

Learning Bite from  
Age Better in Sheffield  
November 2020



AGE BETTER  
IN SHEFFIELD

Zoom Room.  
Get them online now - a  
learning bite from A Better  
Lives

[www.agebettersheff.co.uk](http://www.agebettersheff.co.uk)





## Context

We all know that Covid19 restrictions have meant that our delivery partners have been faced with a conundrum when it comes to how to support older clients who might be experiencing increased level of isolation due to all face to face activities and groups being cancelled. Many of us from the youngest to the eldest have become increasingly used to seeing friends and family via Zoom or a similar video chat platform. Grandparents interact with their Grandchildren who perform songs and holding up paintings, "Here's one I prepared earlier", friends and colleagues organise quiz nights and film watch parties, while those who are keen not to miss out on romance have moved to virtual dating. We've all learned to navigate a brave new world where photogenic cats steal the limelight in our Zoom meetings and dogs bark to remind their owners that the real purpose they are working from home is to keep them company. Yet we also know that for many, the challenge of using this technology can appear overwhelming and that's assuming you have the hardware (laptop, smart phone, tablet) and the internet connection to make the magic possible in the first place.

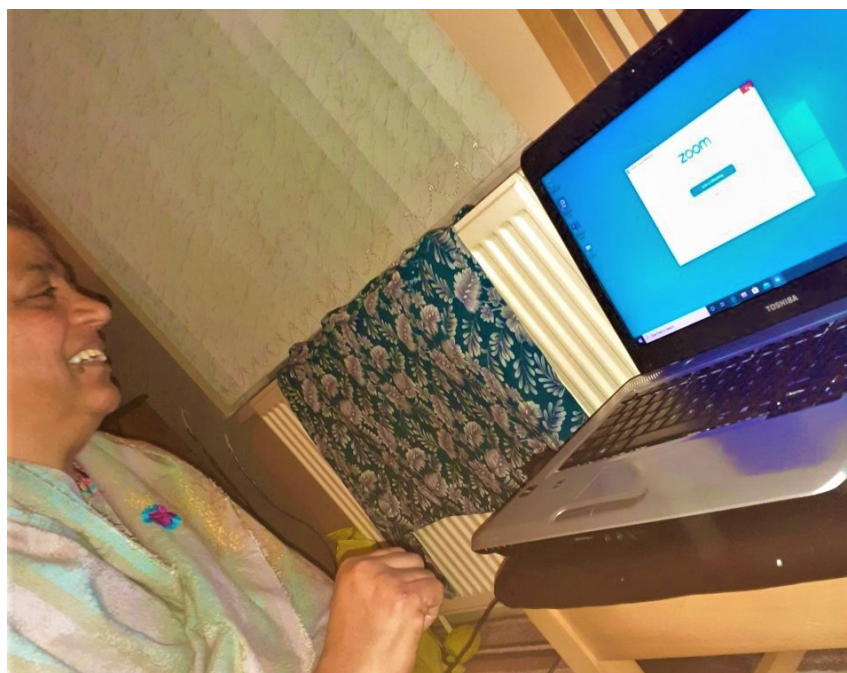
A Better Life is a financial inclusion project situated in the heart of the Burngreave area of Sheffield, an area which is known for its ethnic diversity but also for its economic deprivation. The project is funded by Age Better in Sheffield to look at the relationship between financial exclusion and loneliness and social isolation in people aged 50 or above. As well as offering one to one financial advice and support to negotiate bureaucracy and claim benefits, the project provides a social café. This is a space where people can come together to chat, eat lunch, take part in an exercise class and seek help with understanding bills and other financial matters.



At the start of 2020 Sofeena had launched a new initiative, "Cooking on a Budget" which was just getting underway as the community went into lockdown. Sofeena who herself grew up in Burngreave and is of Pakistani heritage, is uniquely placed to support her community, having a detailed knowledge and understanding of both its strengths and challenges as well as speaking Urdu.

