

# Better lives for older people

An evaluation of Octavia's Outreach, Befriending and Activities service



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This is an abbreviated version of the 'Better Lives for Older People' report. A full copy of the research report by New Philanthropy Capital is on the Octavia website [octavia.org.uk](http://octavia.org.uk).

Inspired by our founder, the social reformer Octavia Hill, Octavia is a not-for-profit organisation providing thousands of people in London with homes, support and care. The work of our Outreach, Befriending and Activities service is an exemplar of how we work with partners across central and west London to enable and provide opportunities for isolated older and vulnerable people to connect with others. This is increasingly critical work as the effects of loneliness and isolation are emotionally damaging, can erode self-esteem and affect physical health.



In 2019, Octavia commissioned New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) to evaluate the work of the Outreach, Befriending and Activities service, to strengthen its evidence base and to inform our plans for the service's future. We are pleased that NPC's research found the service is achieving its intended outcomes and making a positive impact on the lives of local people.

### Service users who took part in the research reported:

**40%** decrease in feelings of loneliness.

**39%** increase in meeting up with friends and family (pre Covid-19).

**50%** increase in taking part in social activities outside of home (pre Covid-19).

**70%** being better able to attend medical appointments.

**61%** improvement to their mental wellbeing.

During the research period, the outreach, befriending and activities service reached more than 500 people and provided over 2,500 hours of befriending at an average cost of £11 per person supported. We established in 2019 that the Social Return on Investment (SROI) ratio for the service was 1:6. This means that for every £1 spent in providing the service, an equivalent of £6 is achieved in terms of social value to wider society.<sup>1</sup>

The achievements set out in this report have been underpinned by a strong theory of change that clearly captures the positive impact of the service. This evidence informs how well this model of support works for older and vulnerable Londoners from diverse communities.

We will be sharing the report's findings and recommendations with partners and peers to:

- promote the benefits of outreach support and develop greater peer support networks through the services Octavia provides;
- demonstrate to funders the value of developing our services to better meet demand;
- explore how we can most effectively partner more with mental health services; and
- review and improve the accessibility of our services, particularly in regards to transport provision.

We would like to thank NPC for their dedicated work on this research, particularly Elizabeth Parker, Matthew Mannix, Rosie McCleod and Carin Eisenstein. We are also very grateful to all the service users, volunteers and colleagues at Octavia involved in this research, who made the project possible in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We would also like to thank Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea for supporting us to deliver these services.

We hope that by publishing this report others will be able to apply what we have learnt to their own services so that more people can be helped to overcome loneliness and isolation.

Reena Mukherji (Director of the Octavia Foundation) and Neil McCarthy (Assistant Director of Care and Support)

<sup>1</sup> Better Lives for Older People, Octavia, 2019



# 1 Introduction

## About Octavia

Octavia is a not-for-profit organisation that provides thousands of people in London with quality, affordable housing, many of whom would otherwise be priced out of living in the city. We offer a wide range of care and support services to older and vulnerable adults living in our homes, including seven extra care schemes, and in the wider community. We focus on relationship-based care for the individual, supporting older and vulnerable adults to stay active, take care of themselves, continue to be part of their local community and stay as independent as they wish, for as long as possible.

The Octavia Foundation is a registered charity and part of the Octavia Group. The Octavia Foundation works with Londoners of all ages to build confidence, connections and community, helping them to live happily, independently and with the care they need. From confidence building and inspirational projects for young people and training and employability support for adults, to befriending schemes and social activities for older people.

## Loneliness and isolation and impact on physical and mental health

The UK population is living longer, and this is in many ways a positive prospect for people and society. Yet living longer can bring challenges and pressures for the individual, our health and social care systems, families, communities and future funding.

A report by the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing found that one in seven people are projected to be aged over 75 by 2040 in the UK.<sup>2</sup> Public spending to cope with the health effects of ageing is projected to increase by around £2.5 billion, year on year, in that period.

While loneliness and isolation are not only age-specific conditions, their impacts are often exacerbated for older people due to the diminished physical health and increased incidence of mental health issues that are associated with later stages of life. There is a wealth of evidence on the harm that loneliness and isolation can do to older people's health and wellbeing. 47% of older people aged over 75 have a longstanding illness, 54% of whom have more than one chronic health condition.<sup>3</sup> Looking

<sup>2</sup> Future of An Ageing Population, Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Projections of Multi-Morbidity in the Older Population in England to 2035, Kingston A. et al, Age and Ageing 47 (3), 2018

at their impacts on mental wellbeing, 40% of older people attending GP clinics have underlying mental health issues<sup>4</sup> and loneliness is associated with a 40% increased risk of dementia.<sup>5</sup>

