



An Asset-Based Approach to Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation

A Case study by Rushey Green Time Bank

Who we are

Rushey Green Time Bank is a local charity that enables people to share time and skills to build happier, healthier communities.

What is a Time Bank?

A Time Bank deals with an alternative currency - time; not money. For every hour a member spends helping someone else, they are entitled to an hour's help in return. It is about neighbours helping neighbours. Help can be in many forms - performing practical tasks, gardening, running errands, language exchange lessons, supporting a community event, etc.

How does it work?

Time banking using an asset-based approach. It looks at what people have rather than do not have. It values people and recognises that everyone has something special to offer others in the form of knowledge, skills and time. Every human being has the capacity to be a contributor. Many people accessing adult social care services will have skills and experience that go unrecognised and unrewarded. As people start to help and get to know people in the Time Bank, they rebuild a sense of trust, and start to feel that they are part of a community/neighbourhood again.

What is also unique in timebanking is that everyone is equal no matter what you give or can offer.

"Time Bank is so special because no matter what people might charge for their skills in the real world, at the Time Bank everyone's time has exactly the same value and that makes it feel special."
Current Time Bank member.

It is distinct from volunteering because timebanking works on the ethos of reciprocity; the expectation is that everyone can give time and receive help in return. It also flexible, acknowledging that people might have more time to give at some stages of their lives, and may need more help at other times.

The New Economics Foundation describes time banking as 'a framework for people who would not normally meet, to come together and learn how to exercise both their powers and responsibilities as caring citizens'. Due to our history, our Time Bank has a particular focus on reducing social isolation.

How Rushey Green Time Bank began

In 1998, Dr Richard Byng at the Rushey Green Group Practice instigated the idea of a Time Bank after hearing about the benefits of timebanking for people's health and wellbeing. In 1999, in partnership with the New Economics Foundation the doctor's surgery set up a pilot Time Bank as an innovative way to promote wellbeing, health, social inclusion and social capital locally. Dr Byng was convinced that increasing patients' contact with other people could help many of his patients who presented themselves with symptoms of depression and isolation. He also hoped to find a framework in which they could feel useful to society and needed by others. In 2003, the three-year pilot project, where the Rushey Green Time Bank had been funded and managed by the New Economics Foundation came to an end. Management of the project was handed over to staff, and a steering group consisting of time bank members and the Rushey Green Group Practice was formed. In 2004, Rushey Green Time Bank became a registered charity.

Where we are now

Since then the organisation has diversified to develop a number of different projects that tackle loneliness and isolation including FoodCycle Lewisham, Wild Cat Wilderness and a current pilot project with Macmillan Cancer Support. Other initiatives we host tackling social isolation are Bring & Fix, DIY and Gardening Clubs, Bellingham Arts and Crafts group, a Members' Action Group, Creative Meet up and Rushey Green Time Bank Choir. We are a partner of Community Connections.

Our Time Bank is a community of diverse people who can find a project or a space where they can spend time and share skills with others as they wish. Whilst the exchange of skills is a core aspect of time banking, our members are often in the Time Bank for the relationships and shared experiences of belonging, and feeling useful and valued in the projects and activities they partake in. By getting involved, our members help shape the ethos and values of the Time Bank.

"I have felt a real sense of community. I have learnt some new knitting techniques. I have met people who would usually fall outside of my normal acquaintances." From 2018 members' survey.

Statistics

We currently have **309** members, with an average of 5-10 new applicants a month. The majority join through word of mouth or recommendations from friends and family. We receive between 3-6 referrals a month from partner organisations like Community Connections, the conduit for adult social care referrals in the borough. They received 1058 referrals from adult social care, health services, self-referrals and partner organisations, supporting 732 through person-centred planning.

Rushey Green Time Bank conducts a bi-annual survey with members to measure the impact of the Time Bank's work and how being part of it affects members' lives, their health and wellbeing. Here are some statistics from our 2018 survey.

Benefits of being involved in the Time Bank



93% of those asked said the Time Bank has given them opportunities to give to others

95% said the Time Bank has enabled them to contribute to their local community

95% having made new friends through the Time Bank

80% had learned new skills through being involved

87% had had their own needs met through being involved

98% agreed the Time bank is a good way of finding out what is happening in the local area



2019 group trip to Hastings

Other ways the Time Bank has helped members:

“Reduce my loneliness”

“I am developing self-confidence little by little”

“I am disabled and was able to receive help to do my garden, which I am unable to do.”

“The Time Bank is a great appropriate community long may it live, Thanks”

“I truly enjoy being part of this Timebank. I have met new friends through it and the staff are all fantastic. It’s a place where I can help others, build friendships and build my confidence up. Long may it last as I would be lost without it. It’s vital to have in the community.”



