

Small Grants for Pensioners' Groups 2016/17 – Annual Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social isolation and loneliness are known to be particular problems of older age and have a negative impact on older people's quality of life and physical and mental health and wellbeing. Older people living in Tower Hamlets are predicted to be the loneliest in all of England according to a model looking at risk factors for loneliness which quantifies the many factors that can increase the risk of loneliness in older age¹.
- 1.2 Throughout the borough there are a number of very small groups, often on housing estates, which go some way to alleviating social isolation and reducing loneliness amongst our older residents. In 2016/17 The Adults' Services Directorate (now known as the Health, Adults and Community Services Directorate) ran its annual Small Grants for Pensioners' Groups fund to provide financial support to these groups.
- 1.3 **33 groups were awarded a Small Grant of between £300 and £500 in 2016/17, totalling £13,665.90.**
- 1.4 As well as evidencing how the grant was used, these groups were also asked to provide details of how many people benefitted from its award and feedback on what difference receiving the grant has made. They were also provided with blank equality forms to be completed anonymously by individual users to give the Council a better understanding of who the beneficiaries are.
- 1.5 The data captured from these completed forms, as well as initial application forms, have enabled us to produce this report which presents:
 - How grants were used
 - Who the beneficiaries were
 - The feedback received

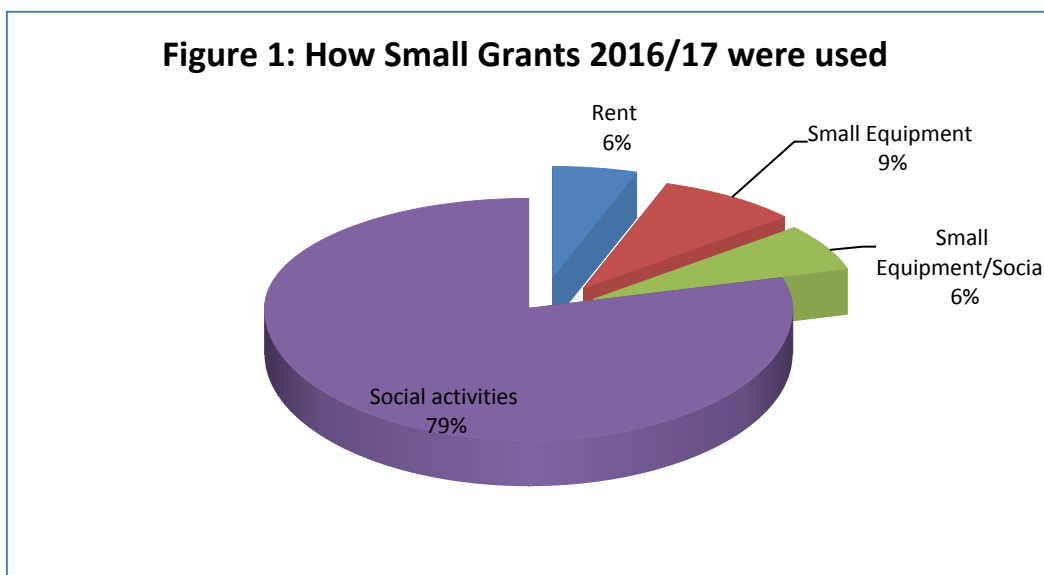
2. How grants were used

- 2.1 Awards fell into the following four broad categories:
 - Rent (including room hire)
 - Running costs (including utilities bills, insurance etc.)
 - Small equipment (e.g. bingo machines, sewing machines, craft materials)
 - Social Activities (e.g. parties, day trips, includes facilitator costs)

¹ [Loneliness and Isolation in Older People – Factsheet \(JSNA\)](#)

