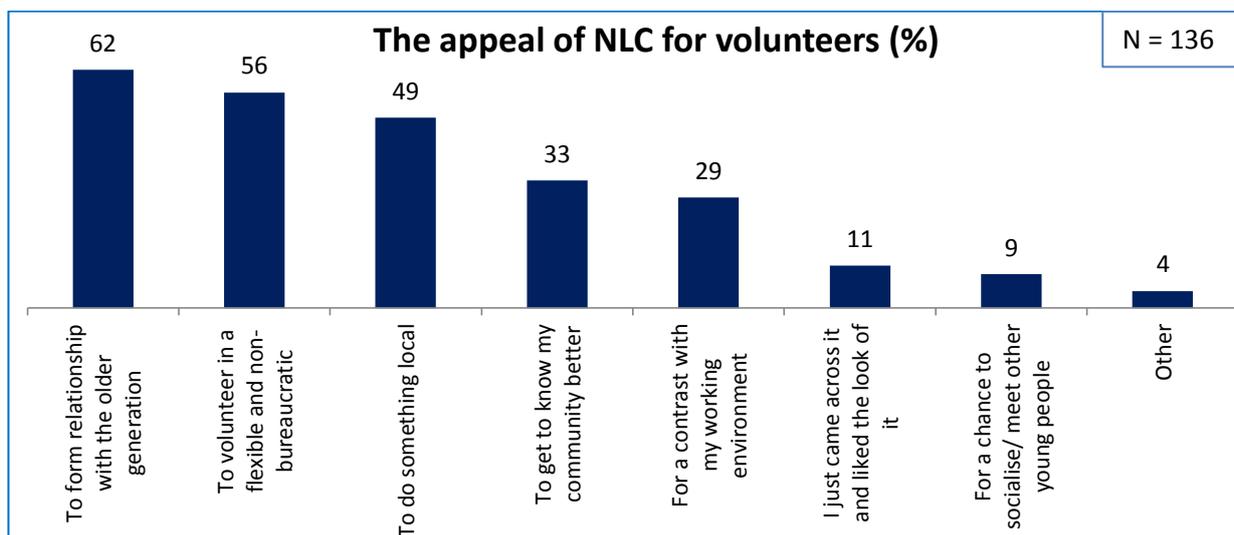
4. The involvement people have with NLC

Both the older and the younger groups are polarised in terms of the level of human contact they receive with or through NLC;

- Over half of the older neighbours are 'regulars', with either monthly (24%) or weekly (30%) contact, but over a quarter (27%) have interacted with the charity just once, in most cases as part of the Winter Wellbeing project to help older people stay connected during the cold snap. 40% of older neighbours are part of a cohort who have had over 10 interactions, but 38% have had fewer than three;
- This latter group of people who don't interact with or through the charity regularly are less likely to have had good wellbeing since getting older (19%) than the regulars (45%) – they have lower self-confidence leaving the house, poorer relations with young people, and a narrower range of experiences (often as a result of poor mobility);
- The young professionals are similarly distributed, with a large cohort of regulars (38%) alongside similar numbers who have signed up but never yet volunteered or volunteered just once (41%). 67% of those with past experience of volunteering go on to volunteer regularly with NLC, compared to 40% of those with little past experience;



