

Expert series



***Equality and human
rights in practice***

A guide for practitioners and
commissioners of services for older people

Document purpose To support implementation of the Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998 in relation to services for older people.

Title Equality and human rights in practice: a guide for practitioners and commissioners of services for older people.

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Target audience Professionals who devise, deliver or commission services for people in later life.

Description This document:

- introduces equality and human rights themes and what they mean for people in later life
- sets equality and human rights work in the context of the developing legal framework
- highlights projects and services with a track record of success in promoting equality and human rights
- provides ideas for reaching, engaging and supporting older people who are marginalised or excluded.

Contact Copies of this document can be obtained from **Sally Anne Steele** at sallyanne.steele@ageuk.org.uk

Author Researched and written by **Antony Smith**, Development Officer – Equalities and Human Rights, Age UK.

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At Age UK we believe in a society in which people in later life from all sectors of our community have equal access to services.

Introduction

Inclusion, dignity and fairness in services for older people

At Age UK we believe in a society in which people in later life from all sectors of our community have equal access to services, where they are free from discrimination and their human rights are promoted and protected. We aim to tackle and reduce inequalities experienced by specific groups of older people in relation to, for example, health and social care outcomes, social inclusion and participation, or income inequality. We work to make sure that our own services and those of our local partners are welcoming, inclusive and appropriate to all, and we work closely with government and other organisations to raise awareness, promote positive legislation and ensure that older people's rights are respected and upheld.

This brief guide sets out what this means in practice for the older people from minority or marginalised communities receiving services from their local Age UK and the organisations they support. It highlights some 15 low-cost, high-impact examples of what works well from around the country and is intended for all professionals who devise, deliver or commission services for people in later life.

The projects and services it highlights are not just about tackling discrimination when it occurs. They are largely about ensuring such discrimination does not happen in the first place – above all, demonstrating what any organisation can and should do to ensure that older people from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, respected and listened to.



1 *Themes*

In particular, this resource looks at Age UK's work in relation to the people and communities most likely to encounter (or expect) discrimination or exclusion and subsequently be least likely to use services such as ours, or who have traditionally felt that we are simply not there for them. It includes those who are directly affected as well as people who are indirectly so, or who are affected 'by association', such as older carers.

Thus, the issues, themes and people that define and structure our equalities and human rights work generally, and form the focus of this guide, are as follows.

At Age UK we are committed to ensuring that no one in later life is treated less favourably on grounds of race or ethnicity than others in similar circumstances.

Age equality

We live in a society in which negative attitudes to ageing and later life are endemic, with effects that are damaging both to individuals and to society at large. Age UK's research has found that 54 per cent of people aged 65 and over believe that age discrimination exists in older people's daily lives, and 35 per cent of people aged 50 and over reported having experienced age discrimination in the last year.

This guide features a number of projects that directly address age equality: ensuring no one is treated unfavourably because of their age, without justification, or is harassed or victimised because of their age. But you will also find examples of our work to ensure the fair treatment of older people throughout the listings, embedded with information about other equality issues.

Black and minority ethnic older people

At Age UK we are committed to ensuring that no one in later life is treated less favourably on grounds of race or ethnicity than others in similar circumstances. But our commitment goes much further than this. Our vision is that all services should address the needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) older people as part of the wider community, acknowledging and upholding their rights to accessible and culturally appropriate services.

There is a wide range of local Age UK services designed with and for older people from BME communities, ranging from tailored information and advice services to culturally appropriate community-based day care services, often delivered in partnership with locally based BME community and voluntary organisations.

Disability

Disability is a broad field that includes people with physical, sensory and cognitive impairments. The focus of much of Age UK's disability-related work at national level has been on older people living with dementia and those with learning disabilities and their carers, while projects such as stroke clubs have been a feature of service provision by local partners for many years.

However, our developing equalities programme is expanding the scope of its work to include those who are ageing with a long-term physical or sensory impairment, as well as people learning to live with an impairment that is affecting them for the first time in later life. The aim will be to develop our own practice to ensure that Age UK's services and activities are as fully inclusive of disabled older people as possible.

