

Socially-focused approaches to addressing loneliness & the Community Navigator programme

Dr. Brynmor Lloyd-Evans, Division of Psychiatry, UCL

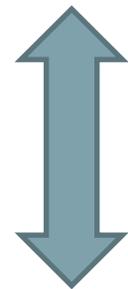
Phrenos “A life less lonely” webinar 23/04/21

Ways of addressing loneliness

Mann et al. 2017 distinguished four types of intervention:

- Changing cognitions
- Social skills training and psychoeducation
- Supported socialisation/ a socially-focused supporter
- Wider community approaches

Individual, psychological approaches



Social and community-wide approaches

Evidence-based interventions for loneliness?

Ma et al. 2019 systematic review	Trials with positive results for subjective social isolation outcomes	SMI populations?
Changing cognitions	2 out of 6	1 trial
Social skills training	1 out of 4	4 trials
Supported socialisation	1 out of 3	3 trials
Wider community approaches	No trials	n/a
Mixed approaches	0 out of 6	1 trial

The often-repeated conclusion that cognitive approaches to addressing loneliness are most promising (Masi 2011, Mann 2017, Ma 2019) is not well supported by evidence.

We know almost nothing about effective ways to address loneliness for people with SMI.

Potential limitations of socially-focused approaches?

- Loneliness and objective social isolation are often only moderately correlated (Coyle 2012)
- Big changes in time spent in social activity do not necessarily improve quality of life or bring health benefits (Fowler 2018)
- A large cognitive element to loneliness is identified in theory and experimental work: e.g. social anxiety, perception of threat (Qualter 2015, Lim 2016)

Potential promise of socially-focused approaches

- Loneliness and objective social isolation are moderately correlated (Coyle 2012)
- Practical barriers to social interaction can be readily addressed, e.g. money, transport, information
- Experienced stigma is strongly associated with loneliness (Alasmawi 2020): finding more accepting communities may help
- Changing social activity/environment can lead to cognitive change

Optimal social approaches for loneliness in mental health: areas of uncertainty

Theoretical
underpinnings?

Who provides
support? Skills
and training?

Duration &
intensity of
support?

Financial
support for
participants?

Stepped or
modular
approaches?

Degree of
integration with
mental health
services?

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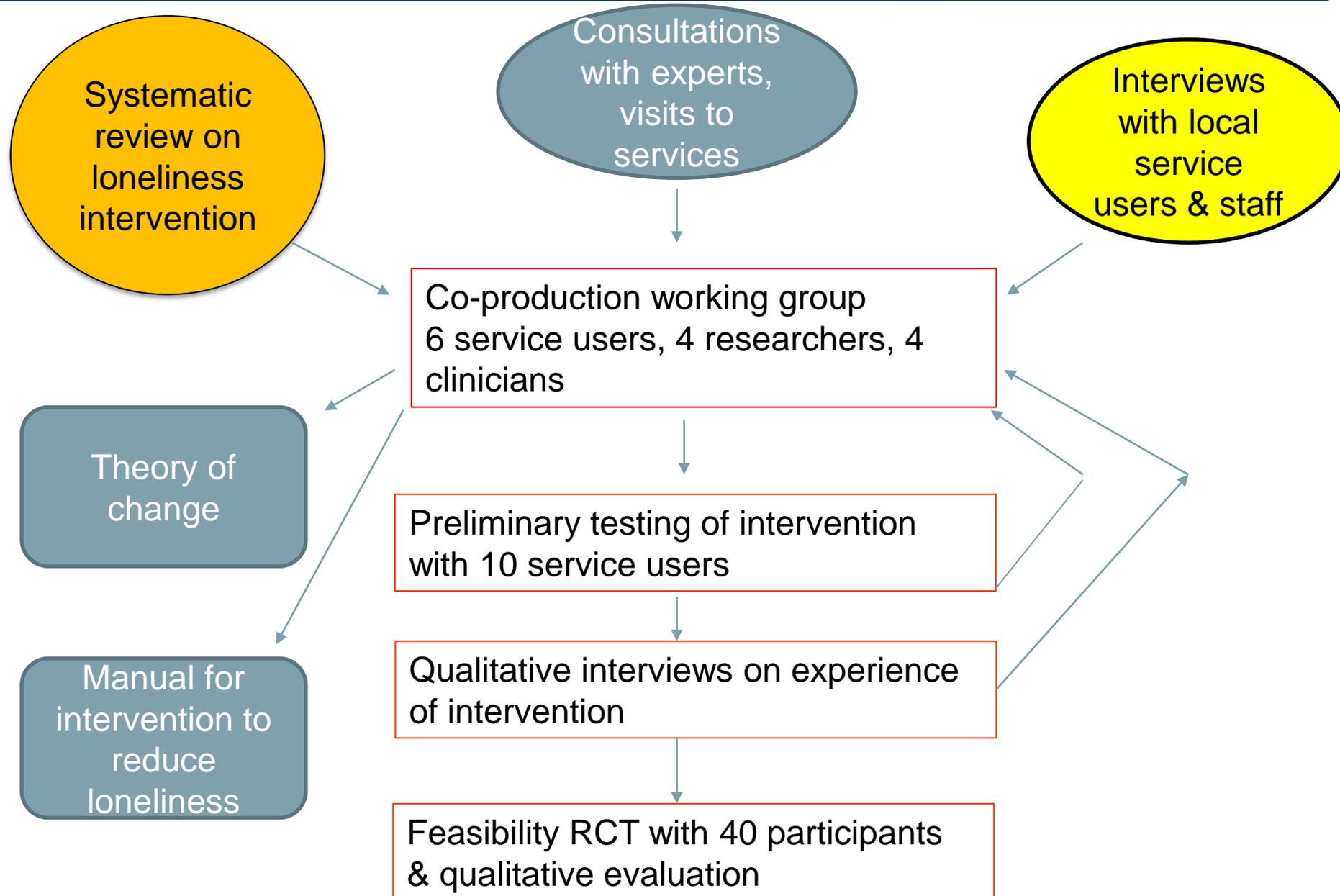
The Community Navigator Study: Results from a feasibility randomised controlled trial of a programme to reduce loneliness for people with complex anxiety or depression

