

# Tailoring cultural offers with and for diverse older users of social prescribing: An overview of findings from a realist evaluation





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**Disclaimer:** This project was funded by a grant from UK Research and Innovation (MR/Y010000/1). The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the funder or the authors' host institution.

**Acknowledgements:** We are extremely grateful for the contribution of the study's Patient-Public Involvement (PPI) group and advisory group for supporting us with this evaluation. We would like to thank the organisations and individuals who took part in data collection. In addition, we appreciate the involvement of those who attended knowledge exchange and dissemination events associated with the project.

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# Executive summary

## Background

Social prescribing connects people to non-medical forms of support that can enhance health and well-being. Cultural engagement, such as arts, heritage, performance, and creative activities, can play a valuable role, particularly for older adults who may experience loneliness, reduced mobility, or economic insecurity.

However, participation in cultural provision remains uneven. Older people from global majority communities are less likely to engage with cultural organisations or be referred through social prescribing pathways. Barriers include experiences of discrimination, the perception that cultural institutions are “not for them,” and practical issues such as travel, cost, and accessibility.

The Tailoring Cultural Offers with and for Diverse Older Users of Social Prescribing (TOUS) study, funded by UK Research and Innovation and led by the University of Oxford, explored how cultural offers can be tailored to better support the well-being of these communities.

## About the study

The study examined what kind of tailoring is needed, when, and for whom, to optimise engagement. It combined several strands of work:

- A scoping review of existing literature
- A mapping exercise with 46 cultural organisations from across the United Kingdom
- Key informant interviews with 11 cultural providers
- Focused ethnographies in six cultural settings based in England and Wales, which involved observations and 17 qualitative interviews
- Storytelling with 27 people – older participants from global majority communities and cultural sector providers

Together, these methods produced a refined ‘programme theory’ – a model of how and why tailored cultural offers work.





# Key findings

## Facilitating entry

Older people (aged 60+ years in this study) are encouraged to engage with cultural provision when three conditions align:

- **Broker** – a trusted individual (e.g. community leader, social prescribing link worker, neighbour, family member) introduces and encourages participation;
- **Hook** – the activity is attractive and feels personally relevant or familiar;
- **Opportunity** – the timing and accessibility are right, with low financial or emotional risk.

## Sustaining engagement

Once individuals step into a cultural space, continued participation is enhanced by:

- **Safety and trust** – feeling welcome and represented;
- **Power sharing** – opportunities to shape and co-produce what is offered;
- **Meaning** – activities that connect to heritage, identity, and lived experience.

## Benefits

Engagement can generate benefits at multiple levels, including:

Type	Description	Examples
Immediate	Enjoyment Distraction Emotional release	Pride in performing or creating something new
Intermediate	Belonging Friendship Stability	Cultural venues become familiar, trusted spaces
Transformational (at a personal or societal level)	Increased confidence Identity Redefinition Visibility	Challenging stereotypes through performance





## Implications for policy and practice

- **Create enabling cultural places:** Invest in welcoming, inclusive, and culturally attuned environments – from décor (e.g. wall displays) and materials to food and music.
- **Support community brokers:** Put resources into connections with trusted intermediaries who can act as a bridge between communities and cultural institutions.
- **Embed co-production:** Involve older adults in planning and evaluation to ensure authenticity and relevance of cultural provision.
- **Sustain engagement:** Build systems and programmes that retain participants and maintain positive change over time.
- **Build workforce capacity:** Train staff and volunteers in cultural competence and inclusive facilitation.
- **Monitor inclusivity:** Track who participates and who does not, to identify and address inequalities.

## Conclusion

The TOUS study demonstrates that with intentional design, sensitivity, and shared power, cultural organisations can successfully engage older people from global majority communities. When individuals are supported to enter, feel safe, and shape what happens, rewards can be profound for participants, communities, and the wider cultural sector.

## Next Steps

The research team has developed an interactive tool to help cultural organisations assess and strengthen inclusive and sustained engagement. This will translate the TOUS programme theory into a practical, evidence-based resource that supports reflection and improvement. Future research will test whether this tool can be applied to other underrepresented groups. The tool is available to access from the study's [webpage](#).