Gender

Women and men in later life may have equal, though often distinct, needs of services such as Age UK, but older men form a significantly smaller percentage of service users. As a result, older men remain relatively invisible and their needs often tend to be overlooked in generic older people's services (which are frequently quite 'feminised' in style) despite their making up some 43 per cent of people aged 65 and over.

Men in later life are, however, prepared to use services if the activities proposed resonate with their identities and appeal to their interests. In response, much of our work around gender to date has focused on men's circumstances and needs – in particular, those older men who feel marginalised by poverty or isolated following divorce or separation, for example. But there are also some excellent examples among local Age UKs of services for older women.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual older people

Older lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people have lived a large part of their lives in far less accepting times than today's, to the extent that they might be criminalised or diagnosed mentally ill. One of the long-term consequences of this is a wariness of services, so much so that they may avoid using them at all for fear of encountering prejudice.

We believe older lesbians, gay men and bisexuals should have the right to be open about their lives, loves and friendships without fearing prejudice. To encourage a safe and welcoming environment for older LGB people, many local Age UKs support a wide and growing number of local services designed with and for them – from social support and intergenerational projects to information and advice.

Religion and belief

We all have the right to hold our own religious belief, or other philosophical belief similar to a religion. By the same principle, everyone has the right to have no religion or belief. In everyday terms, this means being able to practise your religion or belief, express your views and get on with your day-to-day life without experiencing discrimination.

We are developing our work nationally, in particular, looking into the intersection of faith and other equalities issues and exploring the significance of religion and belief for people in later life. Many local Age UKs also address the needs of particular faith communities through their services for black and minority ethnic older people, as well as in partnership with local places of worship.

Transgender

Transgender (or 'trans') is an umbrella term used to include many people whose lifestyles appear to conflict with the gender norms of society, for example, transvestite or transsexual people. Transgender people may be heterosexual or they may be lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). They may also have some legal issues in common with LGB people, but their lives are far more complex and the consequences of discrimination may well be different.

Nationally, we are developing our information services for transgender people in later life and many of Age UK's local projects for older lesbian, gay and bisexual people are LGB and T projects, aiming to be equally appropriate to, and inclusive of, older transgender people.

Human rights

Human rights are basic rights that belong to everyone simply because we are human. They are an important means of protection for people in later life, especially those who face abuse, neglect and isolation, and can be empowering tools for older people to advocate for their own rights. The Human Rights Act (1998) is, however, absent from much of government policy-making in relation to older people. Within many parts of government, human rights are so little understood that conversations using human rights 'language' are ineffective.

But there are examples of good practice emerging and at Age UK we are working closely with government, other organisations and our local partners to promote these and the close relationship between equalities duties and the protection of human rights.

Contexts

The Equality Act 2010

Older people from minority or marginalised communities now enjoy greater recognition, equality and protection in law than at any other time in history. This developing legal framework both increases the importance of services moving in line with change and creates opportunities to demonstrate to potential service users that our services are inclusive.

The Equality Act 2010 replaces the previously extensive range of anti-discrimination legislation developed over 40 years with a single Act. It simplifies the law, removing inconsistencies and making it easier for people to understand and comply with it. It also strengthens the law in important ways to help tackle discrimination and inequality, and has the potential to secure greater fairness and equality for older people across Britain.

Who has responsibilities?

The Act applies to all organisations that provide a service to the public or a section of the public. It also applies to anyone who sells goods or provides facilities. It applies to all services, whether or not a charge is made for them.

Implementation

Most of the provisions of the Equality Act came into force on 1 October 2010, covering the following themes or 'protected characteristics':

- disability
- gender
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation.

Age discrimination

The Equality Act also includes provisions enabling a ban on age discrimination in the provision of services to be introduced. This is not expected to come into effect until 2012 to give the Government time to consider further how these provisions can be implemented in the best way.

Taking forward an age discrimination ban requires secondary legislation to be made, setting out the circumstances in which it would remain lawful to use age as a reason for treating people differently where there are beneficial or justifiable reasons for doing so – for example, to be able to offer concessions such as cheaper rates at leisure centres to the over-65s, or products targeted at specific age groups such as Club 18–30.

Public-sector equality duty

The public-sector equality duty has a key role in ensuring fairness is at the heart of the work of public bodies and those working on their behalf. It came into force in April 2011 and requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations across all aspects of equality protected by the Act.