2.2 Of the 33 grants awarded in 2016/17:

- Two were as a contribution towards rent
- Three were used solely to purchase small equipment or materials
- Two were used to purchase equipment/materials and towards social activities (including gardening equipment, and items for a photography exhibition² which was viewed by 79 local people)
- 26 were towards social activities (including celebrations for occasions such as Christmas and Eid, and day trips)
- None was used towards running costs



3. Who the beneficiaries were

3.1 Over 1,220 older Tower Hamlets residents benefited from the Small Grants 2016/17 fund. Based on over 770 completed equality forms, the breakdown is as follows:

Age

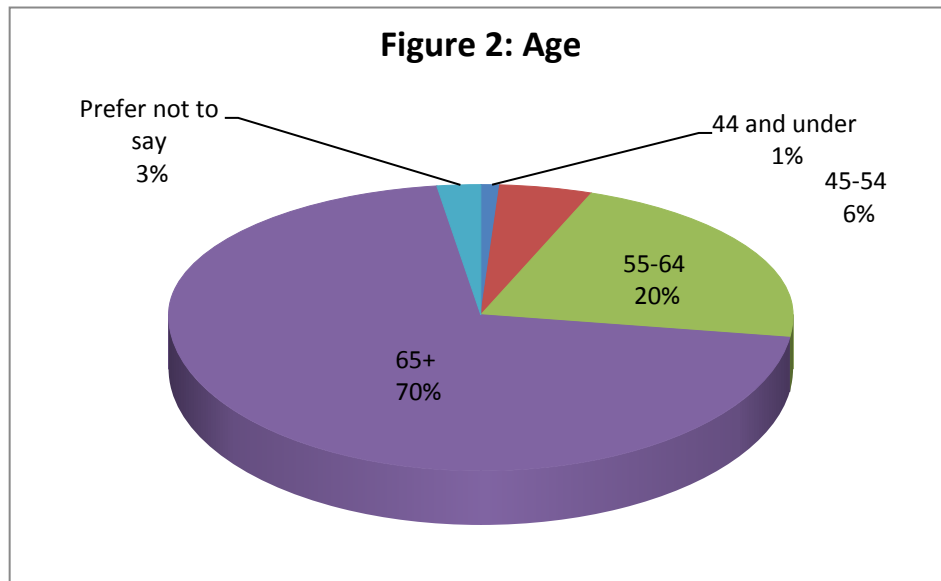
- 3.2 The overwhelming majority of beneficiaries were over 65 (70%). 20% were 55-64, the upper level of which would include some individuals who have reached state pension age. Although the Borough's over-65 population (16,700³) is less than those aged 50-64 (24,400⁴) the higher percentage of over 65's benefitting from a grant reflects the fact that is predominantly 'pensioners' groups' who have applied.
- 3.3 Several people under 50 also returned forms, although there were typically no more than two younger people per group. Although the fund is for older people (aged 50+) it is recognised that these younger adults would have provided support and companionship to other older

² [Poplar Baths and Crisp Street Market – Past, Present and Future](#)

³ [Older People in Tower Hamlets – JSNA 2016](#)

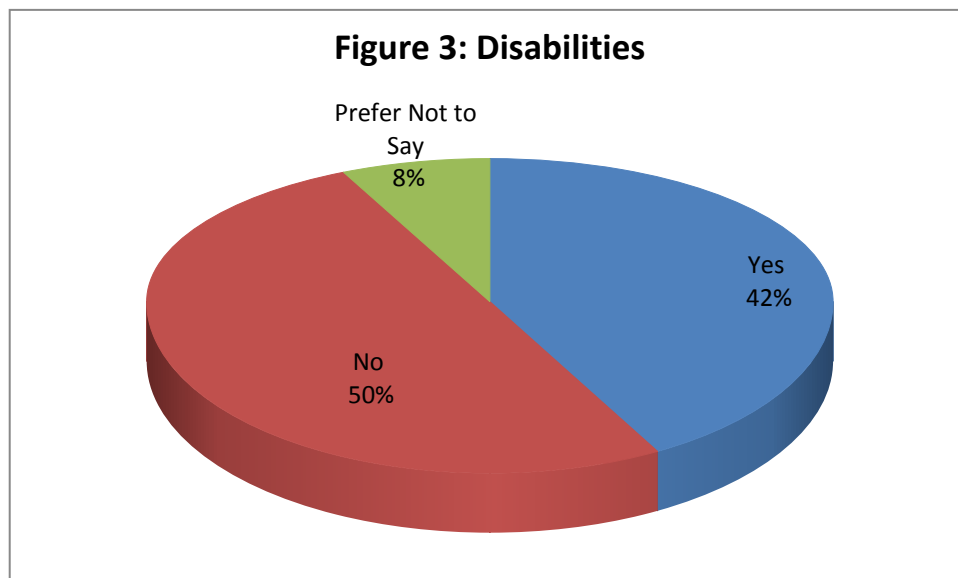
⁴ [ONS mid-year population estimates 2016](#)