## Plain language summary

Many older people feel lonely or worried. Some have health problems that medicine cannot fix. Social prescribing could help by connecting people to local groups and activities that make life better.

Cultural activities – like music, theatre, crafts, museums – can bring joy, a sense of purpose and friendship. But some older people from global majority (or ethnic minority) communities do not join. They may feel that cultural places are not for them, are difficult to get to, or are too costly.

We conducted research (which we called 'The TOUS study') to look at how to make cultural activities more open and welcoming. The study was run by researchers from the University of Oxford.

We visited six cultural groups and organisations in England and Wales. We also spoke to a range of older people and staff or volunteers providing cultural activities.

We found that people were more likely to take part in cultural activities when:

- A trusted person invited them
- There was something on offer that sparked their curiosity or interest
- The time and place felt right

People stayed involved when they felt:

- Safe – that they were not going to be treated unfairly or be misjudged
- Welcome – that their faith, language and traditions were respected
- Valued – feeling listened to and knowing that their ideas made a difference to what cultural activities were provided

Activities that linked to their culture or memories helped older people from global majority groups to feel they belonged. Joining in was enjoyable. They made friends, gained confidence, and were proud of what they could do. It also helped them to feel they could try other artistic or cultural things too.

The study shows that when cultural spaces are open, welcoming and inclusive, they can help older people from all backgrounds to feel well and connected.







# Full Report

## Social prescribing and cultural provision

Patients often go to see their GP with 'non-medical' problems that cannot be addressed with tablets or biomedical intervention. For example, loneliness may lower their mood, financial worries may cause stress, or work-related anxiety may mean they cannot sleep. Social prescribing<sup>1</sup> recognises that such 'non-medical' issues can shape how people feel physically and psychologically, can affect their health behaviours (e.g. diet and physical activity), and can prevent them from looking after existing medical conditions. This is particularly relevant for older people who might experience loneliness as they age, especially if they have health conditions affecting their mobility,<sup>2-3</sup> and/or if they are living on a lower income.<sup>4</sup> They are also at risk of developing more than one long term health condition as they age,<sup>5</sup> which can be compounded by social and economic factors.<sup>6-9</sup>

Link workers are employed to facilitate the delivery of social prescribing. They work with individuals who are experiencing non-medical issues affecting their health and well-being. Link workers identify people's needs and preferences, connecting them to non-medical sources of support (groups, services, organisations), generally in the voluntary-community sector. Social prescribing is reported to bring positive benefits to older people (e.g. through social participation or physical activity).<sup>10</sup>

Link workers might connect people to a 'cultural offer' as part of social prescribing;<sup>11</sup> an activity, group or event provided by a cultural organisation. Cultural activities are wide ranging and experienced across populations as an outlet for fun, personal expression, communing with others and cognitive stimulation.<sup>12-14</sup> Evaluations of cultural offers suggest they are enjoyed by and benefit older people as a means of supporting their broader health and well-being.<sup>15-16</sup>



## Our previous research on cultural provision for older people

In autumn 2021, we completed a study funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) (AH/V008781/1) that addressed the question:

***Cultural institutions as social prescribing venues to improve older people's [aged 60+ years] well-being in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: What works, for whom, in what circumstances and why?*** For this research,<sup>17</sup> we developed a programme theory from the data we collected; a programme theory is a proposition about how an intervention (e.g. cultural offers as part of social prescribing) is thought to work, under what conditions, for whom.<sup>18</sup> The programme theory from this earlier research highlighted that cultural offers can support older people's well-being in four broad ways:<sup>17</sup>

- Immersion – being taken away (distracted), even for a short time, from problems in life.
- Psychological holding – feeling safe and valued in a space that is warm and welcoming.
- Connection – developing relationships and support through meeting others.
- Transformation – personal growth by learning new skills and gaining confidence.

For this research, we conducted a literature review, qualitative interviews with 28 older people and 25 cultural providers, and a questionnaire was completed by 148 link workers. It suggested several things to consider when providing social prescribing cultural offers for older people, including:

- Messaging – how link workers communicate the idea of engaging with a cultural offer to older people they are supporting, to make it seem like a viable and attractive option.
- Matching – how link workers find out what is available in the cultural sector to refer people to, and understanding what older adults would be receptive to trying and how they could benefit.
- Monitoring – assessing cultural offers, using data to improve what is delivered.