Lillian's Story

Lillian was referred to Rushey Green Time Bank in 2015 by Community Connections. One of her first interactions was attending the Bellingham Arts & Crafts group. She made a necklace and earring set from beads using a hook, a task which is taxing and requires a steady hand and mind, even more challenging for Lillian who is partially sighted. It was difficult but as a fellow member helped her patiently, she eventually managed to do it independently. When she finished creating the set it was a beautiful memory as she had given it her all and the finished product looked ‘so pretty she couldn’t believe [she] had created them’. This experience gave her the drive and determination to come back and do more things. With the

consistent encouragement from the Time Bank, she has been welcomed and her confidence has grown, which in turn has enabled her to use her new skills with her family and other areas of her life.

Lillian currently volunteers at her local food bank, and helps most weeks on the reception desk at FoodCycle Lewisham, registering and welcoming guests as they come in and encouraging them to join Rushey Green Time Bank. She is also involved with our Ageing in Style project, part of Lewisham’s Creative Ageing Festival.

“It made me very happy to attend the sessions as I was made very welcome and I felt confident in myself to do and make more stuff and believe in myself and trust myself that I am able to conquer anything if I put my mind to it’.

Angela’s Story*

Angela was referred by Community Connections. She wanted help with tasks around the home she can no longer do due to her cancer diagnosis. She has benefitted from support from the ‘Timebanking with Macmillan’ pilot project attending monthly dropins, our craft sessions and the DIY and Gardening Club. In return, Angela has helped out at engagement events on our stall, and has written articles for our newsletter. Here is her story in her own words.

“When you get a cancer diagnosis, it not only changes your life but those who are around you. The ‘c’ word is more common nowadays however we have a way to go until patients get the support they need and treatment. For myself it has been an emotional rollercoaster ride. You are having many thoughts about your future. Not to mention treatment & hospital visits. It is extremely daunting. Resting your life ‘so to speak’ in the hands of the medical professionals but I quickly realised I had to wake up and be your own doctor to yourself. Patient heal thyself.

One size does not fit all. What works for one can be detrimental to another. One of the most important things to remember is to stay calm, be happy and above all be positive. Your mind is your greatest tool. In order to do that enjoy yourself when you can, live your life!

The Timebank has done that for me by running arts & crafts classes and jewellery making classes. You have a chance to be create things and enjoy yourself and meet people. Fellow members have come to my home and done the gardening and household chores that I have been struggling with. They have given me support in the community where other organisations have deemed I was not eligible for.

They are listening to their members and trying to put in place activities and groups that are missing in the borough. It is a great idea and more voluntary organisations should take note. There is not pressure to give back immediately if you are not in a position to. Going back to basics with mutual respect for your fellow members.

Diversifying our Offer

Two projects have evolved from the organisation, both coming from the ideas and vision of Time Bank members.

FoodCycle Lewisham



A Time Bank member at FoodCycle cooking a special Caribbean Meal for our guests to mark National Windrush Day.

FoodCycle Lewisham is a project founded and managed by Rushey Green Time Bank. It is a project ran by volunteers to provide a free, healthy meal every Saturday at Lewisham Irish Community Centre to reduce food poverty and combat social isolation. Volunteers collect surplus food from local supermarkets, cook up a delicious three-course vegetarian meal which they serve and eat with guests, welcoming an average of 45 guests every week. Since the project's inception, they have provided over 1,145 volunteering places, served over 6000 meals and saved over 10,000kg of food from going to waste.

This project brings people from different walks of life and ages together, reducing loneliness and fostering community. Volunteers sit and eat with guests, creating equity between all, making time and space for conversations and connections for local people who would not otherwise meet. 45% of our guests live alone and 68% told us that they often feel lonely. In recent feedback, a guest wrote: ***"I feel that the work that staff/volunteers do is lifesaving/changing for most of us."***

Paul's Story - Guest

Paul has been coming to FoodCycle Lewisham's community meal on a Saturday for about a year. He saw a flyer on a notice board in his local area and decided to give it a try.



Paul suffers from Schizophrenia and depression. Paul doesn't cook for himself as he feels this is a form of self-love and due to his negative self-image he hates eating and cooking for himself. As a result the only thing he will cook for himself is cheese on toast. The bread Paul collects at the FoodCycle meal will last him the week.

When Paul first came to the meal he felt nervous but eager to meet

people. He now comes every Saturday and has made several friends with other regulars who are always found on the same far corner laughing and joking with one another as well as volunteers who also enjoy the weekly banter.

Paul expressed how he feels happier after the meals as the wholesome food and good company cheer him up considerably. He appreciates the friendly staff (volunteers) the polite guests and fellowship provided in this welcoming space at Lewisham Irish Community Centre. He looks forward to Saturdays when he attends two activities in the morning before heading for the lunch.

Wild Cat Wilderness



Wild Cat Wilderness is a community green space in Catford, developed and managed by Rushey Green Time Bank. Time Bank members identified the space and the project officially launched in 2014. It is a space for people of all ages to explore nature and wildlife, learning new outdoor skills, get involved with gardening and conversation and enjoy outdoor activities and events. Volunteers alongside a project coordinator maintain the space.

Over the last year, there has been a total of 2772 volunteer hours provided at Wild Cat Wilderness. Approximately over 1000 individuals have benefited from the project. There has been 117 dedicated volunteer sessions.

