

## Tower Hamlets CCG Innovation Bursary

### Progress Report - Month 6

**Organisation:** Stepney City Farm

**Project Title:** Furry Tales



#### What was the aim of your project?

To improve quality of life and reduce social isolation of older people and older people with dementia living in Tower Hamlets. To do so by delivering therapeutic animal-handling sessions to 50 vulnerable older people both onsite at Stepney City Farm and outreach in two local care homes. Participants to be referred through direct GP referrals and through indirect sources such as care homes, day care centres and other community organisations. Participants to benefit from emotional and physical comfort of sessions as well as the increased opportunities for intergenerational socialising.

#### Did you complete all work against plan?

What?	Achieved?	How?	When?
Set up GP direct referral procedure	Yes	Procedure established with Furry Tales & XX Place Health Centre. Information sent out to all Bromley-by-Bow Health Partnership staff. In response to midway review, information packs sent out to all Tower Hamlets surgeries.	Initial meeting September 14 Midway review November 14 Monthly reminders sent
Set up partnership with local care homes	Yes	2 new care homes positively engaged with Furry Tales; Pat Shaw House and Peter Shore Court. Re-established contact with 1 care home; Hawthorn Green.	September 14 Ongoing
Establish link with local befriending services	Yes	Contact made with Age UK Tower Hamlets, Tower Hamlets Friends and Neighbours, Tower Hamlets Public Health Locality Managers, Bromley-by-Bow Centre Time Bank, Sundial Centre and St. Luke's	September 14 Ongoing

		Community Centre. Information sent out to all, plus follow-up contact/meetings.	
Recruit volunteers	Yes	10 new volunteers successfully recruited, plus 5 volunteers continuing from previous project	September 14
Run CCG specific volunteer training	Yes	12 volunteers attended training session. Items covered; understanding aging and dementia, communicating with older people and older people with dementia, meaningful activity, animal handling and welfare.	September 14
Deliver 6 outreach sessions to 2 care homes	Yes, plus 1 extra	3 delivered to Pat Shaw House, 3 delivered to Peter Shore Court, each with its own regular volunteer team. Bonus session delivered to Hawthorn Green Care Home via Jubilee Street GP Practice.	Monthly September 14 – February 15
Deliver 10 onsite sessions at Stepney City Farm	9/10 delivered	9 held at Stepney City Farm for participants referred through XX Place, Stroudley Walk and BBBC GPs, Sundial Centre and St. Luke's Community Centre. 1 session cancelled and unable to find suitable time to reschedule.	Fortnightly October 14 – February 15
Regularly evaluate project with volunteers, care homes, participants and NHS staff	Yes	Focus groups held with volunteers at start and end of project. Evaluation forms collected from care homes after each session, from day care centres after referral session. Regular feedback collected from participants via informal interviews in sessions. Referral process feedback requested from GPs via email (2 meetings arranged, both cancelled by GPs). Nurse and HCA present in outreach session to offer feedback.	Ongoing September 14 – February 15



**Have you delivered the anticipated outcomes?**

Smart Targets	
Number of outreach sessions	6
Actual	7
Number of onsite sessions	10
Actual	9*
Number of discrete referrals to onsite sessions (direct and indirect routes)	25
Actual	25
Number of discrete care home residents in outreach sessions	25
Actual	56
Total number of discrete vulnerable older people who took part in sessions	50
Actual	81

\*1 onsite session cancelled, made up for with extra outreach session.

Wellbeing Outcomes
Furry Tales will increase the self-esteem and independence of vulnerable older people who are patients at Tower Hamlets GP surgeries.
<p>We collected evaluation forms from staff at the care homes after delivering each outreach session. 100% agreed that Furry Tales sessions increased residents' feelings of self-worth and reduced feelings of isolation. 50% of those referred to onsite sessions came more than once, with 4 members of one day care centre asking what they can do to help the project continue. Of the residents in the care homes 50% came more than once, whilst 25% came to every session available. Bearing in mind the propensity for memory loss amongst this target group and the fact that attendance was voluntary, we are very pleased with the impact our sessions have had.</p> <p><i>'[since the last session] residents speak constantly about the animals with each other, even those with little memory capacity, when they see the photos they still remember it'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Pat Shaw House</p> <p><i>'Participants came from their floor to join the session – something they rarely do.'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Peter Shore Court</p> <p><i>'I enjoyed this time and last time, and I'll come again next time!'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">- Participant</p>

Furry Tales will increase opportunities for intergenerational interaction for older people and older people with dementia living in care homes.

100% of the homes and day care centres worked with agreed that Furry Tales sessions increased social interaction and laughter for participants. One of the homes we worked with told us there are no other opportunities at present for residents to socialise with 18-35 year olds, whilst the other said though this happens on an ad-hoc basis, there is nothing regular.

Participants at onsite sessions were very open about enjoying the social aspect of sessions.



*'I have enjoyed the company... I feel like we're old friends and we just met today... Thank you for accepting me.'*

*'I love any chance to be with people.'*

Hawthorn Green Residential Home © Louisa Emery

Equally, when we asked volunteers what they felt they had gained from the project, the most mentioned benefit was the opportunity to connect with elders. This word map captures their feedback from our end-of-project volunteer focus group.



Furry Tales will have a knock-on effect for family, friends and carers who will benefit from the boost to each participant's wellbeing.

The homes we worked with noted positive changes in the residents' behaviour beyond their involvement in the sessions:

*'The complicity of talking about the animals to others who were in the group, plus residents have something to talk about to other people and also to friends and family. Their features change to a cheerful expression.'*

Equally, the day care centres who referred members to onsite sessions noticed longer-term effects:

*'The positive influence on their physical and psychological wellbeing meant on the journey home they*

*were very animated talking about their special day with the animals.'*



When the Nurse and Health Care Assistant from XX Place came to observe a session in one of the care homes, they noted the positive effect Furry Tales has on resident-staff relationships.