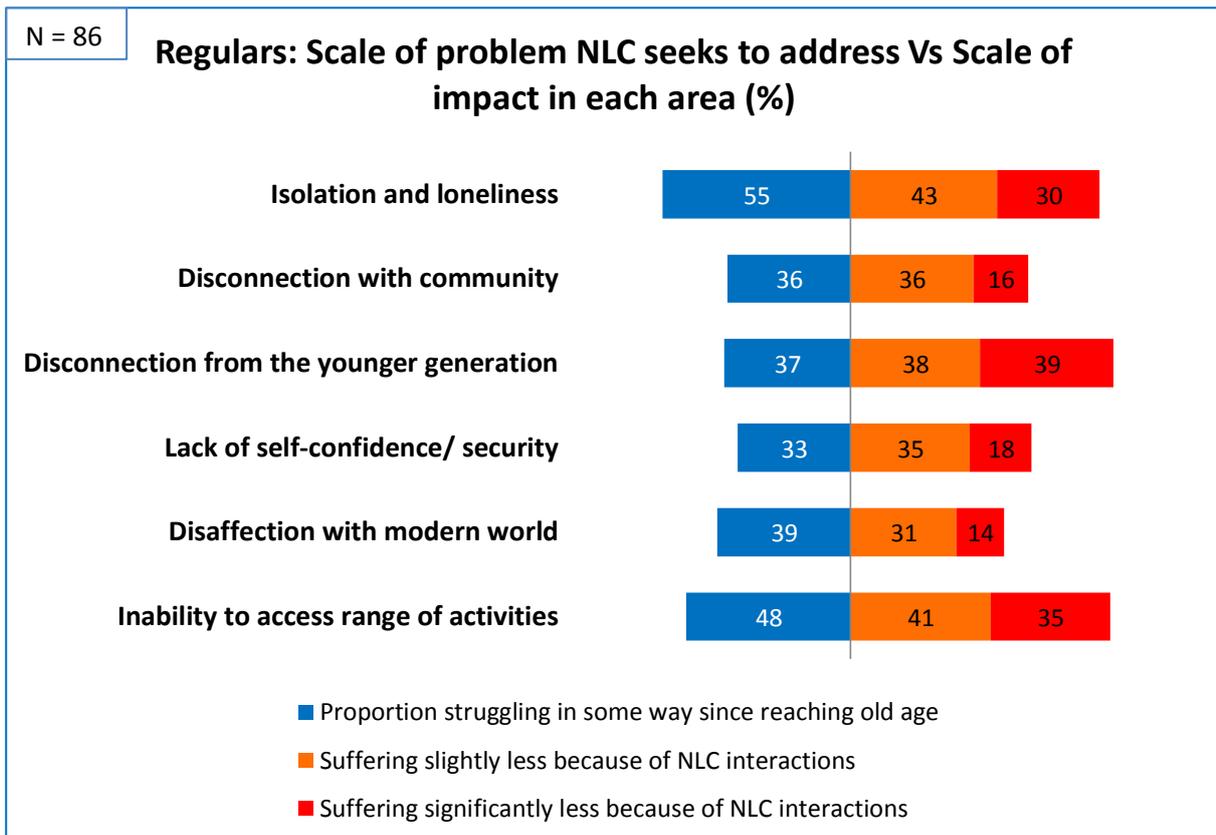
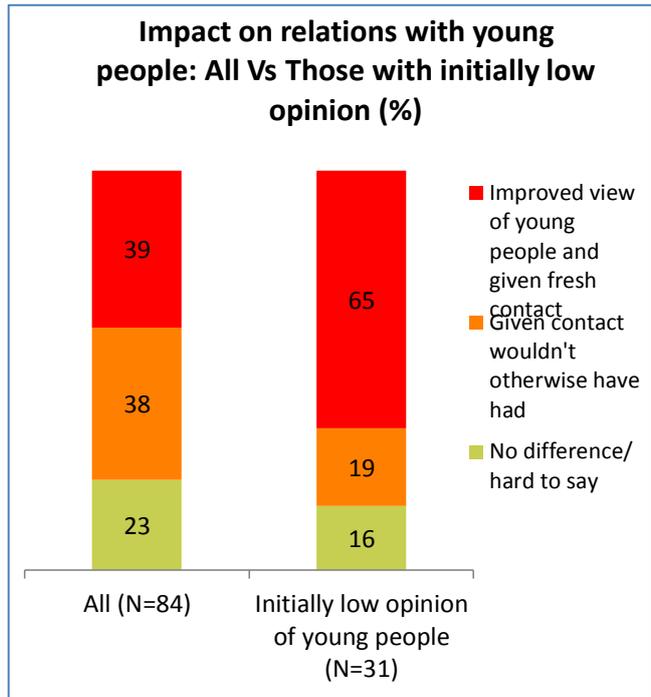
- The vast majority of young people who volunteer (82%) had attended NLC’s “Social Clubs”, whereas just 17% had participated in the Love Your Neighbour (LYN) scheme and less than 10% had helped on the Winter Wellbeing project;
- Figures for older neighbours were similar (65% for Social Clubs, compared with figures of less than 20% for LYN or Winter Wellbeing); 61% said they were introduced to NLC through community centre networks;
- Social Clubs are obviously not an option for immobile older people, or those frightened of leaving the house; nor, the focus groups suggested, were they always the preferred mode of volunteering for young people;
- 47% of young people had initially heard about NLC through online channels – either Google searches or social media;
- Meanwhile 41% of older neighbours said they *continue to participate* with NLC because of the presence of younger people – the second most commonly cited reason for returning – despite the fact that only 19% initially come for this reason;
- Desire to connect with the older generation (62%), desire for localism (49%), and the quest for a form of volunteering that was non-bureaucratic (56%), were the main reasons volunteers were drawn to NLC.



