

Learning Bite from  
Age Better in Sheffield  
October 2020



AGE BETTER  
IN SHEFFIELD

Your Best Journeys:  
A Learning Bite in the time  
of Covid19 from Bluebell  
Evans, Project Coordinator  
for Better Journeys

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





## Context

Public transport is often the key to being able to do the things that matter most to you: keeping appointments, getting the shopping done, meeting up with friends, going to the cinema, having a day out or going away on holiday. The team at PWLC who deliver the Better Journeys project are aware of how important it is not to lose confidence in the ability to travel independently. Loss of confidence can result in people not feeling able to leave the house, which in turn leads to them becoming increasingly isolated. Better Journeys developed tools and provided information to assist people aged 50 and over to get the best out of public transport. They also offer support with accessing digital information, completing concessionary fares forms, and provide "Independent Travel Training" for those who need a helping hand to rebuild confidence.

When the project began no one could have envisaged the huge challenge that Covid19 would present in relation to travel and in particular travelling by public transport. Better Journeys like all Age Better in Sheffield projects needed to have a rethink about the fundamental way in which their project worked and how it could continue to benefit older people at risk of loneliness or social isolation during the period of lockdown.

## **Bluebell, project coordinator, embraced the challenge**

When Bluebell Evans started working as the project coordinator in May this year during lockdown, she knew that Better Journeys needed to offer “something inspirational, something a bit different” during a period when it was impossible for people to make the journeys they would normally make.

“We were asking ourselves “What can the project do?”. It needed to be travel themed because after all, our project is about enabling people to get out and travel independently. We realised that many people were focusing on all the things they desperately wanted to get back to doing and that people were also drawing on their store of positive memories to get them through. Out of this came our podcast series “Your Best Journeys” in which we asked people over the age of 50 to recount a journey from the past which had been significant for them.

In the first episode we heard from Ann who told us about her trip to Toronto, Canada, in 1991, describing all the wonderful things she did including visiting the Niagara Falls and playing American bingo. Anne was followed by Graham who reminisced about a holiday in Malta in 2016. He flew out there for a fortnight and bought a weekly bus pass which meant he could travel all over the island. In all I've recorded 10 episodes which have provided our listeners with a variety of travel memories from a Norwegian cruise to a coach trip to Chatsworth House.



Recording them was a challenge for me, especially at the start. I've had to learn how to communicate effectively with the participants by telephone, striking the right tone, building rapport. It's definitely harder doing this when you can't see each other. Generally the conversation will be around half an hour and I'll make the recording using a Dictaphone, while I'm on speaker phone.

It's their story, their "best journey", and I want them to know I'm actively listening, but I don't want to be interrupting with comments. I'm trying to strike a balance. When they pause, are they taking a breath or waiting for a prompt from me? I can of course edit out my interjections, and that's been another new skill I've had to learn. I've never done editing before and I've learnt pretty much through trial and error. I use Audacity software which was recommended as quite easy to use and I could clean up the recording cancelling out coughs and suchlike. Each podcast is about 15 to 20 minutes, but it takes around 3 hours of editing to produce an episode.

I feel that the people who have taken part in the podcasts have had a positive experience. They aren't sad when recounting the past but instead they enjoy telling their story. The podcast gives them a platform and they know someone is listening. One of the highlights for me was a woman in her 80's enthusiastically recounting her exploits dog sledging and visiting an ice bar in Norway. I was impressed that she did those things and I was inspired to hear something that adventurous.



But there have been many inspirational stories told to me, for example Joan who had a car accident, followed by a couple of falls at the age of 78 and spent the last 3 years recovering, recalled a journey with her daughter to a reservoir where she walked unassisted for the first time:

**“When I was really feeling that I was at last starting to recover, before I was walking with a zimmer frame and then a walking stick, I was taken by my daughter to walk along a fairly flat surface by the reservoir, looking at the bluebells and all the beautiful scenery around. That stuck in my mind as being back to normal.”**

Then there was Peter, Sheffield born and bred, who worked at Sheffield train station and recalls meeting people and helping them make their journeys. He has a passion for trains and railways:

**“I like helping people out and telling them all about the platforms and changes of routes. I loved working in the ticket office - I used to memorise all the train times and really enjoyed meeting people. I love my railways and love my trains!”**

For some the lockdown presented new opportunities to enjoy a different kind of travel. Jane who lives in Bamford in the Peak District remembered her 'arduous' commute to Manchester University via the Snake Pass for her job as a research scientist. Having retired those journeys feel very different to her now and are often done for pleasure. She talked about one specific journey, a bike ride with her family along the Snake Pass:

**“For everyone, myself included, life has changed with the Covid restrictions and one of the biggest changes we’ve noticed in the Peak District, was the drop off in traffic. Roads I would normally avoid cycling on became very quiet and I took the opportunity to do a special bike journey over the snake pass.”**

I have really enjoyed doing the podcast series. Not only did it offer older people the opportunity to recall happy memories of significant journeys, but it also highlighted the importance of travel and the pleasure that brings. It helped me to stay motivated throughout lockdown and to work on adapting and developing our plans for active independent travel for people aged 50 and over, focusing on walking and cycling as alternative ways to get people out and about.”

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