Alongside and linked to ageing, loneliness and isolation represent growing challenges in the UK. In the 2019 Community Life Survey, 23% of people reported they were often / sometimes lonely, and 19% lacked regular contact with family and friends.<sup>6</sup> Octavia also commissioned research and found that incidences of loneliness and isolation were just as acute in the capital city, with 29% of Londoners reporting that they lacked companionship.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Suffering in Silence: Age Inequality in Older People's Mental Health Care, RCOP Report, 2018

<sup>5</sup> Loneliness and Risk of Dementia, Sutin A. R. et al, The Journal of Gerontology: Series B, 2018

<sup>6</sup> Community Life Survey, DCMS, 2019

<sup>7</sup> Social Isolation in London, Ipsos MORI, 2017

## Octavia's outreach, befriending and activities service

Octavia has built close links with local people in Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea where much of our work is concentrated, including three key services to tackle loneliness and isolation in our communities. These three services make up Octavia's Better Lives programme:

- **Outreach support:** provides personal contact and practical help to isolated individuals to combat loneliness and access community and health services.
- **One-to-one befriending:** provides regular and ongoing companionship, with weekly visits from trained and committed volunteer befrienders.
- **Group activities:** offers a range of group and social activities and events connecting people, promoting involvement and fostering friendships.

## The research

In 2019, Octavia commissioned New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) to evaluate our services. The first step was to develop a theory of change and articulate how the services combat social isolation and loneliness and improve physical and mental health amongst older and vulnerable people. Then, between June 2019 and June 2020, Octavia and NPC collected data to measure the impact of these services through four distinct approaches:

- **Assessment forms:** collected demographic data and identified if new service users had long-term physical health conditions long-term mental health conditions and/or difficulties attending medical appointments.
- **Baseline and follow up surveys:** asked service users to self-assess their social, emotional and physical health. (The baseline survey questions are set out in the appendix).
- **Feedback surveys:** collected data about the level of satisfaction of service users and how likely they would be to recommend Octavia to a friend or family member.
- **Semi-structured interviews:** were carried out to capture in-depth insights related to outcomes and feedback from new and existing service users.



In total, 83 assessment forms and baseline surveys and 58 follow up surveys were completed. This was supported by 69 completed feedback surveys and 14 semi-structured interviews.

The Covid-19 social distancing restrictions brought in from March 2020 disrupted the services and the data collection activities. However, the evaluation makes the best use of the available data and demonstrates how Octavia's service has a positive impact on the lives of the people who access them.

## 2 Executive summary

### Improvements in social, emotional and health outcomes

The research found strong evidence to indicate that Octavia's service achieved its intended outcomes of reducing loneliness, encouraging greater self-care, supporting physical health and independence and promoting wellbeing and quality of life amongst people who used the service.

The research found evidence to indicate that the service is having a positive impact on service users' confidence and motivation to do activities and their ability to access other essential services, such as healthcare. The research also highlighted that Octavia's one-to-one befriending and group activities supported people to become more socially connected.

Key findings include:

- Group activities are especially useful for reducing people's feelings of loneliness and increasing their confidence.
- Outreach workers and one-to-one befrienders support people to access essential services.

◀◀ **Octavia's outreach worker always finds solutions for my needs.**

◀◀ **Superb service. Well thought out programme to keep all members physically and mentally charged. Also provides opportunities to make friends and engage in stimulating activities.**

- Service users who had difficulties attending GP or hospital appointments reported the greatest improvements in their mental wellbeing and quality of life, self-care, confidence and physical health and independence.
- Service users who had long-term mental health conditions reported the greatest improvements in feeling more socially connected, their mental wellbeing and quality of life and their self-esteem.

### What people said about the service

People reported very high levels of overall satisfaction with the outreach, one-to-one befriending and activity service. The service received a 96% level of satisfaction, with high levels reported across all three service streams.



## Evaluation findings and next steps for Octavia

NPC found that Octavia has taken important steps towards its goal of combatting social isolation, loneliness and promoting better physical and mental health amongst older and vulnerable people in Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. It was found that much of what Octavia is currently doing is working well and NPC recommended that we seek opportunities to continue to offer or expand the service. Areas identified for future development include:

- Developing a sustainable, long-term monitoring approach to ensure priority outcomes are being tracked, and user feedback collected.
- Prioritising people for support (if required, identifying those for whom Octavia’s support has the biggest impact).
- Improvements to existing services such as reviewing (and where possible expanding) the current transport offer; better communication of the relationship of the outreach workers and service users and the remit of outreach; reducing the wait time for one-to-one befriending; and diversifying the activities to support peer-to-peer support and befriending.