For more information you can visit www.equalityhumanrights.com

The Human Rights Act 1998

The Human Rights Act came into force in October 2000, bringing most of the rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law. This means that the human rights set out in the European Convention can now be claimed within the complaints and legal systems here in the UK. The Human Rights Act also places all public authorities in the UK under a duty to respect the rights it contains in everything that they do.

The rights contained in the Act are not only about matters of life and death, but are also relevant to everyday life issues and situations: what you can say and do, your beliefs, your right to a fair trial and other similar basic entitlements. They are based on key principles, such as fairness, respect, equality, dignity and autonomy – sometimes referred to as FREDAs.

These are the rights covered in the Act:

Article 2: Right to life

Article 3: Right not to be tortured or treated in an inhuman or degrading way

Article 4: Right to be free from slavery or forced labour

Article 5: Right to liberty

Article 6: Right to a fair trial

Article 7: Right to no punishment without law

Article 8: Right to respect for private and family life,
home and correspondence

Article 9: Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion

Article 10: Right to freedom of expression

Article 11: Right to freedom of assembly and association

Article 12: Right to marry and found a family

Article 14: Right not to be discriminated against in relation to any
of the rights contained in the European Convention

Article 1, Protocol 1: Right to peaceful enjoyment of possessions

Article 2, Protocol 1: Right to education

Article 3, Protocol 1: Right to free elections

If any of these rights and freedoms is breached, everyone has the right to an effective solution in law.

For more information, you can visit www.bih.org.uk



2 *The services and projects in practice*

'I feel empowered and informed. Thank you.'

The services and projects outlined on the following pages offer a 'menu' of equalities and human rights initiatives with a track record of success. They not only respond to what older people say they want, but also frequently tap into the resource they represent. Volunteering opportunities, older people's panels and skill-sharing all help to ensure that people in later life can shape and contribute to, as well receive, services.

These services and projects represent just a small snapshot of what Age UK and its partners undertake with and for older people from minority or marginalised communities. They have been selected to demonstrate a range of approaches, themes and environments – from urban to rural. You can find out more about each project by directly contacting the person responsible. To find out about the many other Age UK equalities and human rights initiatives not listed here, email Sally Anne Steele at sallyanne.steele@ageuk.org.uk

Promoting human rights principles with older people

Advocacy and the Older People's Human Rights Group Age UK Derby & Derbyshire

'The human rights project has demonstrated on more than one occasion how human rights can be used to bring about successful results for older people facing issues around care in later life. For our older people taking part it has given them confidence, skills and knowledge they can use, not only when working with the LGBT community, but also in their own personal lives when facing issues of discrimination.'

Age UK Derby & Derbyshire's advocacy service provides advocates for older people going into care, those who are in care and older people who wish to remain living independently in the community. Alongside this service, the Older People's Human Rights Group has been looking in particular at the concerns facing older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people around going into care and how the use of human rights principles can help address and overcome them.

For example, the right to respect for private and family life can be used to ensure that older LGBT people are able to make their own choices as far as possible in forming or maintaining personal relationships or sharing a room with a partner. The project is one of three around the country (the other two are in Hackney and Stockport) funded by Comic Relief for three years and supported by Age UK nationally, the British Institute of Human Rights and the local LGBT support service Derbyshire Friend.

Benefits and outcomes

- Helps make human rights principles relevant and effective.
- Provides an independent voice for older people, their carers, family and friends.
- Addresses human rights violations against older people.
- Tackles discrimination against older LGBT people.
- Allays fears about going into care.

How the work is delivered

The advocacy service operates across Derby city and parts of the county, but the voice of the Older People's Human Rights Group has been heard and recognised regionally and nationally. In response to this growing profile, the group is promoting its work (and in particular its relevance to the LGBT community) through campaigning, with a DVD it has produced, and through members' support groups. The advocacy service is a drop-in service delivered at a couple of locations in the city and is also available by phone. There is no charge, but it is planned to charge for any LGBT training provided by the group or Derbyshire Friend in the future.