members of the group, contributing to a reduction in loneliness and isolation. It could also be the case that these were informal carers.



Disabilities

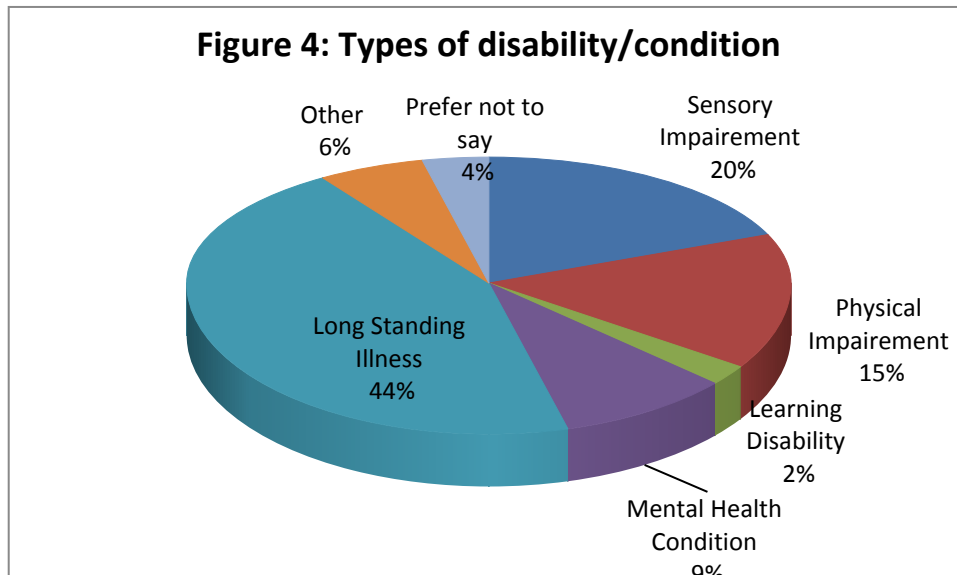
- 3.4 42% of beneficiaries identified as having a disability. 50% said that they were not disabled, although some of these did state that they had a long standing illness (see 3.5). It is known that in Tower Hamlets many residents age earlier than expected, developing long term conditions and disability by their mid-50s⁵ and that poor health, immobility, cognitive impairment and sensory impairment were all found to be significantly associated with loneliness⁶.