## 3 The theory of change



Octavia’s Outreach, Befriending and Activities service is aimed at combatting social isolation and loneliness and promoting physical and mental health amongst older and vulnerable people.

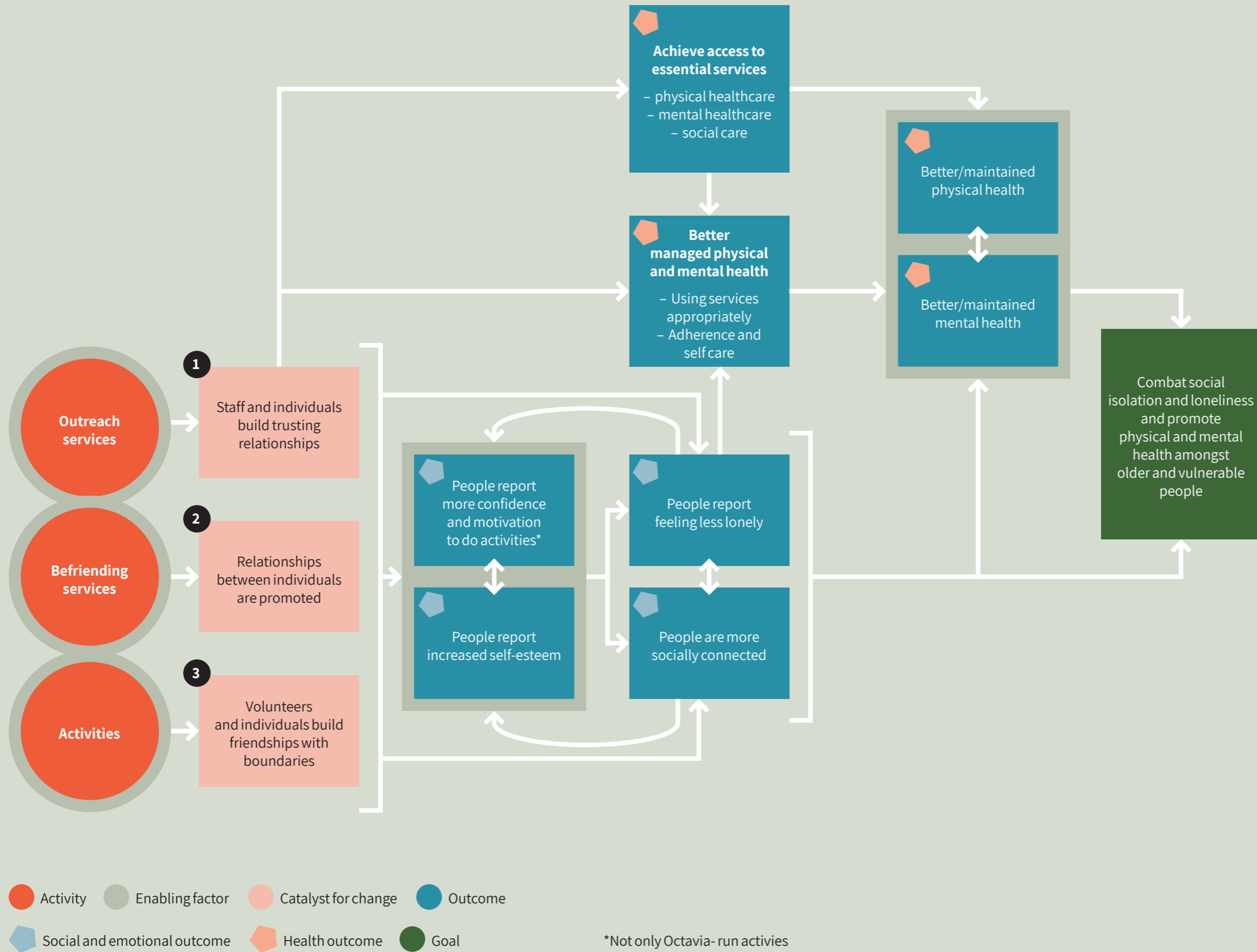
We have an ambition to strengthen the evidence base of our work, to better understand what works well and why, and to identify an approach to measuring impact that provides learning for others. We worked with NPC to:

- Set out a theory of change for the service and develop a comprehensive set of metrics to measure impact.
- Use the agreed set of measures and provide an independent assessment of the effectiveness of Octavia’s service.

Through consultation with Octavia care staff and a review of our processes, NPC used feedback from service users to map out a theory of change for the service as a whole, showing how activities carried out by the service are linked to achieving specific objectives (Figure 1 overleaf).

The theory of change sets out the steps to achieve this goal, through linking how service users’ experiences (‘catalysts for change’) contribute to ‘key outcomes’.

