

## **Kirkham Futures**

### **Kirkham High Street Heritage Action Zone**

#### **Evaluating community wellbeing and cohesion, and social prescribing through heritage-based community assets**

#### **Evaluation of pilot programme: January 2022 – May 2022**

#### **Preliminary findings**

##### **Background**

1. Fylde Council, together with Historic England (HE), commissioned a pilot programme of social prescribing (SP) courses and groups, starting in January 2022, as part of Kirkham High Street Heritage Action Zone and Kirkham Futures. The programme was delivered by Phoenix Rising (PR), a regional SP partnership. The programme consisted mainly of a variety of short-term, weekly courses including chair-based yoga, heritage walks, arts and crafts, gardening, and cookery. Although originally planned to end by 31 March 2022, the programme was subsequently extended into the summer of 2022 (and beyond).
2. An evaluation of the pilot programme was undertaken by Toby Williamson and Dr Eva Cyhlarova, two independent consultants with extensive heritage, wellbeing and evaluation expertise. The evaluation was originally planned to complete by April but was also extended and is due to report by the end of June 2022. This document summarises the preliminary findings.
3. The aim of the evaluation has been to collect information about participants attending the programme, changes in their individual and community wellbeing, and the views of a small number of key individuals involved in the delivery of the programme.
4. The methodology involved a questionnaire (available online and in hard copy) and focus group for course participants, and interviews with individuals.
5. Toby and Eva visited Kirkham on the 27 and 28 April. They interviewed two individuals from stakeholder organisations and conducted a focus group with six participants (five women and one man) from courses and groups that were part of the programme. Since their visit they have carried out a further three online interviews with facilitators involved in delivering the programme and another stakeholder.
6. The evaluation will report on the numbers of participants on each course, some demographic information, continuity of attendance, etc. (currently awaiting this data from PR).

7. The evaluation has included an online survey aimed at identifying changes in course participants' wellbeing and sense of community wellbeing. 17 people responded to the survey at the beginning of courses that were part of the programme and 11 at the end of their course. There was only one male respondent. The age range was from 54 to 80 and 15 reported as being White.

### **Preliminary headline findings from the monitoring data, survey and interviews**

#### ***Aims, participants, impact***

8. There was a good understanding and broad consensus about the aims of the programme involving both health and social gains. Most people felt it had met these aims but some respondents felt it was still developing and taking time to embed itself.
9. Most participants were older, white women experiencing health issues, bereavement and loneliness. Views were expressed by course participants and others, that the programme needed to reach out to other groups e.g. men; parents with children; a family member accompanying an older participant; working people e.g. by weekend and evening, intergenerational sessions. One course participant said, *"it is all very well to us having something, but there's very little in Kirkham for younger people involved, and if we want Kirkham to become alive again, we need the younger generation to come and stay in Kirkham"*
10. Course participants (echoed by facilitators) all described health, wellbeing and social gains, including new friendships and learning new things e.g. about the town's heritage, though respondent numbers to the survey were too low to confirm this. Responses included:

*"My physical health has benefited, and my mind as well, I think because I was on my own for so long, because of Covid and my husband dying, my mind wasn't being used, and the ladies that I talk to have similar minds to me and we can have a conversation which is great"*

*"The group has developed and widened my friendship group, it's super"*

*"Everybody's so friendly and will help each other, joining in, and you see people in Kirkham and think 'I know that lady' [from the course]"*

*"The feedback was really lovely, they [participants] went to the groups, were lonely and isolated, maybe suffered bereavement, and struggling generally, and they found a group of people who were in the same situation. Phoenix Rising encouraged them to get together and meet up"*

11. There was a wide consensus that the programme had enabled participants to make new connections and relationships, which were developed and sustained beyond the sessions and therefore building community e.g. new community group set up by participants, Friends of Kirkham Library from the gardening group, a WhatsApp and coffee group from the yoga / heritage walking group. One course participant said, *"this yoga on a Friday has been a godsend for exercise and social interaction, and learning more about Kirkham I didn't know, and also for friendship. It's led on to meeting the ladies for coffee, our little circle group. We've become friends haven't we?...We are going to the cinema, so 'baby steps' have led to things"*