Details of this research can be found on the [study's webpage](#). Most individuals taking part in this earlier research self-identified as White British. Therefore, we conducted a follow-up study that we called TOUS (Tailoring cultural offers with and for diverse older users of social prescribing).







## The TOUS study

Evidence suggests that social prescribing may be less used by people from ethnic minority groups.<sup>19</sup> To an extent, this may be because available community support is not felt to be applicable to individuals from diverse backgrounds<sup>20</sup> or does not cater to specific cultural identities and needs.<sup>21</sup> In addition, our previous research suggested that link workers may have pre-conceived notions about who would be receptive to cultural offers; this shaped to whom they proposed such connections.

The TOUS study addressed the question: ***What tailoring is needed, how, when and for whom, to optimise cultural offers as part of social prescribing for older people (aged 60+) from global majority communities?\**** It aimed to develop evidence-based recommendations about producing accessible, acceptable and appropriate cultural offers to support the well-being of these groups. The methodology for this study was designed to test and refine the programme theory from our previous study on tailoring cultural offers for older people.<sup>17</sup> Approval was granted by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (ref: R90223/RE001).

We considered the following broad areas as cultural offers in the TOUS study: a) heritage (e.g. museums, historical venues, curated green spaces); b) performance (e.g. music, theatre, dance); c) visual arts (e.g. photography, crafts, fine art); d) books/literature (e.g. creative writing sessions, reading groups); e) audio-visual (e.g. film clubs). Exploratory conversations with organisations offering activities to our target population, during early stages of the TOUS study, led us to expand our definition to include: f) cultural and religious events such as festivals that might encompass a range of elements – dancing, singing and food.

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\* We are aware of sensitivities associated with terminology and consulted widely on language to use in the TOUS study. We are using 'global majority' as a term preferred by cultural sector organisations in this project. We are aware that this may not be as familiar as 'ethnic minority' or 'minority ethnic'.



## Components of the TOUS study

The following components were conducted as part of the TOUS study; findings from each component helped us to create the final programme theory, which is presented as a model in Figure 1.

**Scoping review:** The initial phase of the TOUS study comprised a scoping review of the existing literature. This involved mapping what had been written already about tailoring cultural offers for older people (aged 60+ years) from global majority communities within the United Kingdom (UK). We searched for relevant literature on the following databases: Medline, CINAHL, Social Sciences Citation Index and Arts and Humanities, Citation Index (Web of Science Core Collection), Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, PsycINFO. We also searched on Google. We only found six documents that met the review's inclusion criteria. They highlighted that attending cultural activities or spaces with others could reduce concerns about belonging. In addition, provision of familiar food could help make people feel welcomed. Findings from the review are reported elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

**Mapping exercise:** Alongside the review, we conducted a mapping exercise; this involved sending an online questionnaire to cultural sector providers. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the nature and geographical distribution of current cultural provision for older adults from global majority communities across the four nations of the UK. It also sought to gather insights into how cultural organisations adapt or tailor their programmes to better meet the needs of these communities. We had 46 responses to the mapping questionnaire. An overview of this piece of work has been reported elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

**Key informant interviews:** We interviewed a subset of respondents (n=11) to the mapping exercise questionnaire. They were cultural sector providers not specifically engaging with older people from global majority communities who provided insights into the challenges and opportunities of trying to do so. These interviews were conducted between March-June 2024. Job roles of these key informants were related to learning and engagement (n=5), being an artist or facilitator (n=3), or well-being manager/officer (n=3).