*'It gives the residents a chance to get out of their rooms and enjoy time with animals, other residents and staff.'*

At onsite sessions we had nieces, wives and daughters attend, all of whom were just as involved in the session as the person they were bringing. We also had the pleasure of once hearing a participant call a family member as we were packing up, he described the session to them saying,

*'I wish you could have been there.'*

Furry Tales will improve the links between health services, VCS organisations and the community of Tower Hamlets.

Thanks to this NHS CCG funded project, Furry Tales has connected Stepney City Farm with two new care homes, one new day care centre and three local GP surgeries. We now have regular contact with the Patient Managers and GPs at XX Place and have developed a good working relationship with the Social Prescriptions Coordinator at Bromley by Bow Centre. We are already in talks about how we may continue this project, XX Place are particularly keen to develop social prescriptions at Stepney City Farm.

We have improved existing connections with another care home, two day care centres and a number of VCS organisations. We have invited all those involved in the project to a Springtime Event to celebrate our achievements together. The project featured in local paper, The Wharf, meaning many more Tower Hamlets residents and workers will have heard of our work.

### **Do you believe the project demonstrated any areas of innovation and if so, what?**

Furry Tales has demonstrated innovation through piloting a social prescription service that links GP surgeries, care homes, day care centres and a local city farm. As far as we are aware, there is no project already doing this in London. As testament to the project's success, The Guardian featured an article on our work, whilst one of the GPs from XX Place showed a video of our work to the nation's GPs at a talk on social prescribing at the RCGP.

By bringing people to the Farm for supported sessions with friendly volunteers and animals, we create a space where local elders can start to take ownership of a nearby green space. We encourage them to see the Farm as their own with the hope that they will start to use

the Farm independently, without the need for referral. Likewise, through taking animals into local care homes, we create a relaxed and lively atmosphere where residents can feel valued and needed as they help look after and tend to the needs of the animals. Visiting healthcare staff can then enter into this atmosphere and engage with residents in a manner that may not come so easily in clinical settings:

*‘Talking to residents we got to find out that a lot of them owned animals and one resident worked on a farm, because of this they simply enjoyed the presence of the animals you brought over today. Everyone was happy and at ease - this is not always the case when we visit them from the surgery.’*

- Health Care Assistant, XX Place Surgery

## **Lessons learnt**

- **GP referrals are a complex process and require following up face-to-face**

Whilst the GPs we engaged with were incredibly enthusiastic about the project, pressures on their time meant that getting them to actually refer patients was a much slower process than we’d hoped. Moreover, when patients were referred they were not always appropriate for the project. One lady, for example, was waiting for ankle surgery and therefore did not want to travel far from her house which was a couple of miles from the Farm. One man was referred yet insufficient contact details were given for us to reach him. In both situations, the problem could have been solved by having someone spend a little more time consulting with the patient. Part of this was the job of the Project Manager but, with limitations on time, this needed to be done over the telephone, which isn’t always the best form of first contact for isolated elders who may be hard of hearing. Without the capacity to meet referrals in person and speak to them about their needs and concerns, establishing a relationship was very difficult.

**Solution?** Follow up referrals face-to-face by involving a key worker either for home visits or an initial meeting at the surgery.

- **Transport is a must!**

Without our own transport or care staff to pick participants up, we were relying on vulnerable elders getting themselves to our onsite sessions. This was too difficult or daunting for many and as a result we started to work with the day care centres, having them refer members who they would then collect and bring to sessions. Whilst this worked well for the duration of the project, if we wish to develop our GP referrals process, it is vital that we have a minibus and driver who can collect participants.

**Solution?** Connect with an existing minibus service and explore ways of partnering. Perhaps they could offer us their services for an afternoon and in return we could provide a free onsite session for one of their other groups.

- **Regularity and consistency are essential**

It was wonderful to see the development of relationships in the two homes we worked with. We used a mix of familiar and new animals, kept the same volunteer team each time and many of the residents were repeat attendees. All of this meant we were able to build on-going relationships between animals, participants, volunteers and staff, which led to longer lasting effects as residents came to a session especially to see a particular person or animal. It was very sad after working at this for 6 months to have to say to residents that we wouldn't be back again.

**Solution?** Seek continuation funding that allows us to work closely with each care home, delivering monthly sessions for at least 12 months. Involve care home staff in delivery so they can start to take project into their own hands thereby building sustainably.

- **We need more than 2 days a week to dream big!**

For all of the reasons above, this project requires more management than just 2 days a week. As seen from the results and positive feedback from all involved, Furry Tales has the potential to be developed into a much wider reaching green care programme, with Stepney City Farm becoming much more deeply embedded in the day-to-day lives of Tower Hamlets' elders. For this to happen, we need to continue integrating the services we have started to link; the Farm, care homes, day care centres and GP surgeries, whilst meanwhile developing the structure and delivery of our sessions so that they can provide more fully for everyone's needs.

**Solution?** Expand project management into 2 roles; an Onsite Manager, responsible for training volunteers, session delivery, animal handling and welfare, and an Outreach Coordinator, responsible for community engagement, links with wellbeing and healthcare services, strategy and planning

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On behalf of the team (both 2-legged and 4-legged) at Stepney City Farm, we would like to thank the volunteers, GPs, NHS staff, care homes, day care centres, VCS organisations and of course the participants themselves who have helped us make Furry Tales a reality. We are incredibly grateful to NHS Tower Hamlets CCG, without whom none of this would have been possible.