

Our Social Lives



Peer research project by
people with learning
disabilities



MAKING SURE A GOOD SOCIAL LIFE IS OPEN TO US ALL

LDE Conference, Birmingham

4th March 2026



How this works

- One hour.
- No breaks.
- Sharing the results.
- What we will do with the results.
- Your questions & comments.



Our Social Lives

Peer research project by
people with learning
disabilities



Paradigm

Pushing boundaries



Before we start, tell us . . .

What is
'a social life'?



We think it includes . . .



- Being with other people
- Connection
- Spontaneity
- Thinking outside the box (not being trapped by the Care Plan)
- Creativity
- Variety
- Expressing yourself and your individuality
- Feeling fulfilled

What was the project about?



The project was called '**Our Social Lives**'

It was run by ARC, Learning Disability England & Paradigm

It was a research project.

What happened in the project



We asked 109 people with learning disabilities about their social lives

This means things like how much they go out and meet friends or family.

We wanted to find out:



- what is good now
- what needs to change so people have friends or can do the things that matter to them.

This is what we found out . . .



Peer research project by
people with learning
disabilities



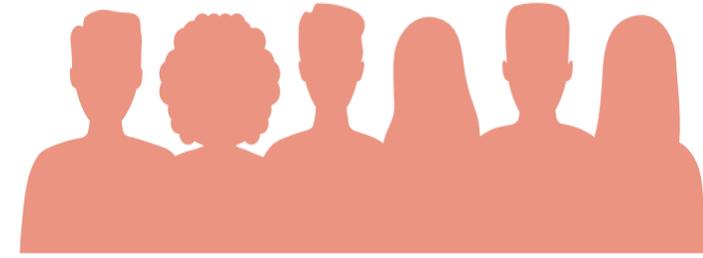
Paradigm

Pushing boundaries



Social Connections

People



Family and friends are the most important people in participants' lives.

Lots of people see their family every day, but **distance and busy schedules** limit contact with extended family and friends.

People talked a lot about being **Lonely**, especially when routines are disrupted or when people lack access to social groups.

Phone calls, video chats, and WhatsApp are common ways to stay connected.

Independence

Choice and Freedom



Most people **make their own decisions** about going out and returning home, though some rely on family or support workers.

Flexibility in changing plans is generally present, but some feel **pressure from others** or struggle with changes due to autism or anxiety.

People living in shared or supported housing often **lack private spaces** or decisions over visitors.

Support Systems

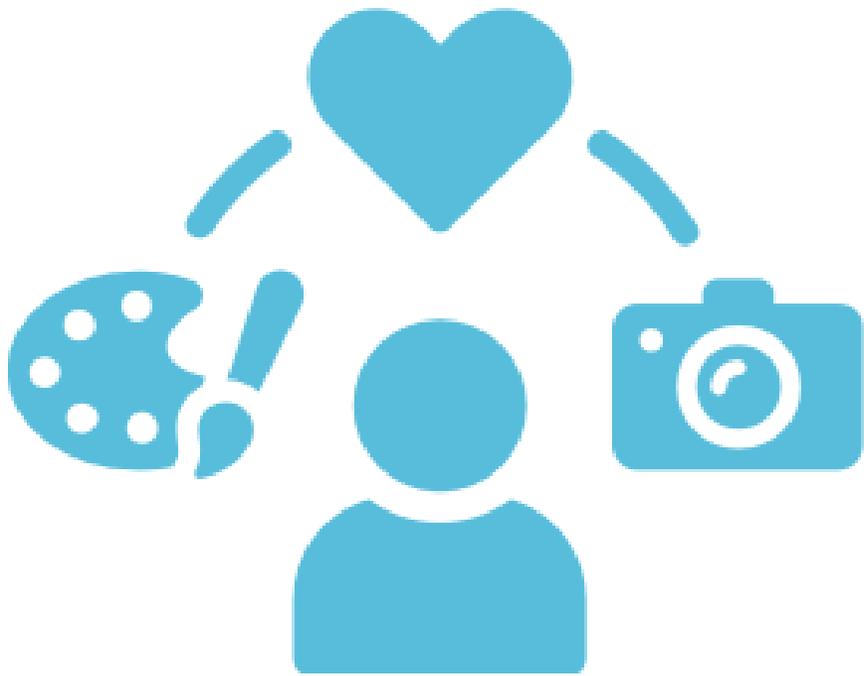


Family and personal assistants (PAs) are the supports for social activities and transport.

Transport barriers (e.g., lack of accessible buses, reliance on lifts) limit participation.