5. The impact NLC has

All of the **older people** who had had more than three interactions with the charity were asked about the impact NLC had had on their lives. This was done using two criteria: the charity's six core aims, and the think tank New Economic Foundation's "5 Ways to Wellbeing"⁶.

From the survey of 86 regular older neighbours it can be seen that NLC's positive impact has eclipsed the initial scale of the problem across all six 'core aims'; across five of them more than half of older neighbours report an improvement in their circumstances;



⁶ http://b.3cdn.net/nefoundation/8984c5089d5c2285ee_t4m6bhqg5.pdf

- A combined 77% say NLC has improved their relations with young people, with the most positive impact occurring among those who started out with low opinions of young people (84% of those with an initially low view of young people said their relations had improved in some way as a result of NLC interactions);

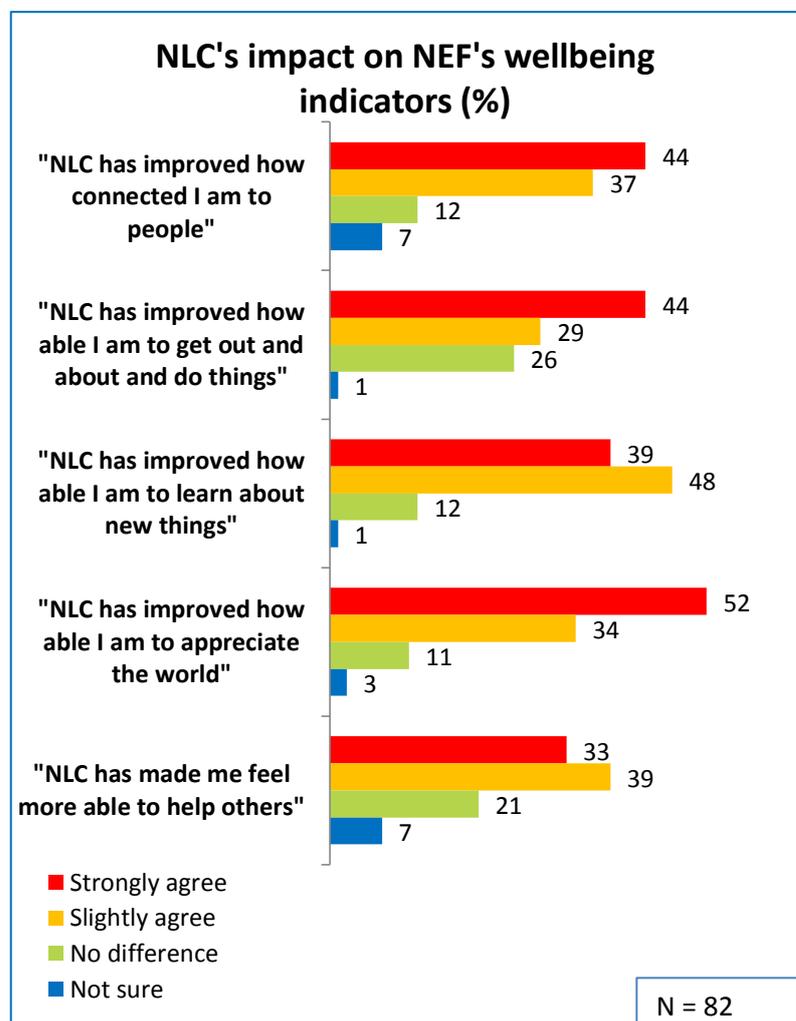


Meeting so many interesting elderly individuals inspires me and restores my faith in society! It's easy to be swept up in London and forget what is actually going on around you. Heather, 24, regular