When we entered the first period of lockdown in March this year, Sofeena not only had to think about how to respond within her project delivery role but also how to cope with the challenge of having her 2 school age children at home and sharing the space in which she was trying to work. First thoughts went to what seemed like the immediate priorities: older people who couldn't get out to do shopping or pick up medication, food bank parcel distribution for those experiencing hardship and phone calls to check on the people who normally came to social café and cooking on a budget but it soon became clear that many of the older Asian Women in particular were missing the motivation to exercise. We know Sofeena as someone who is motivated by a deep desire to help people in her community so we weren't that surprised to get this message from her in mid-October:

**“Held my first virtual exercise class! Had to share my achievement this week with you because I've had a passion to do this since start of COVID and finally did it!!!! “**  
**Sofeena Aslam 16/10/2020**



## Now read the rest of her story


"Meet Naheed, she's 62 years of age and Muslim. Before lockdown she'd been attending and supporting the Gap Shap group which runs on Thursdays at St James Church. Gap Shap loosely translated means "chit chat" in Urdu and this group was originally started with funding from the ABiS Start Up project. Azra's role as a volunteer is vital for ensuring everything runs smoothly; she buys all the resources beforehand for the cooking (the women cook and eat lunch together) and she keeps the other women informed of any changes to group.

Naheed really missed the exercise she was getting through the weekly group sessions and walking regularly with her friends. .

She also fell under the shielding group due to her severe asthma and was told by GP to stay at home. She started feeling some aches and pains and generally struggling with not being so mobile. I sent Naheed some links to exercise videos she could do at home and referred her to our health trainer who contacted her regularly but it was clear that what she really needed most was to be exercising with other people.

So it had been my ambition since the start of the first lockdown to get an online exercise group up and running but back in those early days I felt that it was going to be an enormous challenge. Not everyone had the technology and those who did had never used it for anything like this. Before March we had never heard of Zoom and now we were supposed to use it as the answer to everything.



Sofeena and Mariam are inviting you to  
a Virtual Age Better Health and  
Wellbeing Group! 

Every Wednesday, 11am  
Meeting ID: 928 9392 6139  
Passcode: 586129



I felt like I was in danger of becoming one of the “FAB team”, the “folded arms brigade” who say “can’t be done” as a response to a challenge. I realised that what I needed was to tackle this in bite sized pieces and set some smart targets. We needed hardware for the women to access the technology, they had a lack or complete absence of digital skills, they had language barriers and they had low levels of confidence. Actually, the hardest part in the end proved to be getting the equipment and being able to visit the women and give it to them. I got hold of 3 tablets and a laptop and prioritised who needed hardware the most (on their own/shielding/no equipment in house). Having a buddy to support you is really important, even if it is just to talk through the process. Mariam, our SOAR health trainer agreed to do the exercise class so she became my buddy.

Who knew it could be so exciting admitting people into the “room” on your computer? I certainly didn’t envisage that my levels of excitement and satisfaction would be quite so high that day in October when the Asian women’s exercise class went online. My first virtual class was attended by 9 women all aged over 50 years, who either rarely use a laptop/tablet or never used one before. Mariam delivered the exercise class which was light chair based and the session also allowed the women to interact socially and chat among themselves, something they had been missing as much as the exercise.

## Here's what I know worked for us:

- Seize the moment and get people online now, don't wait for the perfect conditions or until everyone is ready.
- Motivation, motivation, motivation; find out why someone would like to get online. They maybe can't see any point in sending an email but an exercise class on Zoom is a different matter.
- Buddies and mentors. Pair people up. Peer support is great for building confidence in both parties. Someone who knows a little can help someone who knows nothing. Everyone benefits.
- Speak to family members to see if they can support with digital skills.
- Cue cards with visual symbols which act as simple quick reminders to people about how to turn on the mic and the video!
- You know the needs of your audience better than anyone so take their needs into account when getting them online. For example. It's better for those who have limited written English skills to use numbers for passwords rather than letters/words.
- Lots of legwork needed at the start to get the equipment and take it to people who need it and sort out internet connectivity. You may need to block out other tasks and focus on this project for the week.
- It takes time to build confidence in digital skills so be prepared to put in the time even after you think you think you've smashed it.

Finally, I've got to say, I'm so proud of myself and the ladies of course. I know this is just the start and I'm already thinking how to get more people in my community online. My next challenge is to work with those who currently don't have any internet connectivity. "

## **Age Better in Sheffield**

152 Rockingham Street

Sheffield

S1 4EB

[www.agebettersheff.co.uk](http://www.agebettersheff.co.uk)