**Figure 1**  
Theory of change for the service



The study established three catalysts for change, each describing the nature of the relationship between service users, Octavia staff and volunteers:

1. Staff and/or volunteers and service users build trusting relationships.
2. Connections and friendships between service users are promoted.
3. Volunteers and service users build connections and friendships with boundaries.

The key outcomes were established as four 'social and emotional' outcomes and four 'health' outcomes, with a clear connection between the two groups.

The 'social and emotional' outcomes were:

- People report more confidence and motivation to do activities.
- People report increased self-esteem.
- People report feeling less lonely.
- People are more socially connected.

The 'health' outcomes were:

- People achieve access to essential services.
- People have better / maintain wellbeing and quality of life.
- People maintain / improve physical health and independence.
- People maintain / improve mental wellbeing and quality of life.



# 4 The key findings

## Improvements in social and emotional outcomes

### Confidence and motivation to do activities

There is evidence that Octavia's one-to-one befriending and activities service helped to improve service users' confidence and motivation.

Many of the interviewees reported that Octavia's activities and one-to-one befriending helped them to increase their confidence, in particular by encouraging them to leave their home and meet new people. One person flagged that 'it's definitely helped me to get a lot of confidence' and that '[the group befriending] helped me to become 'less afraid to talk to other people'. Another interviewee, who had moved into one of Octavia's assisted living schemes, highlighted that accessing the different services had supported her transition to her new home: 'I felt quite low when I left my flat ... but I feel more confident now'.

**[The group befriending] made a difference to my personality because I was very quiet and shy... but it took me out of my shell'.**

## Loneliness

Octavia's services have reduced feelings of loneliness for many service users; this was supported by the interview and survey data.

Of the 55 people that responded to the direct question 'How often do you feel lonely?', 22 (40%) experienced a reduction in loneliness. This was supported by the findings from the use of the indirect UCLA aggregated loneliness scale<sup>7</sup>, which indicated that 28 (48%) of the 58 people who answered these questions felt less lonely. Of the people who responded to these questions, a number indicated that they 'never' or 'hardly ever or never' felt lonely, meaning they could not show improvements in this outcome area. When removing these people from the analysis, the percentage of respondents that indicated a reduction in loneliness increased to 52% using the direct and 54% using the indirect measure.

**I feel good knowing that (Octavia) are there.'**

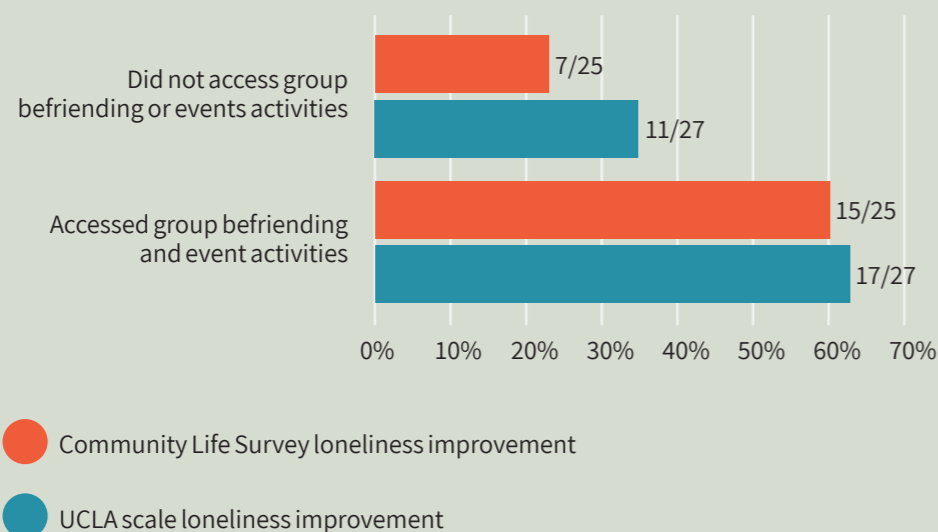
<sup>7</sup> Three-item UCLA Loneliness scale, Community Life Survey, DCMS, 2019

Figure 2

Confidence and motivation to do activities: reported differences between baseline and follow up surveys