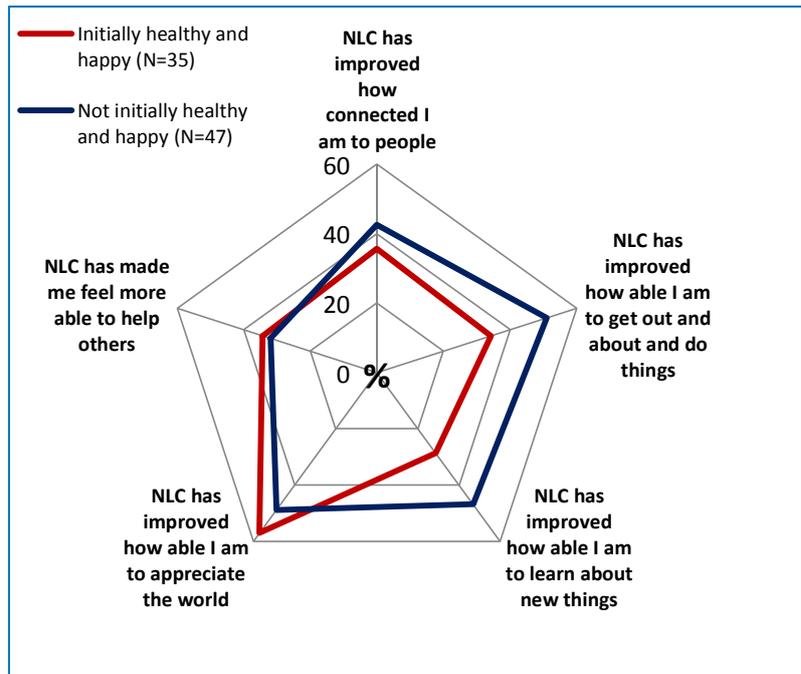
- 76% say NLC has given them access to a greater range of experiences, 73% say NLC has reduced their isolation, 52% say NLC has made them more self-confident and secure in their area and 51% say they feel more in touch with their community;

- Across three of NEF's five 'Ways to Wellbeing' NLC is creating 'Significant improvement', and across two it is creating 'Slight improvement';

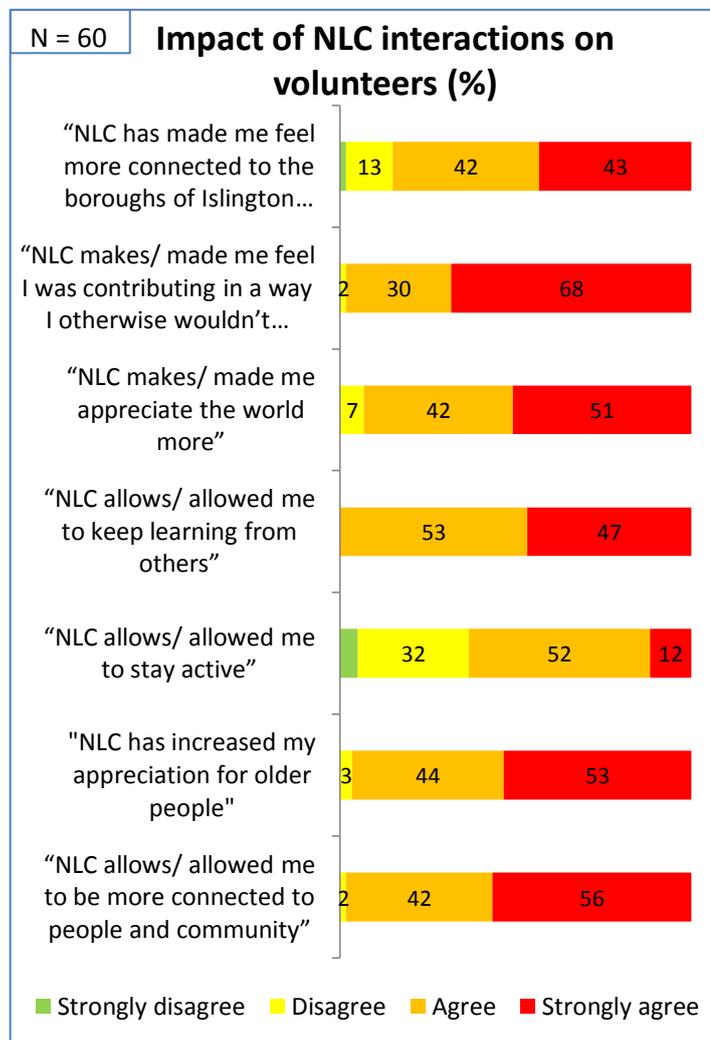
- A combined 87% are more able to learn about new things, 86% are more able to appreciate the world, 81% are better connected to people, 73% are more active and 71% feel more able to help others;