Contact

Ray Gumbley
Derby Services Manager
e raygumbley@ageukderby.org.uk
t 01332 343 232
www.ageuk.org.uk/derbyandderbyshire

Age UK Derby & Derbyshire
15 The Morledge
Derby DE1 2AW

Health and wellbeing for disabled older people

Bright Days Age UK Wigan Borough

'One lady initially would not socialise, was very isolated and could be aggressive. Over many weeks of the project, she gradually approached the bistro area and now eagerly awaits every session. Her carers have noted great improvements in her confidence and temperament.'

'Residents here look forward to the activities and meals. It has provided stimulation in so many ways and the activities have been so varied.'

The Bright Days project promotes physical and mental health and wellbeing primarily for older people with physical disabilities, people with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems. It is based in Wigan's Eliot Gardens extra-care facility and provides meal sessions and activities. It is not only for residents but also for members of the local community, as promoting good relations between the two is an important priority for the project.

Bright Days commenced in July 2010 following a successful joint bid from Age Concern (now Age UK) Wigan Borough and the managing body of Eliot Gardens, Adactus Housing. It is funded by the Supporting People and Healthier Communities Health and Wellbeing Initiative, and its partners include Groundwork Wigan, The Sunflower Project, St James Primary School and Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust.

Benefits and outcomes

- Reduces social isolation.
- Develops confidence and sociability.
- Promotes emotional and physical health and wellbeing.
- Improves independence.
- Promotes community cohesion.
- Provides opportunities for participants to influence the future of the project.

How the work is delivered

Bright Days runs four two-hour sessions (including activities) each week in the Eliot Gardens extra-care facility. This includes two afternoon tea sessions and two 'bistro' sessions. There is a charge for meals – £1 for afternoon tea and £2.50 for the bistro – with activities included in the price. As accommodation is limited there is a booking facility, but 'drop-ins' are welcome, subject to numbers on the day. The project was initially promoted by means of a leaflet drop in the local community and subsequently by word of mouth and through local GPs' surgeries, schools, community centres and churches. The Bright Days Project Officer co-ordinates the project, supported by a catering assistant and a team of five volunteers. Activities are undertaken by partner organisations such as local health trainers.

Contact

Pat O'Brien
Bright Days Project Officer
e pat.obrien@acwiganborough.org
t 01942 615 884
www.acwiganborough.org.uk

Age UK Wigan Borough
68 Market Street
Wigan WN1 1HX

Building trust with older Gypsies and Travellers

Community Development Age UK Norfolk

'I didn't realise just how much advice was available.'

'Following a visit by an Age UK benefits advice worker, an older Gypsy woman was able to claim Attendance Allowance. This served to build trust. Word spread among the community and we have followed up three more requests for assistance in completing benefits forms. We have also advised some of the people on one site about the essential elements of claiming benefits so that they are able to provide some signposting of support to other people in their own community.'

Through its community development work, Age UK Norfolk engages with older people from a range of minority ethnic and other marginalised communities in the county. The work began in 2009 following some simple research about minority and marginalised groups in Norfolk, the largest of which was identified as the Gypsy and Traveller community. Older people from this community frequently face potentially severe social exclusion, arising from issues such as low levels of literacy, lower life expectancy, barriers in accessing health and social care services and high levels of discrimination.

Age UK Norfolk, with funding from Norfolk Local Involvement Network (LINK), works with the local Gypsy and Traveller community to build trust, raise awareness of the kinds of support the organisation can offer, and to set out the different ways they can work together to help members of the community meet their own needs. In addition, the older people they work with are encouraged to become involved in LINK and have their voices heard within it.

Benefits and outcomes

- Builds trust with groups so that they are comfortable about asking for support.
- Assists people to access mainstream services.
- Supports groups in having a voice on issues that affect them.
- Supports the community to look after its own older people.

How the work is delivered

The work is delivered free of charge by a part-time development worker, who is also a facilitator within Norfolk LINK and works across the county – a large and mainly rural area. An early meeting was held with the Chair of the Gypsy and Irish Traveller Council who, importantly, highlighted some of the cultural issues he needed to be aware of. The worker spent time networking and meeting others with contacts in the community, established links with the different sites in the county and attends meetings of the Norfolk Gypsy/Traveller Liaison group. Age UK Norfolk is now exploring how it can provide information in formats that are appropriate for the community.

