



Empowering older
people to live happy,
healthy, independent
and more connected
lives

Engage with Age

Impact Report 2025-26

About Engage with Age

Engage with Age is a Belfast-based charity dedicated to supporting older people to live happy, healthy, independent and connected lives. With over 25 years' experience, it tackles loneliness and social isolation through services such as one-to-one befriending and group activities that foster connection and inclusion. Its health and wellbeing initiatives are shaped by the needs of older people, addressing barriers to accessing support. The organisation also strengthens communities by supporting local groups and forums, ensuring older people's voices influence decisions. Through its work, Engage with Age is helping to build more inclusive, connected and age-friendly communities across Belfast.



Before joining Engage with Age, I had very few social activities and often felt isolated, but the weekly dance group has been a lifeline for me, I've made new friends, built my confidence, and now I genuinely look forward to going every week.

-Engage with Age participant.



Vision Mission and Values

Our Vision

A society where all older people are respected, valued, included, listened to, and actively involved in shaping the world around them.

Our Mission

To empower older people to live happy, healthy, independent and connected lives

Our Values



Older people-led

- Services are shaped by the needs, rights and ambitions of older people .
- Older people are actively involved in leading and influencing work.



Empowerment

- Supporting older people to have their voices heard.
- Enabling them to influence decisions and contribute to society.



Respect

- Treating everyone with dignity and equality
- Making reasonable adjustments to ensure inclusion



Partnership

- Working collaboratively with organisations, communities and stakeholders
- Expanding reach and impact through joint working



Fun

- Promoting enjoyment and meaningful participation in activities
- Recognising the importance of positive, engaging experiences



Forward from Chair

As Chair of Engage with Age, I am pleased to introduce this overview of our work and impact over the past year. Across Belfast, the number of older people continues to grow, bringing both opportunities and challenges. At Engage with Age, we remain committed to ensuring that older people are supported to live happy, healthy, independent and connected lives, and that they feel valued within their communities .

Over the past year, we have continued to build on more than two decades of experience, delivering a wide range of programmes that reduce loneliness and isolation, improve health and wellbeing, and strengthen local groups and forums. Our befriending services and community activities have provided vital connection and support to many older people, while our forums and partnerships have ensured that their voices are heard and represented.

What stands out most is the dedication of our staff, volunteers and partners. Their commitment enables us to reach those who are most isolated, respond to emerging needs, and deliver services that truly make a difference. We are particularly proud of the way our work remains rooted in the experiences of older people themselves, ensuring that everything we do is shaped by their needs, aspirations and feedback.

The development of our Strategic Plan 2026–2029 has given us an important opportunity to reflect on our progress and look ahead.

Our focus remains clear: to reduce loneliness and isolation, improve health and wellbeing, strengthen communities, and empower older people to influence the decisions that affect their lives .

Alongside this, we are committed to strengthening our organisation so that we can continue to grow and sustain our impact.

I would like to sincerely thank our Board of Trustees, staff, volunteers, participants and funders for their continued support and dedication. Together, we are creating stronger, more inclusive communities where older people are respected, connected and able to lead fulfilling lives.

Marianne Skelcher
Chairperson, Engage with Age



A Year in Review

98% of participants reported that activities had a positive impact on their wellbeing.

95% of participants said they felt less isolated after taking part in our activities.