Some people have **no paid support**, and rely on informal networks.

Hobbies and Interests



Popular hobbies include **music, crafting, walking, photography, sports, and gaming.**

Many enjoy **community groups** like discos, theatre, and advocacy sessions.

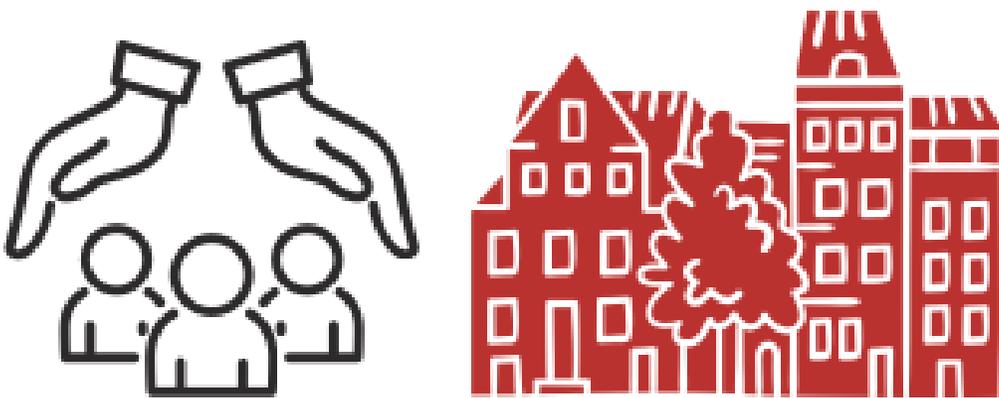
Barriers to participation include lack of money, limited availability of sessions, and physical or emotional fatigue.

Safety

Most people **feel safe** in their communities, especially when accompanied by trusted people.

Concerns include **poor lighting, traffic, and past experiences of bullying or discrimination.**

Suggestions for improvement include **more community officers, better lighting, and inclusive attitudes.**



Barriers to Participation

Common barriers include:

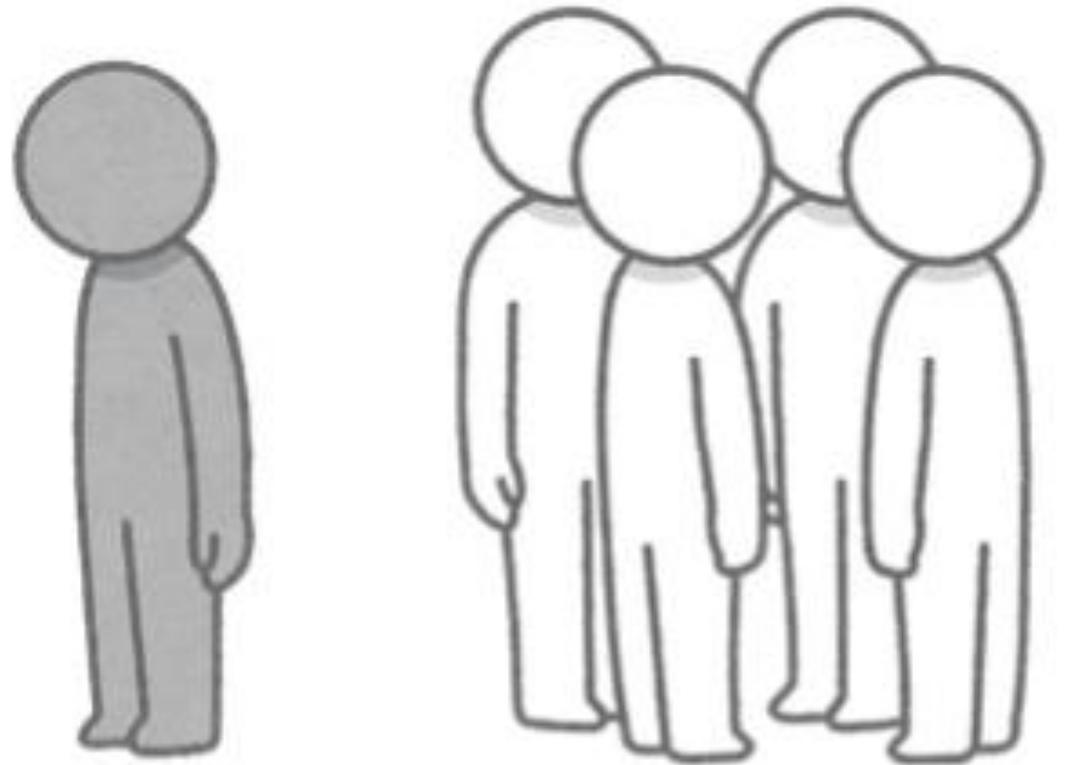
Money and transport

Lack of accessible venues

Limited support hours

Health issues and fatigue

People wanted **more opportunities**, especially in evenings and weekends.