#### **Course organisation, partnerships, communication and promotion**

12. PR, the courses and the facilitators all received praise from course participants and stakeholders, and came in for no criticism. Examples were given of the programme building good relationships with other community organisations and groups e.g. the library, Grow Kirkham CIC, and the Kirkham archive at St Michael's Church. One comment was, *"they [PR] have been excellent. The practitioners have been absolutely lovely...They've been professional, excellent with the people who've come to the groups and they've always been really good at communication. We usually know exactly what's happening so it's been great."*
13. Considerable thought and careful planning had gone into the programme by PR and the facilitators, using their experience from running similar programmes elsewhere in the region, and included taking account of the need to engage sensitively and at the right speed with people in Kirkham before starting the programme; *"in small communities if you don't get it right, if you get it right the legacy sticks a bit longer, so it's about gentle and sensitive negotiations and understanding. We are very conscious that while we are all from Lancashire, but not from Kirkham, and the place belongs to the people within it, so let's not step on any toes, so let's work 'with' and 'for' rather than 'to'".*
14. Finding suitable venues at suitable times was a challenge (PR had hoped to have weekend sessions but couldn't find appropriate venues). Some groups were limited by space e.g. cooking, gardening. Ensuring some groups were pitched at the right level was a challenge e.g. groups involving physical activity.
15. Participants, PR and local stakeholders all agreed that promoting and communicating about the programme has been difficult. Challenges included: raising awareness of the programme and what the courses involved; the requirement for weekly booking which could only be done online; no dedicated phone number for the courses; facilitators needing to be able to communicate with participants in order to let them know about sessions coming up; understanding how the programme fitted with other activities that was part of the wider Kirkham Futures project and ensuring communication about this was co-ordinated and up to date. One comment was, *"people want to phone up and talk to someone, ask what it is about, how they'll fit in, there is no admin for that"*. Another comment was, *"some of them [course participant's] certainly do find technology a challenge and most of them have been able to find help from their relatives, someone else has booked them on, but that has been*

*something we've had to work quite hard to break down...It's less of a challenge now because everyone is more into a routine and knows how to do it but I think initially...the system is a bit more of a challenge when you are setting yourself up as a customer".*

16. Some course participants felt that the names of the courses were misleading and might put people off e.g. people with mobility issues not realising that the heritage walks and gardening group were accessible. One participant said, *"unfortunately the little description didn't really sum up what it was about"* and another, *"I have mobility issues, I can't bend, my hands don't work. I had not gone to gardening because of that, I thought I am taking up a space when I could not do it, I didn't realise"*.
17. Although course participants understood the benefits of online booking all of them felt this could be improved and needed to be more inclusive of people who weren't able to go online e.g. assistance with booking. One participant said, *"it's very difficult for people of our age group who don't go online to book these things, especially if you have to book it very week. I am thinking of a lady, some friend booked her on, but she hasn't come back...she had lived in Kirkham all her life, but I know she's not online and it's very difficult for her to be online"*
18. Respondents expressed a need for a dedicated phonenumber staffed by someone who could answer questions about the groups, encourage people to attend, book people onto courses; up to date website (the Kirkham Futures website appears not to contain information about the courses and the link to PR's website is difficult to find. PR does not come up on Google if searching for e.g. 'activities in Kirkham')? One course participant said, *"I agree with lack of communication, a failing, which is sad, people haven't known about these courses. The website is difficult to book a course, it doesn't come up on Google search, you have to put in the actual address"*.
19. Most participants found out about it through word of mouth or seeing a poster or advert. At least 23 people were referred to the programme via social prescribing but not all attended. Only one survey respondent reported being referred to the courses by their GP. Fear was suggested as one possible reason: perhaps the fear of trying something new or doing something somebody thought they had no talent in e.g. art (though PR described how they worked hard to reassure people and try and dispel these ideas). One participant said, *"you have got to be brave to come into these new things"*. There was low awareness of SP among participants. One course facilitator said that participants *"don't know what social prescribing is"*. One lady in the cookery session said, *"I wanted to come but I didn't know if I was ill enough"*.
20. One person who had referred people to the programme said, *"I really hope it continues; it is an absolute goldmine for me. My job is 'planting seeds', getting people to follow and do things, if you haven't got any seeds to plant, you can't do anything"*.

#### **Sustainability, evaluation, suggestions for improvement**

21. Sustainability and continuity of the programme posed challenges both for the organisers and participants, though some of the groups connected with the programme could help with

this: *“People get used to going, one lady said she lives for Wednesday mornings [when the course took place], she already starting to panic about what’s going to happen. I guess the Grow Kirkham independent community group will be able to continue something, they can go from my sessions into there”.*

22. Participants and organisers questioned how inclusive the evaluation was given that participants had been contacted online and the reluctance of some people to complete surveys and questionnaires. The idea of co-designing the next evaluation was popular.
  
23. Some suggestions for improvements included; attracting more diversity in terms of courses offered and people attending (especially men); courses offered at evenings and weekends if suitable venues are available; a dedicated phonenumber / person who could answer questions about the courses, assist with online bookings, communicate with participants, etc; ensuring communication across all the Kirkham Futures programmes and activities was up to date, coordinated and information was shared across organisations, websites, etc, co-design and co-production of future evaluations;

*Toby Williamson & Dr Eva Cyhlarova  
June 2022*