**Focused ethnographies:** Data gathered through the mapping exercise allowed us to select six cultural organisations for focused ethnographies (our case sites). They were located in different parts of the UK and included theatres, libraries, a museum, a day centre for older people and a women's centre. These organisations were engaging with older people from global majority communities. Data collection at these organisations, undertaken between May 2024 and March 2025, included:

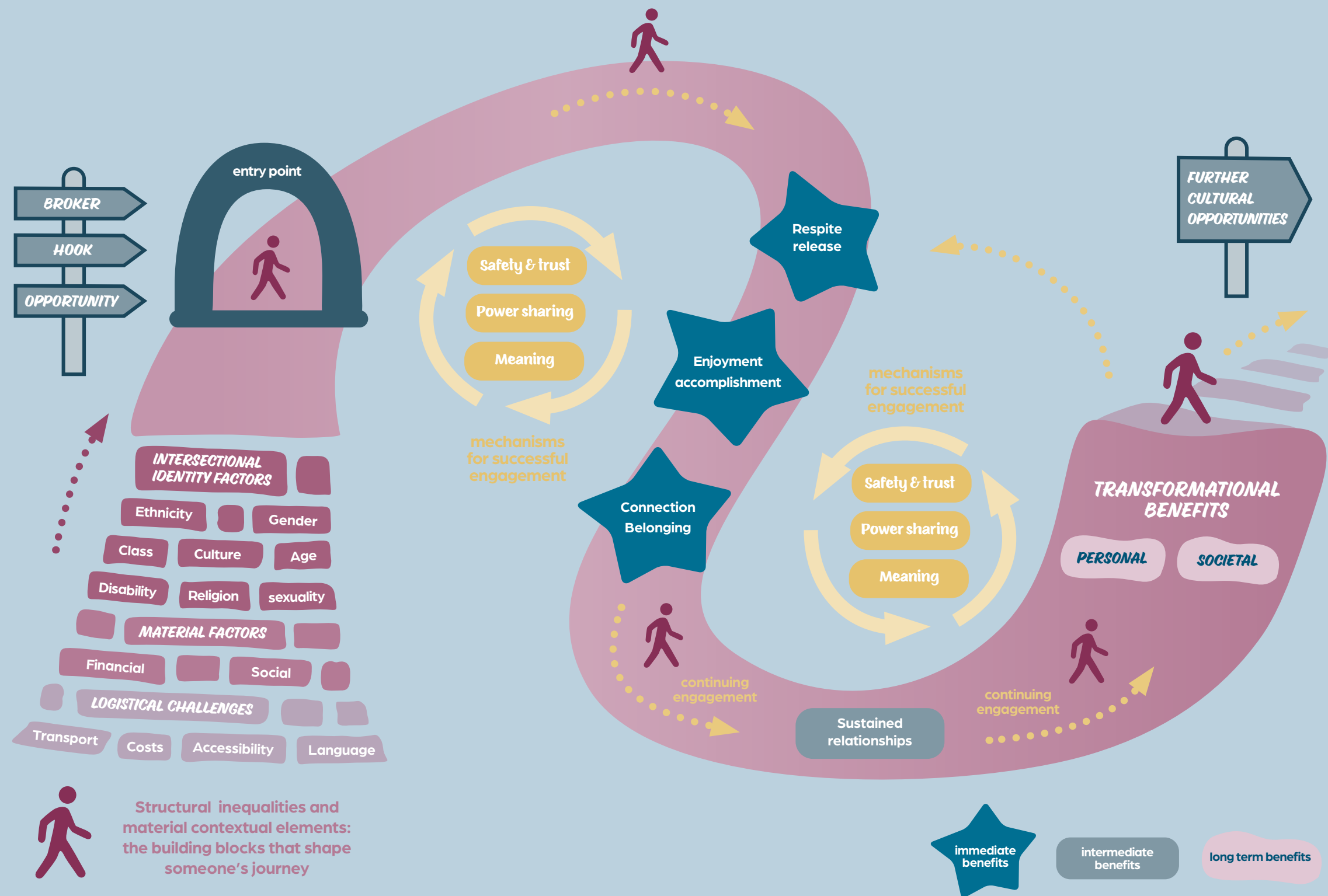
- Participant observation – researchers spending up to five days at an organisation, watching what took place whilst engaging in activities (e.g. knitting, singing, dancing) and making written notes.
- Interviews – conducted with cultural providers (n=17), which were audio-recorded and transcribed.
- Storytelling – this involved talking to older people from global majority communities engaging in cultural activities, and those providing such activities – they were our Storytellers. They talked to a researcher about the most significant changes they experienced as a consequence of engaging in or delivering the cultural provision. Each story was condensed into a two-page summary that retained the words of the Storytellers. These summaries were shared with key stakeholders (including funders and providers of cultural activities). They came together at an in-person meeting to discuss what the stories meant in terms of how to tailor cultural provision for older people from global majority communities. We carried out Storytelling at three of the case sites, collecting stories from 27 Storytellers in total.