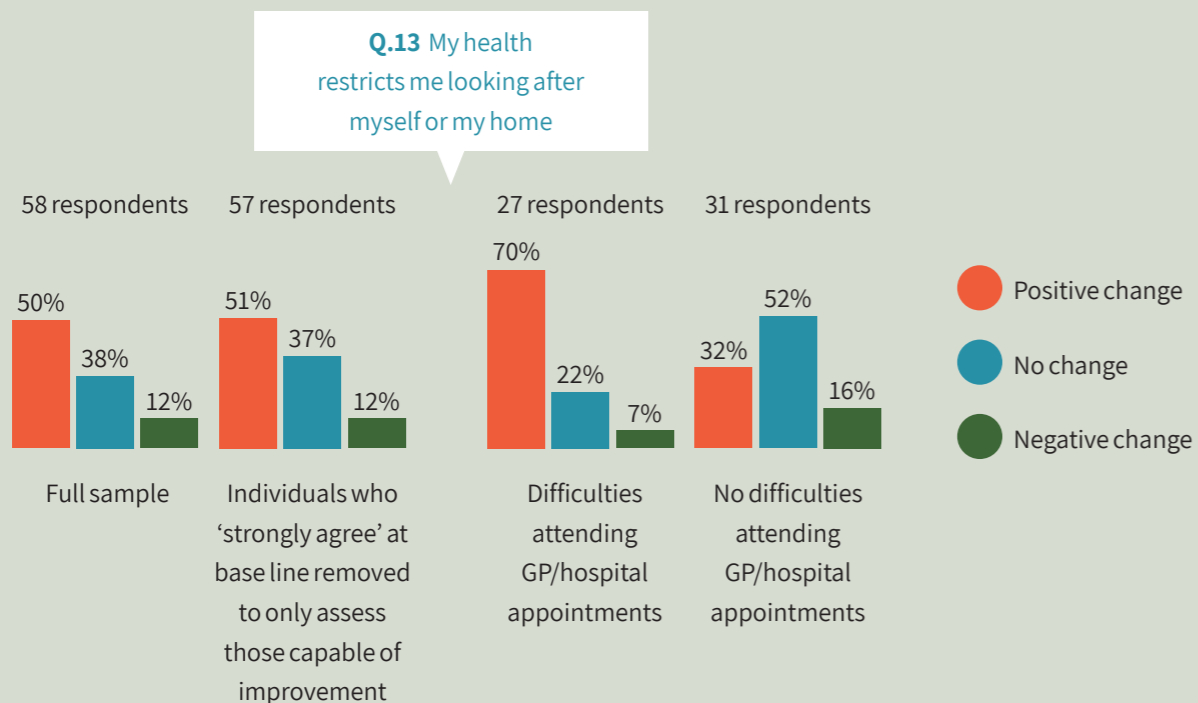
**Figure 3**  
Loneliness reductions: Differences in the % of individuals improving between those attending activities and those only receiving outreach and/or one-to-one befriending



**Figure 4**  
Reductions in loneliness before and after the Covid-19 outbreak

Question/scale	Pre Covid-19 no. of users whose loneliness reduced	Post Covid-19 no. of users whose loneliness reduced	Total no. of users whose loneliness reduced
Direct measure	12 (43%) n=28	10 (39%) n=26	22 (41%) n=54
Indirect measure	16 (53%) n=30	12 (43%) n=28	28 (48%) n=58

**Figure 5**  
Using the right services, adherence and self-care: reported differences between baseline and follow up surveys



It's also important to note that the impact of Covid-19 may have reduced Octavia's ability to collect positive evidence about the impact its services had on loneliness during the pandemic. As shown in Figure 4 above, those who responded to the survey before the Covid-19 outbreak were more likely to report reductions in loneliness compared to those who responded after the outbreak of Covid-19. Therefore, it is likely that Octavia would have achieved greater reductions in loneliness had the Covid-19 outbreak not happened.

**Improvements in health outcomes**

**Using the right services, adherence and self-care**

**The survey evidence indicated the service was helping many people to improve adherence and practice good self-care. There was also some qualitative evidence that it had helped people to access the right services.**

◀◀ **Going out has helped me not feeling so lonely.'**

Survey responses indicate that Octavia's service improved many people's ability to care for themselves and their home (Figure 5). This improvement was felt especially among those who reported difficulties attending GP or hospital appointments. This suggests Octavia was able to improve people's ability to improve their self-care, and adherence.



## Physical health and independence

**Octavia's service has supported the physical health and independence of some of its service users. This was supported by interview and survey data.**

The survey findings indicate that the service helped some people to improve their physical health and independence, when they were asked how much they agreed with the statement 'I am healthy enough to get out and about'. These improvements were felt most significantly by those who reported difficulties attending GP or hospital appointments (Figure 6).

Many interviewees noted the importance of going out for a walk with their one-to-one befriender - both for their health and their independence. In some cases, the service users went shopping with their befriender to buy food or other necessities which helped maintain their independence. This in turn helped them to feel more confident that they could go out for a walk by themselves, which they told us was important for their physical health. Other people noted that the group befriending service also encouraged them to improve their health because the regular meetings provided somewhere to walk to.