100% of participants would recommend the service to others



Attendances
16,208

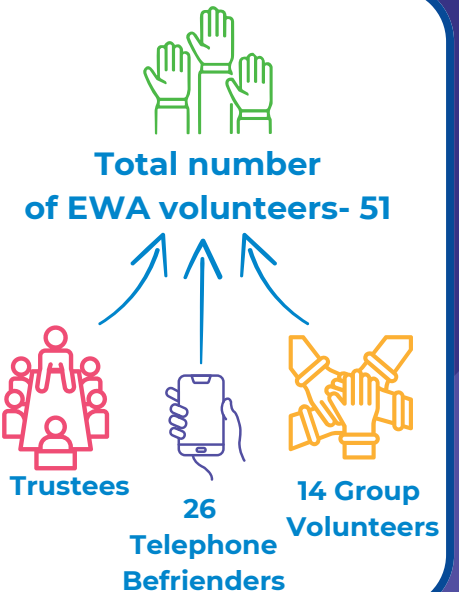


3,120
Telephone
Befriending
calls made

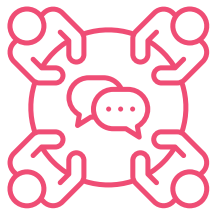


43
Training Sessions

Estimated
upwards of 2
years face to
face social
contact
2025-26



2,549
Attendees



46
Forum Meetings



Facebook reach increased
by 136% and followers
increased by 160.6%



192
Groups



157 attended the
Slipped Disco

TNL PAL Project

The People Addressing Loneliness (PAL) Project supports older people across Belfast to reduce loneliness and isolation through a person-centred blend of telephone befriending, social groups, volunteering and community connection. Funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the project empowers older people to build relationships, improve wellbeing and remain connected to their communities.

Befriending

Items	Number in 25/26
Befriendees	65
Befrienders	25
Age of Befriendees	55-93 years
Training undertaken by Befrienders	EWA Befriending Training, Bereavement Training, Dementia Training and Safeguarding Training.
Reward and Recognition of Volunteers	3 coffee mornings, 3 dinners/lunch, 3 post outs, regular encouragments and support.

“My befriender is lovely, brilliant and very warm. It is a breath of fresh air come into my life, and it leaves you feeling upbeat and full of energy.”
-Befriendee.

Group Activities

Items	Number in 25/26
Groups	8 weekly groups, 1 fortnightly group and 1 monthly group.
Attendees in groups	197 average across a 4 week period.
Volunteers	14
Slipped Disco- reworked to re-establish a sucessful event. relocated to City Centre location with new format of live music, live DJ, competitions and a raffle.	
157 attendees. This was an increase of 131% from last year.	



“Peter is great—the dance group has been a lifeline for me, and I’ve made so many friends.”
-Group participant.



East Belfast Community Development (BHSCT)

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) Support and Advocacy Programme, delivered by Engage with Age, supports older people to remain independent, informed and connected through practical support, advocacy and community-based interventions. The programme works alongside older people, carers and community networks to address issues such as isolation, access to services, wellbeing and social participation.

Through one-to-one support, information and advocacy, the programme helps older people navigate services, access entitlements, build confidence and connect with community supports. It also strengthens peer support and promotes older people's voices through engagement with local forums and community development activity. The service is person-centred and preventative, helping address issues early while supporting dignity, choice and independence.

A key strength of the programme is its holistic approach, combining individual advocacy with wider community engagement to improve wellbeing and reduce vulnerability. Through partnership working with health and community stakeholders, the programme helps older people access support, influence decisions affecting their lives, and remain active participants in their communities.



We love coming here for bowling, it is such a great fun with friends. And we love winning! But at the end of the day it's not about winning, but having fun together!
-Participant at EWA bowling Club.



1,968
Engagements



36
Groups supported



30
Forum Meetings



460
Attendances at Physical Activity Sessions



82
Attendances at Committee Meetings



Attendances at Networking Meetings and
39
324
attendances at Networking Activities



200
Attendances at Long Life Learning Activities



South Belfast (PHA)

The Public Health Agency (PHA) Health Improvement Programme for Isolated Older People, delivered by Engage with Age, supports older people in South Belfast to improve health, wellbeing and social connectedness through a preventative, community development approach. The programme helps reduce loneliness and isolation while enabling older people to stay active, informed and engaged in their communities. Through health promotion activities, social groups, learning opportunities, digital inclusion support and community events, the programme builds confidence, resilience and peer support among participants. It also strengthens older people's voices through support for the South Belfast Lifestyle Forum, enabling participants to influence services and engage with decision makers. Monitoring evidence highlights strong participation, partnership working and volunteer-led initiatives that extend the programme's reach and impact across the community. By promoting positive ageing and reducing health inequalities, the programme supports older people to live healthier, more connected and more independent lives.