Contact

Eamon McGrath
Community Development Manager
e eamon.mcgrath@acnorfolk.org.uk
t 01603 787 111
www.acnorfolk.org.uk

Age UK Norfolk
300 Saint Faith's Road
Norwich
Norfolk NR6 7BJ

Putting human rights into practice

The Elders – older people and human rights group Age UK Stockport

'I didn't realise human rights belonged to me. I thought they were for people living overseas in third-world countries.'

'I feel empowered and informed. Thank you.'

The Elders group started in 2008 as a pilot project to inform older people about their human rights and how they can be used to strengthen their voice. It was clear from consultation that most people did not associate human rights principles with their own circumstances and were not aware that this powerful legislation could benefit their everyday lives. After learning that the Council was proposing to close public toilets with little consultation, The Elders group used the Human Rights Act to focus their attention on this issue. The group was concerned that the closures would have a significant impact on many other groups in the community, leading to some people even losing the confidence to leave their homes. The group is one of three (the other two are in Derby and Hackney) funded by Comic Relief for three years and supported by Age UK nationally and the British Institute of Human Rights. It has become a dedicated subgroup of an older people's forum, which in turn is part of Stockport's All Our Tomorrows Partnership, supported by the local council and primary care trust, and the voluntary sector.

Benefits and outcomes

- Educates and raises awareness among older people.
- Empowers them and strengthens their voices.
- Tackles social exclusion and inequality.
- Helps build confidence.
- Creates social interaction.
- Promotes consultation and engagement.

How the work is delivered

The group is free of charge and open to anyone over 50 living in the borough of Stockport. It has a core membership made up of a range of older people, but others drop in informally depending on how they would like to be involved. They meet monthly as part of the forum, supported by one staff member and a volunteer. For their work on the closure of public toilets, members created a short questionnaire to gain the views of the local community and used the evidence in a letter to the council, written using human rights language and principles.

Contact

Catherine Morris
Facilitating Independent Living and Lifestyles Manager
e catherine.morris@ageukstockport.org.uk
t 0161 480 1211
www.ageukstockport.org.uk

Age UK Stockport
Commonweal, 56 Wellington Street
Stockport SK1 3AQ

Empowering black and minority ethnic older people

Ethnic Minority Access Project (EMAP) Age UK Hillingdon

'This service is truly a lifeline for people who have no one or have no idea what there is out there.'

'Our voices are being heard.'

EMAP offers information, advice and advocacy to black and minority ethnic (BME) older people living in Hillingdon. It aims to empower them to take a leading and participatory role within the borough in shaping services for older people, from welfare benefits and health to transport and leisure. People are also encouraged to identify service gaps. EMAP was founded by the local primary care trust in 2002 as a result of the Social Services Inspectorate report detailing the lack of provision for BME elders in the borough. This need was further highlighted by the growth of the older population in the local Asian, African Caribbean and Somali communities. As part of the project, a Black and Minority Ethnic Forum has been developed that works closely with Hillingdon's Older People's Assembly. Age Concern (now Age UK) Hillingdon assumed responsibility for EMAP in 2005 and it is currently funded by the local authority.

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Benefits and outcomes

- Empowers BME elders to articulate their needs and preferences.
- Improves confidence.
- Maintains dignity.
- Influences the provision of services locally for BME elders.
- Creates cultural awareness among service providers.

How the work is delivered

The EMAP service is free and is available in English, Somali, Arabic, Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi. It is delivered five days a week by two co-ordinators, assisted by five volunteers and supported by the First Stop information and advice service manager. The service is delivered from the Townfield Community Centre in Hayes, which has the highest density of BME elders in the borough. However, home visits are also arranged where necessary. It is promoted through leaflets, posters, talks to relevant groups and the local media.

Anyone can drop in, but appointments are made for continuing casework.

Contact

Harjinder Dhanda or Rukiya Farra

EMAP Co-ordinators

e hdhanda@ageukhillington.org.uk or rfarra@ageukhillington.org.uk

t 020 8813 6302

www.ageukhillington.org.uk

Age UK Hillingdon
Townfield Community Centre
Townfield Road
Hayes UB3 2EL

Targeted health and wellbeing for older people with impairments or health conditions

Get Set Go/Goodlife Age UK Northamptonshire

'Since attending the Get Set Go course, we have formed our own group and have been going for over five years now.'