⁵ [Older People in Tower Hamlets – JSNA 2016](#)

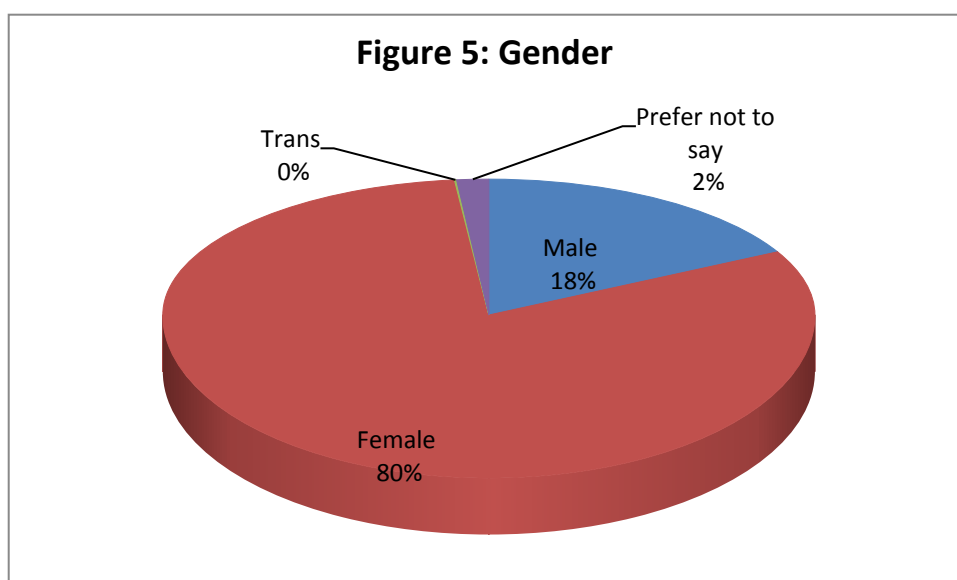
⁶ [Loneliness and Isolation in Older People – JSNA 2016](#)

3.5 Of those who identified as having a disability, 44% stated that they had a long standing illness or long term condition. 20% reported having a sensory impairment, 15% had a physical disability or impairment and 9% identified as having a mental health condition. Many identified as having more than one type of disability/condition.



Gender

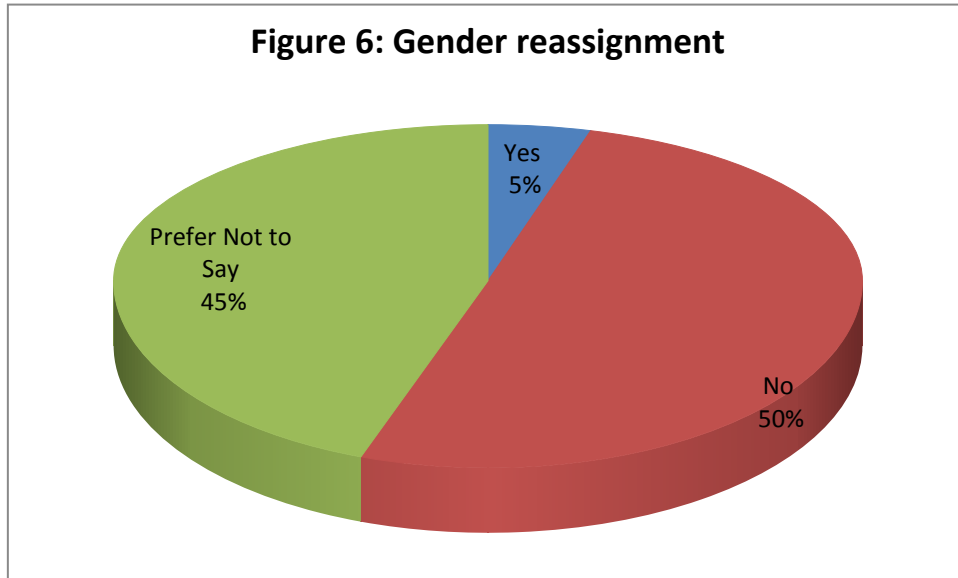
3.6 Significantly more women (80%) than men (18%) benefitted from the award of a Small Grant. The gender split in Tower Hamlets (all ages) is 52.2% male and 47.8% female. However, a greater number of females aged 65+ are predicted to live alone (3,972) than males (1,976)⁷.