Item	Number of sessions
Digital technology sessions	4
South Belfast Lifestyle Forum	11
Funding Training Sessions	3
Representation by EWA at events	16
Physical Activity	46
Out and About	4
Games Equipment Bank	1
Take 5 Programme to improve Mental Health	23

Funded by Belfast City Council's Belfast Health Development Unit/Active Belfast, Engage with Age delivered 13 sessions across East and South Belfast between January and March 2026 including shared meals, nutrition workshops, savvy shopping sessions, and physical activity classes.



The SBLF is an excellent source of information and health & wellbeing activities for an older person.





We conducted a Health and Wellbeing Needs Assessment report, completed (in person using paper surveys) by 121 older people, during a 12 week duration. All surveys were completed independently.

Key Findings from the Report:

- High levels of loneliness and social isolation identified.
- Large proportion of participants aged 75+ and many living alone.
- Strong demand for social groups, outings, exercise, and day trips.
- Significant health, mobility, and safety concerns limiting participation.
- Ongoing difficulties accessing transport and GP/health services.
- Clear digital inclusion needs, with many older people seeking support.

A subsequent Action Plan has been completed and forwarded to the PHA for review. Action plan targets will inform measurable objectives for 2026-27.

The forum continues to be well attended; relevant information continues to be disseminated and regular inputs/activities are organised at each meeting.

At each meeting, up-to-date information relevant to older people is gathered and circulated to group leaders for distribution across South Belfast. Members provide updates from their groups and local areas, and any new issues are passed to the G6 (Greater Belfast Seniors Forum) representatives—three of whom come from the South Belfast Lifestyle Forum—so they can advocate on behalf of members.

G6 representatives report back monthly on progress. SBLF members attend the monthly G6 meetings, including the strategy day at Belfast Castle on 12/03/26.

Alongside representatives from other forums, they contributed to shaping the G6 priorities for the year ahead.



Capacity Building and Forums (G6) BCC

The BCC Capacity Building Grant supports Engage with Age to strengthen older people's groups and forums across Belfast by building leadership, governance and community influence. The Capacity Building Grant Re-profile 2025–26 project focuses on supporting the G6 Greater Belfast Seniors Forum and local older people's groups to become stronger, more sustainable and better equipped to represent the voices of older people.

The grant funds a programme of practical capacity building activities including support for strategic planning and governance within G6, skills development in advocacy and decision-making, peer exchange visits, and tailored workshops for groups at different stages of development. This includes basic capacity building support for groups recovering from the impact of Covid-19, alongside higher-level leadership and sustainability support for more established groups. In total, the programme will engage hundreds of participants through workshops, mentoring and forum development activity.

The grant aims to improve governance, confidence, programme delivery and collaboration between older people's groups and decision makers, enabling older people to influence policy and advocate for their communities. By investing in skills, leadership and peer networks, the programme strengthens community resilience and ensures older people's voices continue to shape an age-friendly Belfast.

G6 Overview

G6 continues to play an active and influential role in representing the views and experiences of older people, engaging widely with key stakeholders and contributing to policy and service development across Belfast.

Over the past year, G6 hosted eight guest speakers from a range of organisations including the Public Health Agency, Commissioner for Older People NI, Northern Ireland Assembly, health development services, the voluntary sector, and the banking sector. These engagements have strengthened connections and ensured members remain informed and involved in shaping services. In particular, the visit from the Commissioner for Older People, Siobhan Casey, marked the beginning of an ongoing and positive relationship.

G6 members also had the opportunity to visit the Lord Mayor's Parlour at Belfast City Hall, where they showcased their work and discussed priorities. Engagement has also extended to the High Sheriff, reflecting the group's growing profile.

The annual strategy day provides an important opportunity to reflect and plan, with key focus areas including transport, health and mental health, and fuel poverty.

G6 has contributed to 16 consultations and surveys during the year, demonstrating strong participation and ensuring the voices of older people are heard in areas such as healthcare access, housing, transport, and anti-poverty initiatives.



86
Groups supported



1,558
Attendees plus 12
volunteers and 146
children at
intergenerational groups.



11
G6 Meetings



Support for G6 includes
Secretarial duties,
arranging and paying for
transport for members,
and meetups and away
days.