# Programme theory developed from the TOUS study

We used data from the TOUS study to create a programme theory; it provides an evidence-based explanation of how tailoring cultural provision for older people from global majority communities works, for whom, under what conditions and why. We organised the TOUS programme theory around the following four categories: a) Underlying elements; b) Entry; c) Engagement; d) Benefits. Each category consists of concepts that we outline below. They are captured in Figure 1, which provides an overview of the TOUS programme theory.

Figure 1





### Underlying elements – Life stories and experiences shaping cultural access:

Older people's stories showed how past experiences of discrimination could create anxiety about entering an unfamiliar cultural space. Ageing processes such as reduced mobility or cognitive capacity, together with economic insecurity, intensified exclusion by heightening barriers to cultural spaces, including travel distance, transport costs, entrance fees, physical access and language barriers.

**“I passed the theatre and I came here for lunch and so forth; but I had never really clicked what really goes on in here. Otherwise, I would have been here twenty years ago. Because the culture of the theatre here is prone to white people not black people, and I have never been here to a show. I just felt that you have to be educated to come here.”**

Site 6\_Storyteller 1, older African-Caribbean woman

Older adults involved in the study navigated these challenges and experiences of exclusion. This meant they were able to engage in and benefit from creative sector activities. To do so, they had to first enter the cultural space.

### Entering a cultural space for the first time:

Data from the TOUS study highlighted that the following three factors facilitated the entry of older people from global majority communities into a cultural space or activity.

- **Broker** – due to previous negative experiences (including discrimination) and not feeling that cultural provision on offer is ‘for them’, older people from global majority communities may require encouragement from a trusted member of their community or network to engage. This is someone they respect, who can ‘sell’ the cultural offer, breaking down negative preconceptions or concerns older people may have about engaging.

**“...we find that it works really well; people who are known and trusted within their communities, who then go and talk to people that they know, and spread awareness of these things.”**

Site 4\_P02 interview, White British man, programme officer

- **Hook** – this is the factor that entices or encourages someone to give a cultural offer a try. It may be something familiar to an older person (e.g. they may have been in a choir or knitted before) so they feel comfortable and confident about what is being offered. Or it may be that they are interested in trying something new (e.g. the chance to act for the first time or to learn about a topic), which prompts them to get involved.

**“...one of our long-term partners has a real focus on West African drumming and dance movement, and that attracted new members to the group from those backgrounds. Then we have our choir facilitator, who brings people’s cultural backgrounds into the sessions, which I think’s really key for people to feel heard and listened to.”**

Site1\_P06 interview, White British woman, theatre producer

- **Opportunity** – the older people we talked to suggested that the timing had to be right for them to take up a cultural offer. The cultural activity or group often came into their awareness at a point in life when they had more time or headspace (e.g. after retiring or when grandchildren had grown up and no longer needed to be looked after). Or a new cultural offer started in their local area, making it easier to get to, with no fees attached to it so risks/effort were perceived as low.

**“...The workshop was God’s way of putting me there at that certain time. It made me realise that I need to do things for me. All my life, I’ve done things for others. Not just my own family, but the community. To this day, I still do for others, but I think I lost me a long time ago. I never put me in front, but that particular workshop made me wake up to the fact. I just wanted to give myself a chance, and from that couple of sessions, I started doing other things like going back into arts.”**

Site 6\_Storyteller 6, older Pakistani woman

This part of the TOUS model proposes that when a trusted person (broker) presents a cultural offer in an engaging way (hook), at a moment when someone is open to it (opportunity), older adults from global majority communities are more likely to take the first step into a cultural space or activity. Individuals may not always require alignment of these three components to facilitate engagement, although data collected as part of Storytelling suggested that each element (broker, hook and opportunity) was essential in their cases. This reflects the significant barriers older people from global majority communities can face in taking the daunting step into a new space or activity – particularly for those who have experienced discrimination and exclusion.