## Mental wellbeing and quality of life

Octavia's service has helped to improve people's sense of mental wellbeing and quality of life. This was supported by the survey data and the interviews.

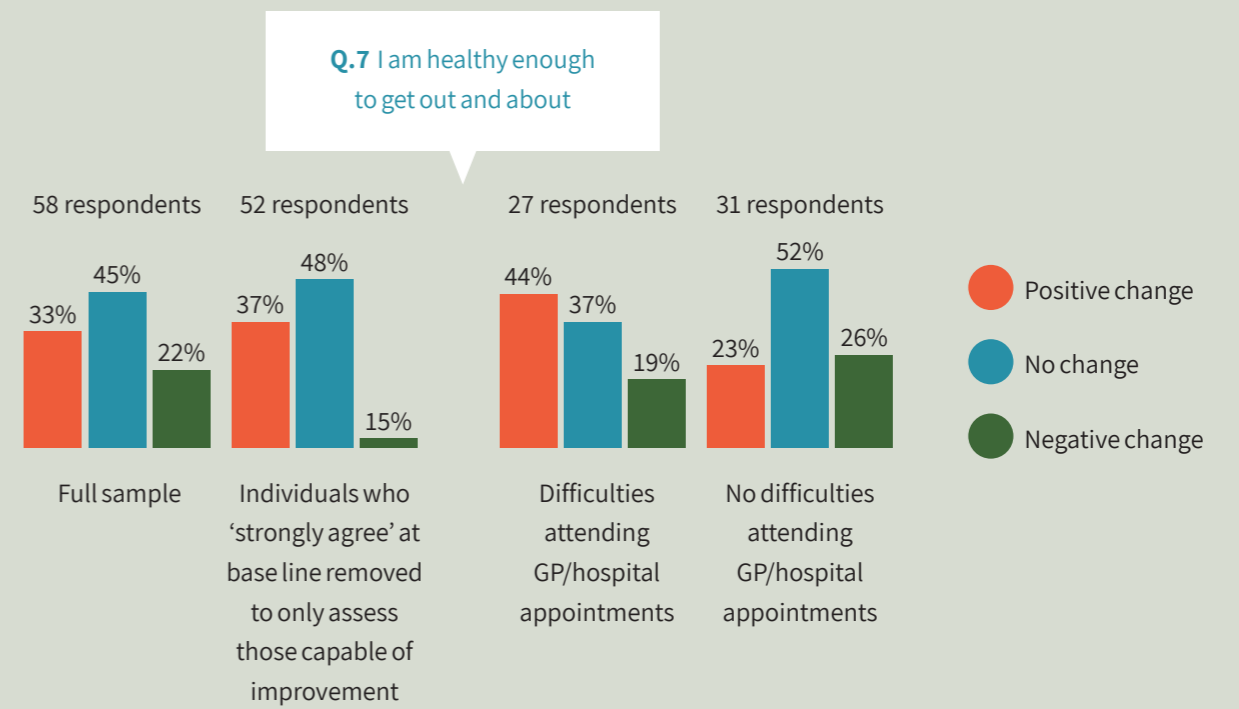
The survey findings indicated that many people's sense of mental wellbeing and perception of their quality of life improved over the evaluation period (Figure 7). The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) showed that 25 (61%) out of 41 service users reported an improved sense of wellbeing.

People who were supported to attend GP or hospital appointments seemed to benefit in especially high numbers from the service, as well as those with long-term mental health conditions. For the former, 55% of the 27 people with difficulty attending GP or hospital appointments improved their overall wellbeing, in contrast to 40% of service users overall.