Budgeting

Many rely on **family (especially mums)** or support workers to manage money.

Direct payments and benefits are used to fund activities and support.

Some people have **difficulty understanding money**, and a few mention needing help from **Citizens Advice** or similar services.



What we learned (1)

Co-production needs time and trust.

Working together properly means building good relationships.

Sometimes what people said didn't match how they acted.

This shows it can be hard for some people to say what they really think.

Feelings and needs matter.

Some people talked about bad experiences as if they were not a big deal.

Interviewers did not always notice when someone felt uncomfortable or just agreed to be polite.

Other people in the room can change answers.

If a care worker or family member was there, some people tried to give answers that would make them happy, instead of saying their real thoughts.



What we learned (2)

It was difficult to interview people in supported living or living with family.

These groups were harder to reach.

The interviews were helpful and positive for many people.

Some people felt confident to make changes in their lives.

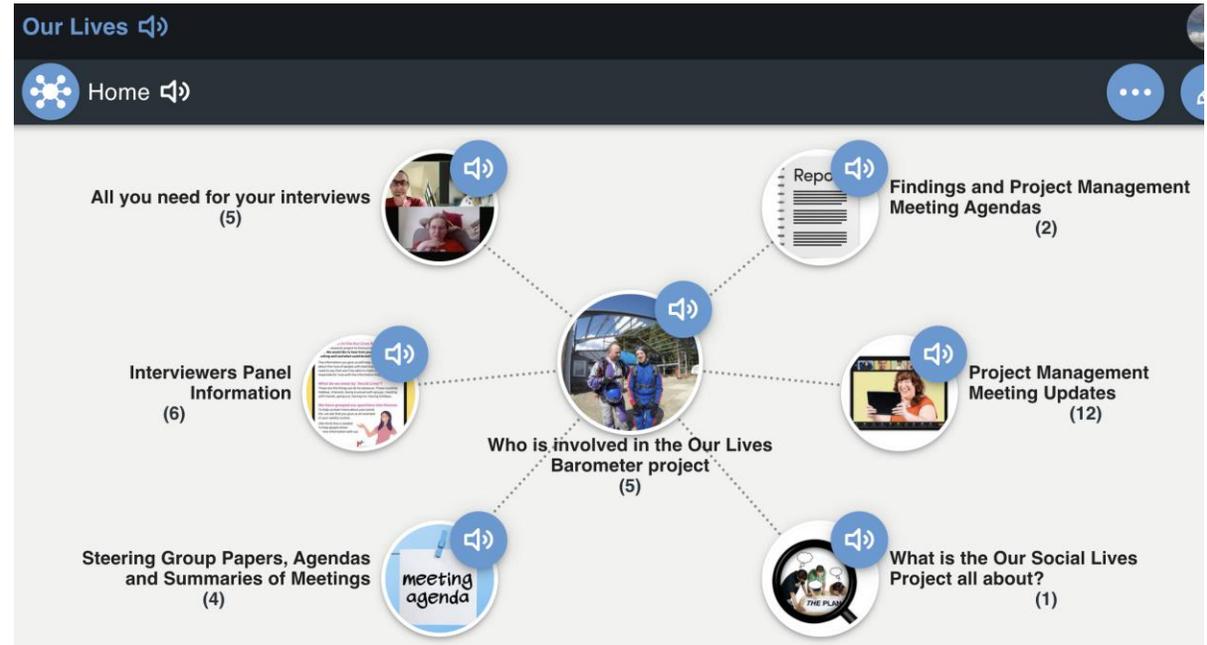
A few even became interviewers themselves.

Supporters also got new ideas about how to help.

People felt listened to.

Most people enjoyed being asked about their lives and liked knowing their voice was important





The project Wiki

Tell us . . .



- 1) What are the barriers to having a good social life?
- 2) What can we do about them?





Your pledges . . .

What can you do to make things better?

Open Air

Do you have any questions, issues, challenges from today?

Did anything surprise you?

Who should we share this with?

What resources can you suggest?



**Thankyou for
your pledges!**

... and thanks
for coming.



Contact Our Lives



Peer research project by
people with learning
disabilities



Rod Landman

rod.landman@arcuk.org.uk

<https://arcengland.org.uk/oursocialives/>