**Engaging with cultural provision:** Data suggested that after stepping over the threshold into a cultural space or activity, three ingredients were crucial in shaping how cultural institutions engaged with older people from global majority communities to encourage them to keep going – ‘safety and trust’, ‘power sharing’ and ‘meaning’. Data highlighted that these are within the remit of organisations to deliver through staff, volunteers, artists and the space provided.

- **Safety and trust** – when an older person goes to a cultural offer, it needs to feel like a place they belong to, where they are welcomed and at ease. This calls for skilled facilitators who can create a sense of it being a safe space. It may include developing tangible materials to reflect safety (e.g. visible inclusivity statements).

**“I think first of all, you know, to create a safe space, you need to feel safe. And one of the ways that you can feel safe is if you trust...the facilitator, trust not just the facilitator, but trust the people around you as well. They can use things that are familiar, you know, foods and colours and situations that would be familiar... in their growing up, you know, plants, and flowers, and herbs.”**

Site 2\_P02 interview, Black British woman, managing an older person's day centre

- **Power sharing** – taking steps to enable older people to feel a sense of ownership in what is offered was identified within the data. This may include involving them in planning sessions such as deciding which creative elements are selected (e.g. music, craft, performance), or co-producing themes and structure of performances. It calls for ongoing dialogue between providers and participants and opportunities for the latter to give feedback in a way that is accessible. This enables older people from global majority communities to feel heard and valued.

**“It needed to be their voices. They were like, ‘well, write down what you want us to say,’ and I said ‘no. I want it to be like you’re telling me a story naturally, so it flows’. [...] The piece looks lovely, and it really is their voice.”**

Site 6\_Storyteller 8, British Asian woman, artist and facilitator at a theatre community outreach programme



- **Meaning** – activities with personal relevance were described as important by older people in the study; activities that resonated with their heritage, memories, skills or personal experiences. Meaningful activities enabled people to feel immersed or connected with others and, therefore, meant they were more enjoyable.

**“People love it and when they were clapping, I feel good...They [my family] are proud of me. I feel happy that I'm doing something that they like. So, when I'm coming here doing acting play and all that, I'm so happy. And I've got the interest... Because if you don't love something, you won't do it.”**

Site 1\_Storyteller 1,  
older Black African woman

The above ingredients underline that when cultural organisations work with older people to create a welcoming environment of safety and trust, individuals feel a sense of belonging and ownership over activities, leading to deeper engagement, continued participation, and meaningful connections with others. Our data showed that for older people from global majority communities who had experienced discrimination and exclusion, safety and trust were essential. Organisations that actively fostered inclusivity through diverse representation, culturally relevant programming, and ongoing community engagement helped create this sense of safety and trust, ensuring that participants' engagement was sustained over time.

**Benefits from engaging:** From the analysis of data, we created levels of benefits that individuals can expect from engaging for shorter or longer time periods with a cultural offer.

- **Immediate benefits** – In common with our previous research,<sup>24</sup> being absorbed by a creative activity was reported by participants in the TOUS study as a source of great enjoyment; a distraction from everyday concerns and worries. It can provide respite – both metaphorically (as a psychological escape) and in concrete terms (as a reprieve from family and community responsibilities, such as caring obligations). Enjoyment was associated with feelings of accomplishment at learning a new skill or conquering negative beliefs about creative abilities, sometimes held since childhood. Meaningful engagement can facilitate emotional release (or catharsis). This was a powerful experience for older people who had not surfaced emotions before in this way – particularly feelings associated with marginalisation or discrimination. Participants also described experiencing an immediate sense of connection and belonging to a group of like-minded individuals, particularly important where people had previously felt excluded in cultural venues.