The weekly Thursday volunteering sessions attract 4-9 people.

Since 2017, Wild Helpers, a session on Friday mornings aimed at engaging isolated and often vulnerable adults, offering light gardening and conversation activities. This group has blossomed over the past year and welcomes many Time Bank members, and participants finishing their year at Sydenham Gardens.

Lillian's Story



Lillian is 61 lives 10 minutes away from Wild Cat Wilderness. Before she found out about Rushey Green Time Bank and Wild Cart Wilderness she mentioned spending a lot of time on her own, feeling quite isolated and not sure what to do with her time. She lives with a friend but doesn't have any family. Lillian has mild learning difficulties and a number of long-term health conditions including Epilepsy, high-blood pressure and anxiety.

Lillian joined Rushey Green Time Bank in 2017 after stumbling upon an arts and crafts session ran by the Time Bank

in Bellingham. She enjoyed the arts and crafts activities so was introduced Wild Cat Wilderness's Winter Wild programme which happened indoors over the winter months. She particularly enjoyed painting pots and the art side of these sessions. Once spring started and Wild Helpers was launched Lillian started to attend this session on a Friday regularly.

Lillian enjoys the social aspect of Wild Cat, meeting new people, engaging with the public during events, undertaking tasks and activities she never thought she could, and learning about wild food. She was particularly impressed with wild cooking, making nettle soup, pesto and planting seeds. She learned how to grow runner beans and tomatoes in the outdoor garden and also was given some seedlings to take home and grow. Lillian helped out over Open Squares weekend, selling jams and knitted bees for fundraise for the project, and championed Wildcat at People's Day, engaging with over 50 children. She enjoyed feeling valued and useful to the project, and feeling part of something working as a team.

"It's made me feel wanted"..... "I was very nervous when I first come but they brought me out of that nervousness"

Key Learning from Our Work

When referrals to Rushey Green Time Bank have worked well

Through past learning, we have developed a referral form for partners to complete with their clients which offer guidelines when referring someone to our Time Bank to help ensure appropriate referrals. These were adapted from Community Connections referral guidelines:

- *It's recommended this form is completed with your client*
- *Clients cannot require continuous 1:1 support from activity facilitators or Time Bank staff. If they require personal care a personal assistant must be present*
- *Clients are able to travel to Time Bank activities (i.e. can use public transport or have support of a carer or family member or friend to travel to local activities)*
- *There are no safeguarding concerns regarding clients engaging with other vulnerable adults*
- *Clients are not currently misusing drugs or alcohol*
- *If a client has a history of violence please discuss with us directly before referring.*

The Time Bank works best for people who:

- Are able to get to activities independently
- Have a willingness to get involved and give
- Have access to a community facilitator like Community Connections or British Red Cross who can come along to initial group activities for clients that need a little extra support getting started.

We know:

- Having a diversity of opportunities for people to get involved in, depending on their skills and interests, makes it easier to find the right fit for individuals
- A person-centred approach works best, working with individuals where they are at in their journeys. For some people coming along for the company and food at the FoodCycle Lewisham meal will be the level of engagement they need. For others having quiet time outside in nature at Wild Cat Wilderness will be appropriate, or coming along to a regular group activity like knitting or arts and crafts.
- Group activities are very popular as they provide opportunities for people to meet others on a regular basis, share skills and experiences and develop their confidence.

“You get so much from being part of a group with people who have an interest in the same subject area.” Current Time Bank Member

Rushey Green Time Bank is currently conducting an Appreciative Inquiry to understand what gets people involved in our Time Bank and projects and what people value the most about our work. Launched in May this year, we briefed fourteen volunteers and members to collect experiences from our members and volunteers.

Appreciative Inquiry uses an asset-based approach. It can be used as a participative research methodology for organisations (and communities). It works by asking people to talk about their successes. People like talking about their successes because it gives them confidence in their own ability.

Between May and July 2019, our story collectors collected 47 stories. The team of story collectors then analysed the stories to identify the following key themes or ‘magic ingredients’ in engaging and maintaining engagement in our activities and projects.

- **Offering a space to develop ideas and create something new**
- **Working in a team**
- **Opportunities to socialise and meet new people in a relaxed environment**
- **Working together with a shared common purpose towards a relaxed target**
- **Seeing progress towards a goal, seeing the impact of involvement**
- **Feeling part of a community and a sense of belonging to something, being included and forming friendships**
- **Learning and sharing skills and knowledge**
- **Sense of satisfaction and over-coming challenges**
- **Sense of pride and being needed**
- **Positive impact on self; health, well-being, sense of self-worth, confidence. Therapeutic benefits**
- **Giving and receiving**
- **Having fun!**

We are holding a story-sharing event with our members on Saturday 7th September to share what we have learned so far and continue to gather learning as part of this participatory research inquiry.



“It has been a place where you feel free, where you don’t spend money, you can learn so many skills, hear information about your health. A place where we will not be lonely.” Feedback from Member, August 2019

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