'I just love the exercise sessions. We have fun while getting fitter.'

The Get Set Go programme was developed in 2002 to address social inclusion, promote good mental health and build social and skills capacity among older people in specific groups within the community. Participants with a particular impairment or health condition are encouraged to take part in a bespoke course called Goodlife, designed to include topics and health issues that address their specific needs. One such example is a course for older blind and partially sighted people, which offers relaxing, tactile and sensory experiences such as yoga, Indian head and hand massage, music sessions and 'sensing with colour', alongside all the service's regular health checks and complementary therapies. Carers are welcome to join in, or alternatively the service is an opportunity for them to enjoy much needed personal time. The programme is funded by NHS Northamptonshire and works with health professionals to address standards 6, 7 and 8 of the National Service Framework for Older People.

Benefits and outcomes

- Helps boost confidence and self-esteem.
- Enhances take-up of physical activity and relaxation techniques.
- Promotes a healthier diet.
- Improves understanding of and access to health care services.
- Increases take-up of preventive measures, such as blood pressure screening.

How the work is delivered

Get Set Go/Goodlife is a series of free 12 week two-hour courses delivered across the county. They take place in a variety of locations, such as doctors' surgeries, sheltered accommodation and community centres, as well as in centres for people with specific conditions. Health professionals help to establish the correct approach, and sessions and talks are delivered by fully qualified tutors and speakers. In the case of the course for blind and partially sighted people, sessions began in the spring to ensure better natural light conditions and all exercises are seated to help participants feel safe. The course is promoted primarily through the Northamptonshire Association for the Blind but also through health surgeries and visitors, local media and the 50-Plus newsletter. Once a 12 week course is over, Age UK will help the group to carry on meeting and become self-sustaining.

Contact

Yvonne Starkey
Health Promotion Co-ordinator
e yvonne.starkey@acnorthants.org.uk
t 01536 513 100 or 07990 797 252
www.acnorthants.org.uk

Age UK Northamptonshire
31 Billing Road
Northampton NN1 5DQ

Communicating the needs of older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

Highland Rainbow Folk Highlands of Scotland

'Using my experience to influence others' attitudes helps give purpose to my life... a real sense of connectedness with others who share a similarly poor experience of life through a lack of understanding by others.'

'The whole session was informative and inspirational. Will do all that I can to educate others to ensure that such special people will never be marginalised.'

Highland Rainbow Folk is a group of mainly older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, established by Help the Aged (now Age Scotland) and the Terrence Higgins Trust in 2009. Through sharing stories, the group aims to raise awareness of the issues LGBT people can face. Most importantly, members have felt there is a lack of information and understanding among health and social care professionals, with assumptions being made that may be hurtful, discriminatory or even detrimental to an older LGBT person's health needs being met.

The group feels fortunate in having five transgender members, not least as questions around transgender issues are often raised at the group's presentations, to which the transgender members always respond openly. In fact, at least one lesbian, gay man, bisexual person and transgender person is present at all presentations and, of the stories told and shared, there is always one transgender story. The group is now independent and currently has no formal funding, but is supported in kind by Age Scotland.

Benefits and outcomes

- Raises awareness among health and social care professionals.
- Highlights LGBT issues among older people's groups.
- Encourages older volunteers to get involved.
- Increases capacity of older LGBT volunteers.
- Produces resources that can be shared.



How the work is delivered

The group is run on a completely voluntary basis, with a chair, secretary and treasurer elected from the group. It meets monthly to discuss any issues among volunteers. The group aims to deliver at least six to eight presentations each year and to get involved with relevant events and information days. Presentations usually involve six older volunteers plus a volunteer facilitator. The group is in the process of establishing a website and currently has listings on relevant internet sites across Scotland. The service is free to groups and organisations but volunteer expenses and donations are welcomed.

Contact

Suzy Gentle
Chair
e highlandrainbowfolk@gmail.com
t 07791 874 583

Highland Rainbow Folk
c/o 18 Tulloch Park
Forres
Morayshire IV36 1AX

Addressing inequalities experienced by black and minority ethnic older people

Later Matters

Age Concern Support Services – Yorkshire & Humber

‘To me, the current process is very effective. The review has helped me identify our strengths and weaknesses and areas of development.’