Brynmor Lloyd-Evans^{1*}, **Johanna Frerichs²**, **Theodora Stefanidou¹**, **Jessica Bone¹**, **Vanessa Pinfold²**, **Glyn Lewis¹**, **Jo Billings¹**, **Nick Barber¹**, **Anjie Chhapia¹**, **Beverley Chipp¹**, **Rob Henderson³**, **Prisha Shah¹**, **Anna Shorten³**, **Maria Giorgalli¹**, **James Terhune¹**, **Rebecca Jones¹**, **Sonia Johnson¹**

1 Division of Psychiatry, University College London, London, United Kingdom, **2** The McPin Foundation, London, United Kingdom, **3** Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust, St Pancras Hospital, London, United Kingdom

* b.lloyd-evans@ucl.ac.uk





Community Navigators: 6 months programme (Ten 1:1 sessions + groups)

Social
identity
building

Network
mapping

Goal
Planning

Solution-focused
Breaking goals into
steps

Support
with
goals

Rehearsal
Practical support
Budget
Reframing
Group x 3



Hello, I'm Iman. Through working in a community organisation in Islington in the last few years I have enjoyed learning about how much the local community has to offer. I enjoy climbing, cycling and walking around London and I love cooking (and anything food related).



Hey, I'm Cecilia. I'm a Londoner at heart but love exploring new cities and spending time in the country too. I am an animal lover and an arts and crafts enthusiast! I am also a keen jewellery maker, and recently joined a group that enables me to spend time making jewellery with others.



Hello, my name is Zubair and I'm a Community Navigator. I enjoy most sports, particularly football, and manage a successful youth football team in Camden. My other interests include socialising with friends, travel, politics and television.

Hi, I'm Jane and I have a background in health and social care. I'm interested in ways in which creativity and community resources can enhance psychological and social well-being. I'm currently involved in various art and animal related projects



The Feasibility Trial

Study design

- RCT (n=40) from 2 NHS Trusts in London
- Treatment group (n=30): Community Navigator support + usual care; control group (n=10): usual care
- Outcome measures at baseline and 6-month follow-up
- Qualitative interviews with participants (n=20) and other stakeholders (n=13)

The participants

- **72%** female; **48%** White British; mean age **42**
- **5%** in employment; **2.5%** in a relationship
- Median DJG loneliness score at baseline: **11** (top of the scale)
- Median PHQ-9 depression score at baseline: **21** (severe depression)

Feasibility trial outcomes

Recruitment

61% of screened service users were eligible; **40/65 (62%)** of eligible participants were recruited

Retention

All participants retained in trial; follow up interviews with **35/40 (88%)**

Adherence

24/30 (80%) treatment group participants were treated per protocol; mean attendance 7 sessions; 64% of meetings in the community

Acceptability

Positive qualitative feedback from participants and providers (Frerichs et al. 2020)

Indications of potential efficacy

Moderate effect sizes for depression and anxiety (non significant); superior remission rate for treatment group; reductions in loneliness

Changes in thinking resulting from a socially-focused programme: the Community Navigator project

“It connects back to the person I am as an artist because for so long now I've been defined by mental health problems, which is really unhealthy. Since becoming ill, you're just described as somebody with PTSD or agoraphobia or whatever. You need your identity back, your real identity.”

“It's made me try to see some people differently to what I may initially. . . not to just initially cut everybody off from the start without giving it a chance and seeing whether we would get on.”

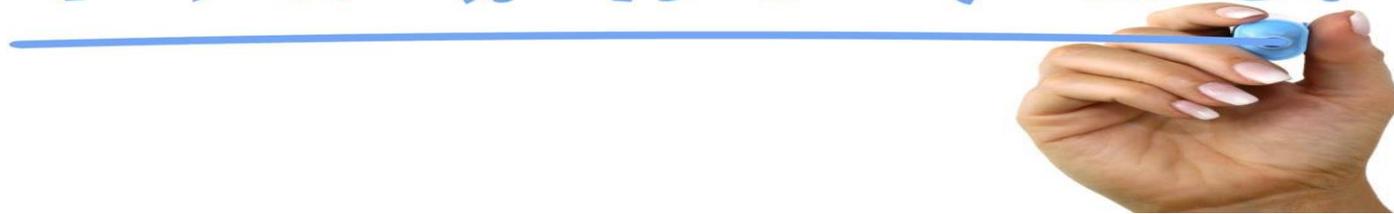
Addressing loneliness in mental health: next steps

- More development and high quality evaluation of social and psychological programmes for loneliness is needed
- Mental health services can't wait for research: need to offer some help with social relationships now
- A full trial of the Community Navigator programme is starting later in 2021

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THANK YOU



Key references:

Ma 2019 – Interventions systematic review <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-019-01800-z>

Lloyd-Evans 2020 – Community Navigators Feasibility Trial results paper
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0233535>

Frerichs 2020 – Community Navigators qualitative paper
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02961-x>