**“One time in the group we celebrated Chinese New Year. A Chinese lady made a dragon and all the ladies joined together dragon dancing. Wow, you feel so proud! We lead the dancing and everyone enjoy it. I didn't have this experience before. It was a great chance of explaining our history.”**

Site 5\_Storyteller 4,  
older Chinese woman

**“It makes me feel like my day has been fruitful and when I go home, I don't have this thought of reflecting back on the past negative experiences.”**

Site 1\_Storyteller 5,  
older Black British woman

- **Immediate benefits** – For many participants, regularly attending a cultural activity provided stability and a sense of purpose. Having a regular event to look forward to was particularly beneficial for those experiencing isolation or lacking other social outlets. At some sites, cross-cultural connections were fostered; barriers were broken down as common experiences and emotions were shared via activities or performances.

**“This is my second home, you know? I made lots of friends. Lots of nice people from outside and with different cultures. Which made me more attached to [the Women's centre]...I met lots of ladies older than me and you feel, you know, one day you'll be like them. So, yes so you have to change sometimes. This is what I learned from here. As I said, it's my second home.”**

Site 5\_Storyteller 8,  
older British Iraqi woman



- **Longer term - transformational benefits** – Our previous study<sup>24</sup> highlighted the transformative power of engagement with the cultural sector for older people, contributing to increased self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth. In the TOUS study, sustained, trusting relationships were key to transformational benefits, which could occur at the personal/individual level and at a wider, societal level.

○ *Personal transformation* was characterised in data collected for the TOUS study by changes in self-perception and exploring identity. Participants reported an increase in self-confidence, which could lead to them trying additional art forms or activities. For example, one participant, initially motivated by a friend to join a knitting group at a local community theatre, was then encouraged to try singing and drama (Site 1\_P01). This illustrates a potential 'springboard' or 'cascade' effect, where the sense of accomplishment from one activity leads to broader creative engagement. Participants also described experimenting with new identities or ways of being by challenging limiting personal beliefs. This could mean being bold and seeing themselves as a creative person or artist rather than simply 'someone who does art'.

**“I turned 60 last year, and I think in any culture, once you get to a certain age, you sort of think that’s it, we’re only going to go to one place now. So, there’s no point doing this or doing that. Let’s just stay home. But I tried to tidy up my life when I hit 60. Going to the workshop, that’s when I grew to the place where I am now, where each week I’m thinking, right, this is what I can do...Now I do other activities like calligraphy... and a theatre group.”**

Site 6\_Storyteller 6,  
older Pakistani woman

○ *Societal transformation* included benefits that extended beyond the older individuals participating in creative activities. For example, family members expressed pride in an older relative’s achievements, altering how they perceived this individual and their capabilities. Beyond the family context, changes in the public participation of older people from global majority communities was described. This included public performances that addressed issues related to ageing, ethnicity or gender norms, which challenged stereotypical narratives of decline and passivity. Taking a role in spaces previously thought to be the preserve of the White British population situated older adults from global majority communities as dynamic contributors to cultural and social life. Older people participating in the TOUS study were proud of positive community responses to their creative work.

**“In another play (we acted in), the council are forcing people to move from where they live. Strong hearted woman who live in a place for thirty years, and all of a sudden she have to move. Did she tell you she want to live closer to her daughter? You can’t decide my life for me, you don’t know my life, so you can’t decide for me. I know my life. I will tell you this is who I am. Not you telling me. That was the message of that programme. This does happen to elderly people.”**

Site 1\_Storyteller 2,  
older Black African woman





## Practice and policy implications

Based on the TOUS study model, we have developed the following implications for practice and policy when seeking to tailor cultural offers for older people from global majority communities:

### Benefits of cultural engagement

- Engagement with cultural activities can produce benefits at **three levels** – immediate, intermediate, and longer-term.
- The depth of these benefits is linked to **how often and how consistently** individuals participate.
- **Short-term participation** can offer:
  - Respite from stress or loneliness
  - Enjoyment and distraction
- **Sustained engagement** can lead to:
  - Stronger social connections and relationships
  - Increased confidence, identity expression, and a sense of purpose
  - Wider community visibility and shifts in public perceptions of ageing and ethnicity

