

# Lincolnshire Innovation Project

## Problem

Unpaid carers can often feel alone, unconnected, and sometimes unable to talk about their feelings or struggles. Lincolnshire County Council wants to improve local support for unpaid carers, helping them to connect with others and to improve their wellbeing and resilience.

## Innovation

Lincolnshire decided to use a broad community-based partnership approach to co-design arts and nature sessions including unpaid carers. Sessions are combined with supportive respite care options, using social impact evaluation to assess outcomes.

*"From my perspective, what has made this project successful is the amazing and dedicated partners that have been involved, and the fact that everyone has brought different expertise, resources, contacts and knowledge to the table."*

Sarah Grundy, Senior Historic Environment Officer – Projects, Lincolnshire County Council



## Project overview

Lincolnshire's co-produced programme of activities with unpaid carers focuses on using local nature, arts and heritage to increase wellbeing and social connection.

The Council has an established connection between culture, nature, health and community organisations via their local 'Improve Network', presenting the opportunity for them to collaborate with unpaid carers to design and deliver free monthly activities, ranging from foraging to printmaking, at a local cultural venue. To enable carers to feel comfortable attending these activities, respite care has been co-designed with them in partnership with trusted provider Age UK.

The project also includes a training programme for support workers so they can learn how to deliver culture and nature activities, supported by online resources. This ensures that activities can continue beyond the current project funding and be scalable.

## Key project activity

- A series of co-production sessions with unpaid carers run to understand barriers faced and what activities they would like to be involved with
- University of Lincoln appointed and onboarded as the evaluation partner, using bespoke social impact evaluation measures
- 36 hours of activity sessions delivered to 9 unpaid carers
- Provision of practitioner training so wider benefits are felt across local area
- Online resources (e.g. guided meditations) have been commissioned, accessible for anyone on the 'Visit Lincolnshire' website
- A 'visual process model' in development, so other areas nationally can replicate

*"In terms of the evaluation what we've developed is a bespoke approach that has evolved organically from the co-production focus groups and continued throughout the delivery of the project... One example has been asking participants to write and post letters reflecting on their experiences. This was new for us, but it's proven to be incredibly powerful, offering real nuance, emotional depth, and personal reflection that goes far beyond standard feedback. Alongside this, we've taken an embedded, ethnographic approach by being present at workshops and sessions, not just collecting data at arm's length."*

Dr. Robert Dean, Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts & Health, University of Lincoln





## Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) support

Lincolnshire is keen to share their model as a blueprint for embedding arts and nature into existing care systems, and SCIE is working collaboratively with them to capture this and share with wider networks. The model will be represented as a visual process flow, highlighting key steps taken, partners and stakeholders to collaborate with, and how to embed co-production and social impact measures.

SCIE will also convene with the local authority and the University of Lincoln to explore how sustainability can be embedded effectively into the project, looking at a training package to create additional income.

## Emerging learnings and insights

*"The ARF funding has been so helpful for us for testing out ideas – the flexibility to experiment has been invaluable, and the amount of funding was so helpful – it has made it possible for us to support carers as much as we can to enable them to get involved and break down the barriers. Providing sufficient funding with flexibility, along with a strong partnership across the different sectors, is crucial for innovation and change."*

Sarah Grundy, Senior Historic Environment Officer – Projects, Lincolnshire County Council

- Embedding co-production throughout the entirety of a project helps to ensure success, meeting the needs of those intended
- Social impact evaluation shifts the focus from quantitative outcomes to robust qualitative evaluation, providing evidence to scale and deliver future work that is based on carer experience and lessons learned
- Upskilling practitioners alongside project activity encourages scalability and strengthens the workforce
- Collaborating with experts and taking a partnership approach reaches successful outcomes
- Ringfenced funding allows for testing and makes room for innovation



## Emerging impact

*"I've got my husband back."*

Person whose unpaid carer (their life partner) has been attending sessions

ADASS have reported burnout as the number one reason for carer breakdown. This project can achieve significant impact by preventing carer crisis through early intervention, offering regular and structured respite opportunities that help reduce stress. By fostering a sense of community and providing carers with tools for self-care, the programme enhances wellbeing and resilience, ensuring they feel supported in their roles.

The project also incorporates sustainability by upskilling support workers to continue delivering arts and wellbeing activities, extending benefits beyond the initial participants. Strong cross-sector collaboration between the local authority, cultural institutions and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector is embedding carer wellbeing into broader services, creating a more integrated support system.

Ultimately, by equipping carers with the resources they need to sustain their roles, this initiative will help to reduce demand on health and social care services.



*"Thank you for the project. It's a godsend. It makes a big difference, gives me back time, doing something wonderful."*

Unpaid carer and project participant