**The more I walk, the more exercise I get, and the better it makes me feel because I have achieved something.**

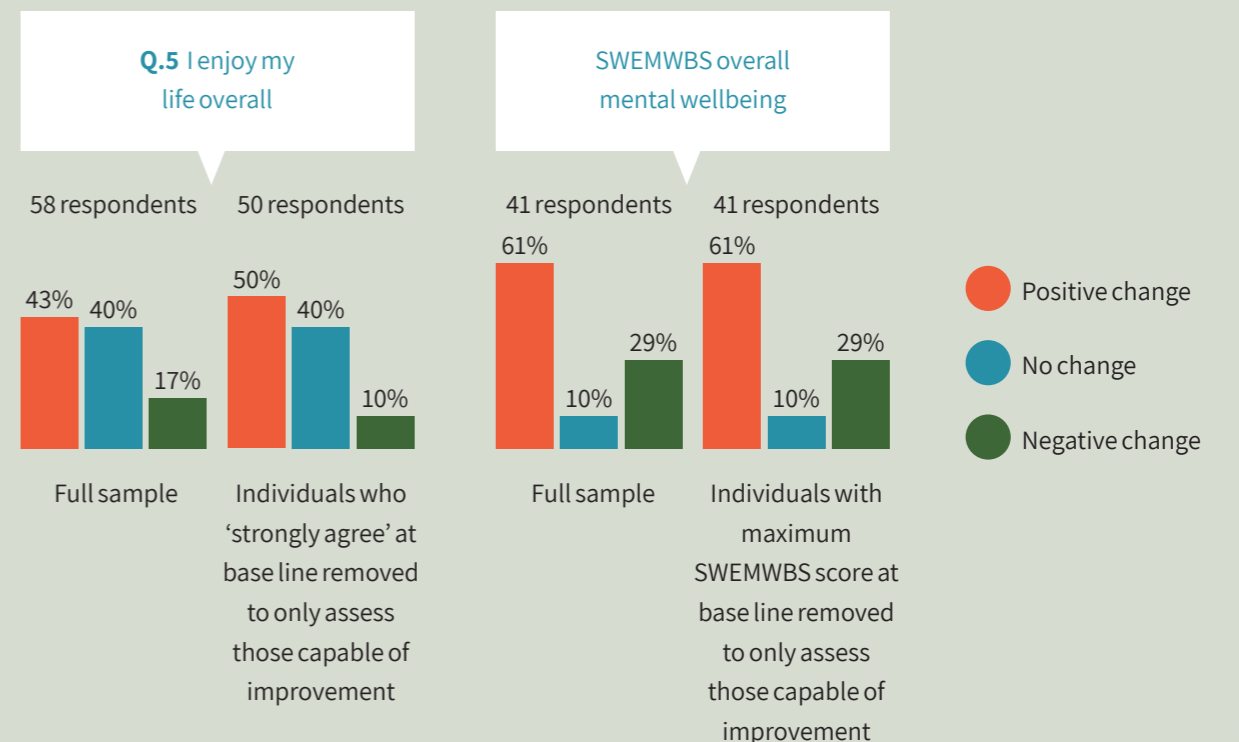
**Figure 6**

**Physical health and independence: reported differences between baseline and follow up surveys**



**Figure 7**

**Mental wellbeing and quality of life: reported differences between baseline and follow up surveys**





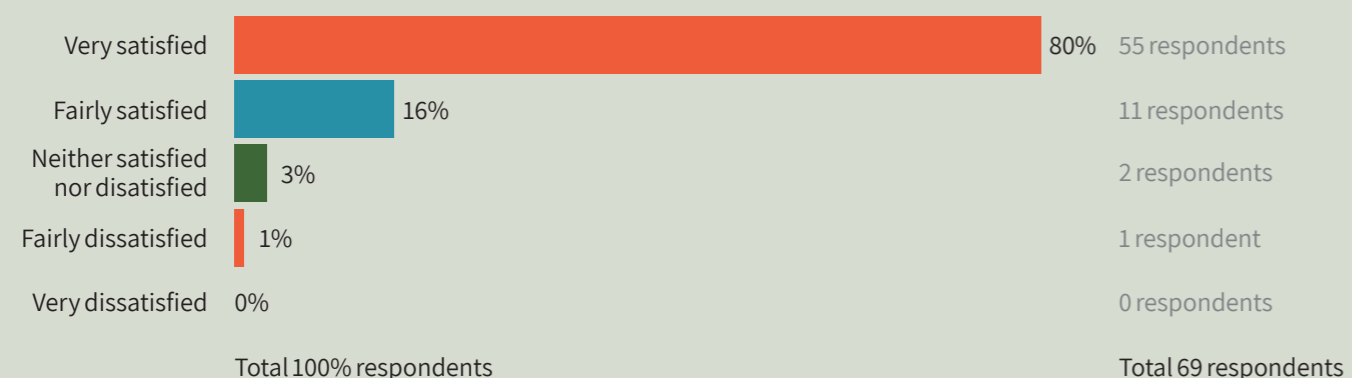
### Service user satisfaction

People using Octavia’s service said they were highly satisfied with the overall service. These high levels of satisfaction are shown in the service user’s answers to Octavia’s feedback survey on satisfaction.

**96%** of service users were satisfied with the service they received from Octavia.

Figure 8

Service user satisfaction question: ‘Overall, how satisfied are you with the service you received from Octavia?’



## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

### Overall conclusions

Throughout 2019-2020, Octavia, with the support of NPC, embarked on an ambitious evaluation to identify, document and share learning about the impact of our outreach, one-to-one befriending and group activity service. The restrictions from Covid-19 were a complication, but the insights from NPC’s research indicate that Octavia’s outreach, befriending and activities service has been successful in combatting social isolation, loneliness and promoting better physical and mental health amongst older and vulnerable people.