- As the chart to the right shows NLC's wellbeing impact is greater on those with initially low wellbeing than on those with initially higher wellbeing (especially when it comes to being connected, active and able to learn):



Younger people, meanwhile, were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences. Among the 60 most regular volunteers that we surveyed 98% said they had been able to contribute in a way they otherwise would not, 98% agreed that they had a greater connection to community as a result of their volunteering with NLC, and 97% felt that they were more able to appreciate older people. All 60 (100% of the regular volunteers surveyed) said NLC had 'Slightly' or 'Strongly' improved their ability to learn from others. Focus groups showed that supporters understood the "shared benefit" concept behind NLC, and supported it.



6. Achieving the potential

The findings of this research represent an endorsement of the relationships and interactions brokered by NLC to date, and a corroboration of the central concept underlying the charity's work. They provide definitive evidence that the problems of disconnection and isolation brought about by the accelerated pace of social change in north London can be turned into assets through generating dialogue and enabling contact – and, indeed, that NLC is already having a significant, positive impact on people's lives through doing this.

With the value of the charity's work assured, the key challenges now lie in sharpening the impact of interactions, and in making the most of the dynamic, skilled and affluent group of supporters the charity works with. Furthermore, there is a need to coordinate the different strands together more (i.e. the Winter Wellbeing and LYN projects) and to invest in systems, so as to move more consistently beyond the "Social Club" comfort zone and reach isolated neighbours who require 'at home' interactions (and those volunteers who are most willing to provide it).



Her visits give life that added bit of interest. Helen lives a very different life to me, working in a high-powered job in The City. Her coming round is a chance to learn about her life and for her to learn about mine. She brings in a part of the outside world that I've lost touch with, and now I feel like I'm part of the world again. Ruth, 90

7. Recommendations

There are a number of specific suggestions to come out of this research project, some of which could be immediately implemented, and some of which are more long-term considerations, possibly for new sister 'Cares' organisations. These include:

- **Greater efforts to reduce the gender imbalance – starting with a consultation with male volunteers – and to encourage those from industries like law and finance who may have specific goals;**

- **An increase in emphasis and funding for the two 'at home' components;**
 - *More resourcing/ focus on LYN – to reach out to older people not attuned to "Social Club" networks, as well as engaging more 'introspective' volunteers;*
 - *More deployment of volunteers so as to expand Winter Wellbeing – to better reach out to less forthcoming older people, and as a lower commitment, task-orientated means of engaging male/ private sector volunteers⁷;*
 - *Better processes for staying in touch, so as to bridge the gap between those who are 'regulars' and those with only 'fleeting' interactions;*

- **More publicity for the charity, in particular amongst older people:**
 - *Given the high numbers who feel they have better relations with young people as a result of NLC, more might be done to promote this as NLC's 'Unique Selling Point', to help distinguish and publicise the charity;*
 - *Publicity for the geographical range of events;*

⁷ Note: It is important to recognise that the idea of men being more 'task-orientated' in their thinking is a generalisation – one which does not necessarily stand up to scientific scrutiny and is certainly not true in every case. It is referred to in this document because it came through as a common perception among volunteers, and because observations of NLC sessions did seem to suggest that there were certain personality types which flourished more naturally than others in the Social Club setting.

- **More efforts to capitalise on the high level of bilingualism among volunteers (51%) – especially given the positive impact of language skills on dementia.**

- **Slow introduction of the option of donating to NLC:**

- *Supporters were, on balance, open to the idea of fundraising or donating (69% and 65% respectively said they would consider it);*
- *However, some volunteers felt this was “out of keeping” or even a betrayal of NLC’s communitarian agenda – so it would need to be executed unobtrusively and introduced with the buy-in of regular volunteers;*

Openness to helping financially		Total
Willing to fundraise	Yes	70
	No	34
Willing to donate	Yes	68
	No	35
N = 104		

- **A greater clarity of the volunteer role at social events:**

- *More NLC staff support for first time volunteers and more clarity about the volunteer ‘role’;*
- *More opportunities for socialising with other volunteers;*
- *Introductions for context at the start of social events, and de-briefs afterwards.*

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