### Conditions for delivering benefits

- Benefits depend on **meaningful engagement**, not simply attendance.
- Cultural settings need to be:
  - **Safe** – places where older adults from global majority communities feel respected and free from discrimination
  - **Welcoming** – environments that signal inclusion from the moment someone walks in
  - **Empowering** – giving participants a voice in shaping activities
- **Culturally sensitive** practice requires attention to:
  - How people are greeted and supported
  - Representation in materials, displays, performances, and creative content
  - Food, music, and symbols that reflect diverse cultural identities
  - Skilled facilitation to respond to emotional expression or vulnerable moments

### Supporting initial engagement

- Organisations should identify factors that help people take up a cultural offer, such as:
  - Activities that are relevant, familiar, or appealing (**the hook**)
  - **Opportunities** that align with people's time, mobility, and life circumstances
  - Intermediaries (**brokers**) who can build confidence and encourage participation; reaching older people who may not see cultural spaces as 'for them.'

### Role of social prescribing link workers

- Link workers could play a significant role in connecting older people from global majority communities to cultural activities.
- However, the TOUS study (consistent with wider research) found few referrals to cultural offers via link workers, indicating a missed opportunity within social prescribing pathways.

### Using the TOUS programme theory

- The programme theory (Figure 1) provides a practical framework for organisations seeking to deliver inclusive practice – see below for details.
- It can support:
  - Planning and designing activities
  - Strengthening inclusion strategies
  - Developing funding applications
  - Monitoring and evaluating practice
- Further research is required to test its relevance for other underserved groups (e.g., people with learning disabilities or visual impairments).



The TOUS model

This is a practical framework to support organisations in designing and delivering inclusive and meaningful cultural provision for older adults from global majority communities. As noted in this document, it contains the following components.

Facilitating entry to the cultural provision	
BROKER	Is there a trusted individual (e.g. community leader, social prescribing link worker, neighbour, family member) who can introduce, recommend and encourage participation with the cultural provision?
HOOK	Is the activity relevant, familiar, or appealing to the target community?
OPPORTUNITY	Have practical barriers (cost, timing, transport, confidence) been considered and addressed wherever possible?
Sustaining engagement with the cultural provision	
SAFETY AND TRUST	Does the environment visibly signal inclusivity and cultural welcome?
POWER SHARING	Are participants meaningfully involved in shaping current and future activities?
MEANING	Are activities connected to heritage, identity, or lived experience? How has this been validated?
Benefits of engaging with the cultural provision	
SHORT-TERM (e.g. sense of belonging, respite and release)	Do people feel recognised and part of something from engaging? Are cultural activities or opportunities offered that allow for enjoyment or an escape from everyday pressures?
MEDIUM-TERM	Can people gain confidence or feel pride in the cultural activities offered? Are people able to develop sustained friendships or bonds?
LONG-TERM	Are people enabled to see themselves differently (e.g. as creative individuals) from engaging in the cultural provision? Does participation challenge stereotypes and highlight people's strengths?

Next steps

We have created an interactive tool designed to help cultural organisations strengthen their approach to inclusive engagement, especially with underserved communities. The tool features clickable elements, bringing to life ideas in our programme theory, alongside reflection exercises that enable organisations to track their progress and identify areas for improvement. We aim to pilot the tool with a number of cultural sector organisations, who will provide feedback to ensure it is practical and responsive to the sector’s needs.

Conclusion

While there are clear barriers to engagement for older people from global majority communities in cultural provision, the TOUS study demonstrates that with intentional, sensitive engagement and power sharing approaches, cultural organisations can foster participation and support well-being in later life. Our programme theory highlights that initially engaging individuals can be facilitated through a broker, hook and/or identifying an optimum opportunity; these factors appear important for individuals stepping over the threshold into a new cultural activity or space. For them to stay involved once entering a space or engaging in activities requires cultural organisations to consider the aspects of safety and trust, power sharing and meaning identified in our study. When such an environment is provided, benefits can be expected; these may be immediate, intermediate, or long-term, depending on an individual’s length of time engaging with activities and the people organising and attending them.





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**Cite this report as:** Tierney S, Westlake D, Mahtani KR. (2025)  
Tailoring cultural offers with and for diverse older users of social  
prescribing: An overview of findings from a realist evaluation.