#### What improvements in social, emotional and health outcomes do Octavia’s service users report?

There is strong evidence to indicate that Octavia’s service achieved many of its intended outcomes, including reducing **loneliness**, encouraging **greater self-care**, supporting **physical health and independence** and promoting **wellbeing and quality of life** amongst people who used the service.

There is also evidence to indicate that the service has a positive impact on people’s **confidence and motivation to do activities** and their ability to **access essential services**. The research also highlighted that the one-to-one befriending and group activities supported people who used the service to become more **socially connected**.

There is more limited evidence to indicate that accessing Octavia’s services has led to an increase in people’s **self-esteem**, although this was something found to be difficult to measure and will need re-framing as an outcome in future studies.

### Key recommendations

NPC made the following recommendations from the research that Octavia has committed to take forward:

#### What should Octavia do going forwards?

##### Develop a long-term monitoring approach:

To support ongoing monitoring of the Outreach, Befriending and Activities service, Octavia should update and streamline the theory of change. For example, through prioritising the key outcomes, and simplifying data collection to support ongoing, continuous learning.

**Prioritise service users for support:** Service users who had long-term mental health conditions and/or difficulties attending doctors’ appointments saw the greatest changes to their social, emotional and health outcomes after accessing Octavia’s service. In order to make the biggest difference through their work, Octavia should look at prioritising support for these people. To progress this, Octavia will explore more joint working with mental health services.

**Adjustments to existing services:** Building on the success and positive feedback in this evaluation, further areas for improvement include:

Across all services:

- Investigating how Octavia can use technology better to connect service users, staff and volunteers and reduce digital exclusion.
- Reviewing the current transport offer to address the physical and emotional barriers that are preventing people from joining activities. Transportation was identified as a key enabler, especially to attend group activities, so it is important that it is made accessible.

### Recommendations for others working in this sector

- Sustained, long-term contact with service users is critical to building trusting relationships (see ‘catalysts for change’ in Figure 1) and securing the positive impact demonstrated in this evaluation. These relationships require financial investment. Tracking and measuring these ‘catalysts for change’ is important.
- Using a common framework for measuring the impact of these types of services would allow for better shared learning across the sector, especially in areas of loneliness and wellbeing.
- When gathering feedback, use language to describe outcomes that service users can readily understand and relate to (for example around ‘self-esteem’).
- Transport provision is essential and should be a priority in helping people with physical barriers to engage with services outside of their home and overcome loneliness.



# Appendix

## Baseline survey questions

### Section 1.

The next questions are about your relationships. For each one, please say how often you feel that way.

Please tick one for each of the following statements:	Hardly ever or never	Some of the time	Often
1. How often do you feel that you have no one to talk to?			
2. How often do you feel left out?			
3. How often do you feel alone?			

Please tick one for each of the following statements:	Never	Hardly ever	Occasion -ally	Some of the time	Often/ always
4. How often do you feel lonely?					

The next questions are about how you are feeling about different aspects of your life nowadays.

Please tick one for each of the following statements:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
5. I enjoy my life overall					
6. I look forward to things					
7. I am healthy enough to get out and about					
8. My family, friends or neighbours would help me if needed					
9. I have social or leisure activities/ hobbies that I enjoy doing					
10. I try to keep active and involved in things					
11. I can please myself in what I do					
12. I take life as it comes and make the best of things					
13. My health restricts me looking after myself or my home					



Please indicate to what extent the following statement applies to you:

Please tick one for each of the following statements:	1= not at all true of me	2= rather not true of me	3= some part true of me	4= rather true of me	5= very true of me
14. I have high self-esteem					

Below are some statements about your feelings and thoughts. Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks.

Please tick one for each of the following statements:	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
15. I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
16. I've been feeling useful					
17. I've been feeling relaxed					
18. I've been dealing with problems well					
19. I've been thinking clearly					
20. I've been feeling close to other people					
21. I've been able to make up my own mind about things					

## Section 2.

The next questions are about your contact with family and friends and participation in social activities.

On average, how often do you:

Please tick one for each of the following statements:	Never	Less than once a month	About once a fortnight	About once a week	2-3 times per week	Once a day	More than once a day
22. Meet up in person with family members or friends? (Not including people you live with)							
23. Speak on the phone or video or audio call via the internet with family members or friends?							
24. Email or write to family members or friends?							
25. Take part in social activities outside of your home?							

Please tick one for each of the following statements:	Definitely agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Definitely disagree
26. If I needed help, there are people who would be there for me				
27. If I wanted company or to socialise, there are people I can call on				

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