⁷ [Older People in Tower Hamlets – JSNA 2016](#)

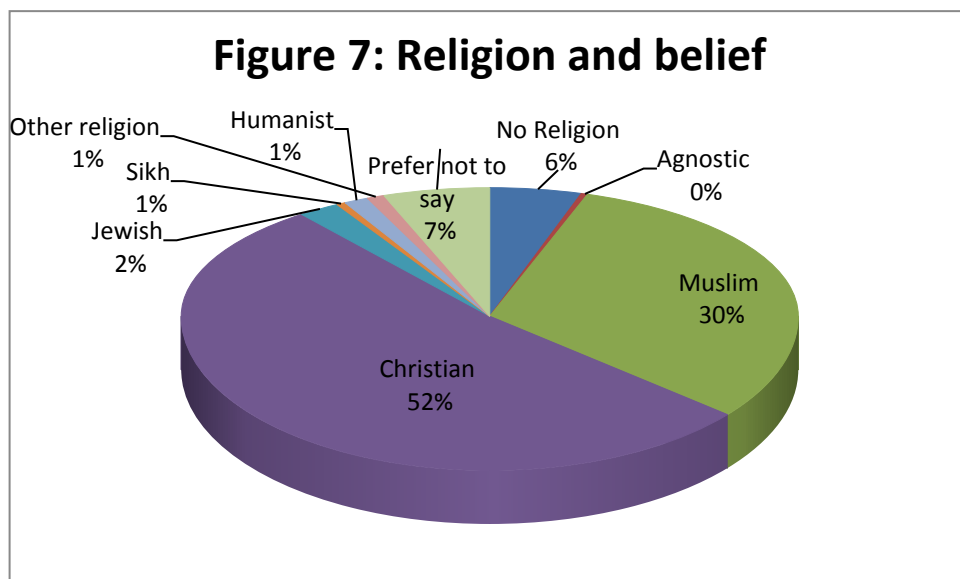
Gender Reassignment

- 3.7 Whilst there is limited data regarding this protected characteristic in Tower Hamlets, a surprisingly high number of beneficiaries identified as having gender reassignment (5%). More information on equalities will be provided to recipients in future years, including explanations of some of the terms, so as to avoid potential confusion when completing forms.



Religion and belief

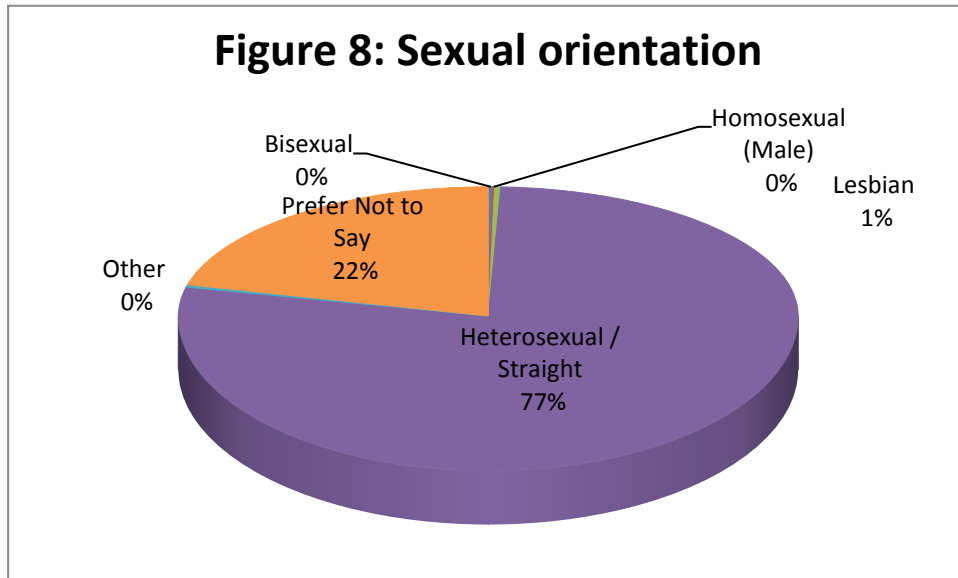
- 3.8 Over half of beneficiaries identified as being Christian (52%), with Islam being the second largest represented faith (30%). At the time of the 2011 Census, 38 per cent of residents (all ages) said they were Muslim and 30 per cent Christian⁸, although this is likely to be a different picture for older people based on what we know about ethnicity (see 3.10).