‘Review was a positive learning experience with adept staff who were skilled at reviewing services and offering valuable feedback.’

The Later Matters project works with service providers in Yorkshire and Humber to help ensure that they are inclusive and accessible for older people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. The need was identified by colleagues at Age Concern Support Services and had also arisen from an earlier research and mapping study in the region. Later Matters is funded by the Tackling Race Inequalities Fund (TRIF), through Communities and Local Government.

It corresponds to one of the TRIF priority themes – to ‘address inequalities of access and reduce gaps in outcomes for people from minority ethnic groups in a range of public services, including education, health, housing, the criminal justice system and in employment’. The project began in 2009 and is a two-year partnership with Age UK. It also works with a wide variety of public service providers and community and voluntary organisations in the region, and has developed a ‘progress measure’ tool to help them assess their services and support for BME older people.

Benefits and outcomes

- Helps tackle barriers and inequalities experienced by BME older people.
- Engages with BME older people to find out what they want and need from their services.
- Identifies ways of working in partnership with BME community and voluntary organisations.
- Empowers BME organisations and older people themselves to challenge service providers.

How the work is delivered

The service provided is essentially an equalities auditing and assessment tool to help organisations assess and improve their own practice and performance with and for BME older people. Organisations are trained and supported to undertake the review process and complete a practical and realistic action plan, with advisers available to assist for a fee of £90. Age Concern Support Services then offers ongoing support after the initial review. Although the project itself was concluded in June 2011, the ‘progress measure’ tool is available from Age Concern Support Services on an ongoing basis and will also be available on the Yorkshire and Humber website along with other training resources.

Contact

Joanne Volpe
Regional Company Co-ordinator
e yorksandhumber@ageuk.org.uk
t 0113 244 1860
www.ageconcernyorkshireandhumber.org.uk

Age Concern Support Services – Yorkshire & Humber
Suite 6, 3rd Floor
7 Eastgate
Leeds LS2 7LY

Day services that appeal to older men

Men in Sheds

Age UK Nottingham & Nottinghamshire

'I enjoy the workshop atmosphere. It helps take my mind off caring for my wife when she is at her therapy.'

'Ray has recently retired from the mining industry and has become one of the leading members of the Shed. He volunteered to deliver Shed promotional leaflets in the local area and is constantly suggesting new projects and providing valuable information about the local community.'

Men in Sheds is an approach to day services provision specifically designed to appeal to men in later life who, although they may be isolated and lonely, would be unlikely to make use of mainstream day services. It involves the provision of a workshop, tools and equipment where older men can make use of their skills and be involved in productive activity, while enjoying the benefits of working in a social group. It can also provide a route for them to access information, advice, health promotion and other services they might not otherwise seek out.

There are three contrasting pilot projects across the country (the other two are in Greenwich and South Lakeland) funded by the Sir Jules Thorn Trust for two years. The Nottinghamshire project focuses on older men living in ex-coalmining areas, where there are high levels of deprivation following the decimation of the collieries in recent years. It seeks to reach out to men for whom social isolation is the result of the early loss of employment because of the area's reliance on the coal mining industry.

Benefits and outcomes

- Promotes health and wellbeing.
- Helps develop friendships.
- Provides respite for older men who are carers.
- Supports men in later life to reintegrate into mainstream society.
- Provides access to help through other local services.
- Encourages members to take ownership of their Shed.

How the work is delivered

The Shed is located in a former coalfield area of North Nottinghamshire, recognised as an area of significant deprivation and also considered rural, which can add to the social isolation experienced by some older men.

The choice of activities is at the discretion of the members and includes the production of wooden items for the garden and the restoration of second-hand furniture for sale at the Mansfield furniture store (part of Age UK). The Shed has been running eight sessions a week with a view to one or two being run by volunteers, enabling the co-ordinator to spend time promoting the project and allowing it to open when he is on holiday. There are 25 members, 18 of whom attend on a regular basis.