Artist in Residence Work

The Artist in residence programme aims to offer people living with dementia a meaningful way to express emotions at a time when their verbal skills are declining. Sessions are always person-centred drawing on conversations within the group and further background information from family or staff. This work has shown profound benefits from enhanced emotional wellbeing and a reduction in anxiety to fostering social connections, a restored sense of identity and of course lots of laughter. This work has highlighted that support workers in day centres often lack ideas and the confidence to engage in art activities with their clients. As an add-on to each project, Art & craft training sessions were undertaken in all centres engaging over fifty Day Care workers and family members. Tips were given on making the arts more dementia friendly as well as easy craft ideas which, with support, the older people living with dementia would enjoy.



2 Projects with **66**
participants living with
dementia



Partner Organisations: Kirkhouse,
Edgecumbe, Cityway Day Centre,
Mount Oriel Day Centre, Carlisle
Terrace, Sydenham Court and
Knockbracken Day Centre



Double Doors

Double Doors is a dementia-friendly community project supported by LFT Charitable Trust, that provides a welcoming, safe, and inclusive space for people living with dementia and their carers. The project aims to reduce social isolation, improve wellbeing, and help people remain connected to their communities through meaningful activities, peer support, and shared experiences.



The programme offers regular dementia-friendly sessions for people living with dementia alongside dedicated wellbeing and support opportunities for carers. It also brings both groups together through inclusive social events, helping to strengthen relationships and create lasting community connections. By promoting understanding and inclusion, Double Doors supports people to live well with dementia while providing valuable respite and support for those who care for them.



It's the knowledge that my husband is going to be well cared for and stimulated for at least an hour is such a massive relief to me. He really enjoys his session but my participation in the other half is a lifesaving session especially the relaxation session where I am transported to another world means so much to me. Meeting other people who are in a similar situation as me is also very important.

-Carer.



Treasurers Report - 2025/26

The financial position of Engage with Age (EWA) for the year ending 31 March 2026 reflects a stable and well-managed organisation operating within a challenging funding environment. Total income for the year was **£390,024**, with expenditure of **£382,132**, resulting in a net surplus of **£7,891**. This has contributed to an overall closing surplus of **£158,087**, strengthening the organisation's financial position going forward.

In line with the EWA Strategy, the organisation has continued to prioritise sustaining existing funding streams while actively pursuing more diverse income opportunities, including fundraising and grant income, to help achieve our vision:

"A society where older people are valued, connected and empowered to live fulfilling lives."

The current funding environment continues to be challenging for the Community and Voluntary sector. However, EWA's continued delivery of existing contracts, alongside a growing commitment to older people and dementia-friendly activities within our community, ensures the organisation maintains its strong reputation for supporting older people across Belfast.

Our principal sources of income remain the Public Health Agency (PHA), Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT), Belfast City Council (BCC), and The National Lottery, and we are extremely grateful for their ongoing support. These partnerships are critical in enabling EWA to deliver vital services that address loneliness, reduce social isolation, and ensure older people have a voice in their communities.

The reported surplus for 2025/26 reflects careful financial stewardship. I would like to sincerely thank the CEO and staff team for their strong financial management, which continues to position the organisation to thrive within a highly competitive funding environment.

EWA remains committed to growing its reserves in line with organisational policy, ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience. The current level of reserves provides a solid foundation, while ongoing efforts will focus on strengthening this position further.

Looking ahead, the organisation is focused on broadening its income base through increased investment in fundraising and income generation. This will enable EWA to adapt to a changing external environment and respond effectively to the growing demand for services from an increasing older population.

	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total 2026	Total 2025
Income resources	361,925	28,099	390,024	368,449
Expenditure	376,177	5,956	382,132	334,463
Surplus / (Deficit) for Year	-14,252	22,143	7,891	33,986

Thank you to our Funders

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all our funders for their continued support throughout the year. Your investment enables Engage with Age to deliver vital services that reduce loneliness and isolation, improve health and wellbeing, and strengthen communities across Belfast.



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 **#engage_with_age**

Thank you for supporting Engage with Age. Together, we can help older people stay connected, valued, and engaged in their communities.

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