⁸ [Census 2011 – Religion in Tower Hamlets](#)

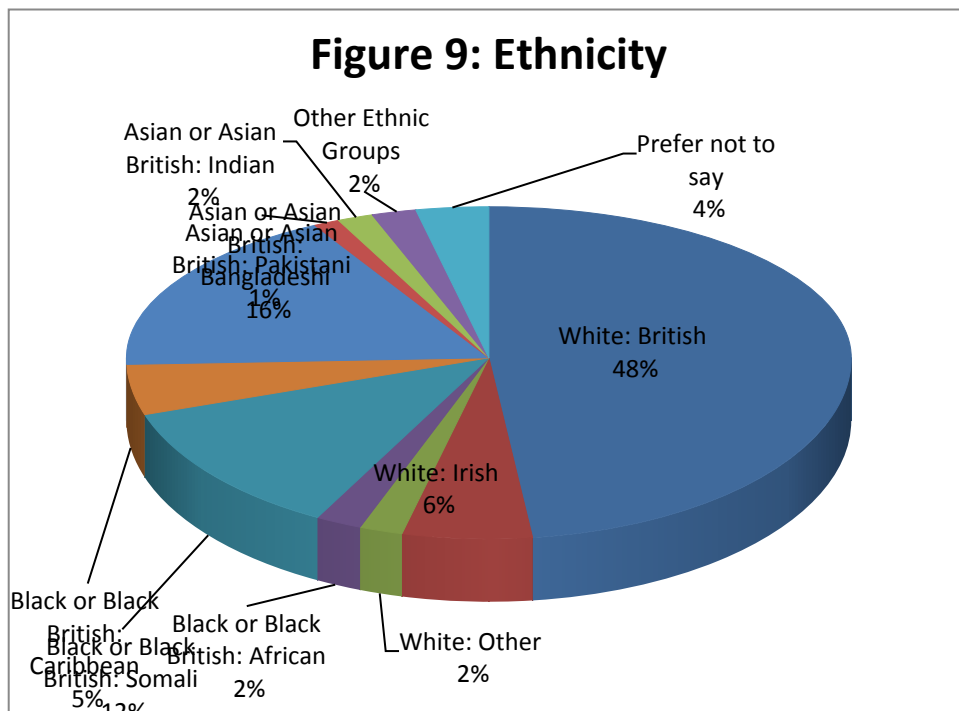
Sexual Orientation

- 3.9 77% of beneficiaries identified as being heterosexual/straight, whilst those identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual was in single figures. Limited data is available for this protected characteristic in Tower Hamlets as it was not a specific category in the last census.



