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## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

### Tackling isolation and loneliness

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Janet Bridle<sup>1</sup>,

1: Southern Community Initiatives, Port Erin, Isle of Man

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#### *Introduction*

In 2009 the Third Sector Strategy Group (government departments, the Council of Voluntary Organisations representatives of the faith groups), instructed a Development Officer to conduct a gap analysis in the south of the Isle of Man. The objective of the analysis to develop a project that would fill the gaps in current provision and demonstrate good working practices between the above parties, within 6 months.

#### *Practice change implemented*

Community initiatives were co-produced in conjunction with local residents to reduce social isolation. A local version of Men in Sheds was set up as well as 3 social groups. Eight years later, “The Hub” has a timetable of creative, games, fitness, food and drop in sessions with approximately 152 weekly participants.

#### *Timeline*

Meetings with health professionals, local politicians, local authorities, teachers, police, 3rd sector and voluntary and social groups, mums and tots, 6th form students and 100 local residents were held over a 4 month period. Each group was asked the same questions –what works well in the south, what does not, what do we like/dislike, what could we do better. Additional efforts were made to engage men since they were not present in the first round of consultation. A steering group was set up to transform a space for the hobbies Shed and by October 2011, a part-time paid coordinator was hired and 38 regular members. A further facility was provided to set up a community hub that would tackle the wider issues of isolation and loneliness.

#### *Highlights*

Three main elements came out at every gathering:

1. Isolation/loneliness
2. Lack of relevant/up to date information on local services (government or community)
3. Not enough relevant facilities for youth if not sporty or artistic

A number of issues were raised by the men:

1. Since retiring felt obsolete

2. Unless played golf or had specific hobby there was very little do to
3. Since retiring/moving/changing jobs/widowed had lost contact with former work mates, social groups and found it difficult to join things, felt shy.
4. Wife/partner organized the socialising
5. Since retiring there were a lot of little jobs to do round the house but this meant they were not getting out enough.
6. A full time carer for a wife with a long term illness.

### ***Sustainability***

Costs are kept to a minimum by utilizing volunteers and donations. The project required modest start-up funding provided by the Manx Lottery Trust.

### ***Transferability***

Each community will want something that is tailored to their particular needs.

### ***Conclusions***

No assumptions should be made about what communities need; good research, communication and public gatherings are essential. There is a clear benefit for people and organisations of working together across sectors. "Coming into the Hub is like having a warm blanket put around me."

### ***Discussion***

Consultation and collaboration can lead to reduced isolation and loneliness.

### ***Lessons learned***

Don't be afraid, be thorough but be prepared to make mistakes, make sure you have some funders who are there for a bit of duration, do lots of promotion.