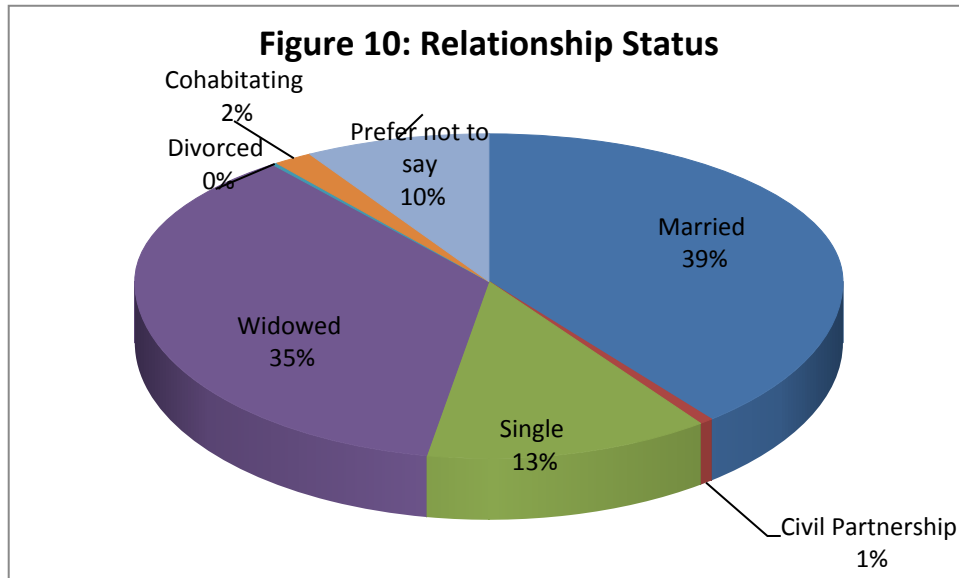
Ethnicity

- 3.10 Almost half of beneficiaries were white: British (48%), with 16% identifying as Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi. The next largest groups were Black or Black British: Somali (12%), White: Irish (6%) and Black Caribbean (5%). In Tower Hamlets, nearly two thirds of those aged 65+ are white and 25.3% Asian or Asian British.



Relationship Status

3.11 Just under half (46%) of beneficiaries reported being either widowed (35%), single (13%) or divorced (0.2%) with 39% being married. Limited data is available for this protected characteristic in Tower Hamlets.



4. Feedback received

4.1 Organisations awarded a grant in 2016/17 were asked to provide some qualitative feedback to help us understand whether the fund was achieving its objective to contribute towards a reduction in social isolation for older people. A selection of the comments received is shown on the following page. It is clear that the grant awards are valued and, by funding or enabling social activities, go some way to providing support and opportunities for social interaction.

4.2 The majority of groups who were awarded funding rely on volunteers to keep them operating and, more often than not, the leader of the group is an older person themselves. These tireless individuals have made a huge contribution within their local communities which, as can be seen from the equalities data, have helped and supported a large and diverse group of older people across the borough. They deserve an enormous amount of credit.

We were able to organise coach trips in conjunction with local Sheltered Housing schemes... thus reducing their isolation and brightening their outlook

The grant provided an opportunity for a social event that would not usually have taken place. It also makes the members feel valued and introduces people to the sport of bowls

This has enabled us to organise regular trips, and has led to a great friendship amongst all of us

The grant was used towards a party to celebrate International Women's Day, giving the opportunity to mark the achievements of local women

This grant has reduced older people's isolation by helping to provide social activities and therefore it has given people the chance to meet new friends and maintain social networks

The grant award has been a great help to our community

It provides an opportunity for the elderly to socialise and interact with each other. It is therapeutic and provides companionship. Bingo keeps them mentally alert and provides excitement when they win

The Eid party was able to bring the local community together

It has enabled older men in Tower Hamlets to be able to meet every week, not only to socialise but to get involved in a lot of projects in our community"

These are mainly single elderly people who benefit from the social support of their peers and make acquaintances within the group. Many go on to support each other in their daily lives as neighbours and friends.

We want to encourage residents to spend more time outside... enhance their lives by reducing their isolation... this can be achieved through our gardening project

We are aware that many older people spend Christmas alone, so we feel that at least they get to have one day that is like Christmas.

The grant provided the opportunity to bring in a skilled tutor to teach group members new techniques, which can be passed on... we had such a laugh

The difference was knowing the pensioners had a dinner (and a hamper), as a lot of them are on their own at Christmas time and don't bother to cook themselves a Christmas dinner

This enabled us to bring the community together to celebrate Christmas. Some of our old people have no family and it is nice to see them getting out and mixing with people