Contact

Nicky Wheddon
Project Manager
e nicky.wheddon@ageuknotts.org.uk
t 0115 919 4871
www.ageconcernnotts.org.uk

Age UK Nottingham & Nottinghamshire
Bradbury House
12 Shakespeare Street
Nottingham NG1 4FQ

Engaging isolated black and minority ethnic older people

Neighbourhood Contact Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin

‘Sometimes we feel isolated in our homes because the children are at work all day and the grandchildren at school. All we have is the radio, but that is not enough being on your own all day. I really enjoy the physical exercise sessions as it gives me opportunity to come out of the house and meet other community women and sometimes have a joke and laugh.’

In areas with a relatively small black and minority ethnic (BME) population, the needs of minorities tend often to be invisible as these populations can be very dispersed. As a result, disadvantage and exclusion can be significantly amplified, especially for older people who may already be at greater risk of isolation because of their age. This can also be compounded by a widely held assumption that communities will ‘look after their own’. These risks were highlighted by the Older People’s Inclusion Group at Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin.

In early 2008, the group appointed a multi-lingual neighbourhood contact officer to work with older people from BME communities in Telford by supporting them to engage with services, signposting to other support available and assisting other groups that support older people from BME communities. The service is funded by Telford and Wrekin Council and the local primary care trust and works with a wide range of partner agencies, including health groups, benefits advice agencies and other voluntary organisations.

Benefits and outcomes

- Supports the engagement of older people from BME communities.
- Provides advice and information to them.
- Reduces social isolation, providing opportunities to meet.
- Helps improve wellbeing.
- Maximises income via benefits advice.

How the work is delivered

The Neighbourhood Contact service for BME older people is delivered free of charge on a weekly basis through a variety of groups and one-to-one sessions, led by one member of staff and supported by the rest of the Age UK team, as required. It is a mix of informal drop-in and booked appointments and, for clients with a higher level of need, ongoing support is offered in partnership with other agencies. Translation is also available, including translations of various information resources. The service is largely promoted informally by word of mouth.

Contact

Heather Osborne

Chief Executive

e heather.osborne@ageukstw.org.uk

t 01743 233 123

www.ageukshropshireandtelford.org.uk

Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin

3 Mardol Gardens

Shrewsbury SY1 1PR

Supporting older carers of people with learning disabilities

Older Carers Support Service Age UK Leeds

'Before Age UK Leeds, social workers were non-existent as far as I was concerned. Now with Age UK, help is there whenever I need it. I will be 90 in October and still care for my 47-year-old son with Downs Syndrome, but I have no problems at all with him as he is quite capable. I know that when and if my health fails, he will be looked after and will accept it. He goes into respite four times a year, which he thoroughly enjoys.'

The Older Carers Support Service was developed in response to increased awareness at central government level of the invaluable contribution to society that is made by older carers of people with learning disabilities, a group that is often overlooked and undervalued. It was established in 2003 and supports carers aged 60 and over through services such as information, advice, benefits, emergency and future planning and emotional support. The service also provides help in accessing other services and leisure activities, and works with a wide range of statutory and third-sector partners in Leeds in order to provide a quality, holistic service to carers. It serves the Leeds Metropolitan District and is funded by Leeds City Council.

Benefits and outcomes

- Helps plan for emergency situations and for the future.
- Provides emotional support in times of carer crisis.
- Supports carers to have a life beyond caring.
- Maximises take-up of benefits.
- Increases health and wellbeing.
- Combats social isolation.

How the work is delivered

After an initial assessment visit, support workers and carers identify a support plan to tackle any immediate issues. Once these are resolved the team contacts carers on a six-weekly basis. Carers can choose from a personalised menu of support, including phone calls, home visits, social and informational events and newsletters. There are also carers' trips four times a year. The service is managed and delivered by paid staff and is provided in carers' own homes and in carers' groups. It is a totally free service and is promoted through local networks and by informational events and presentations to statutory agencies. Referrals are accepted from all sources and carers are welcome to refer themselves.

Contact

Jackie Bolland
Director of Community Services
e jackie.bolland@ageukleeds.org.uk
t 0113 200 8852
www.ageukleeds.org.uk

Age UK Leeds
Office Suites 1 & 2
First Floor, Bridge House
Balm Road
Leeds LS10 2TP

Challenging age discrimination and disadvantage in local policy

Older People's Parliament Age UK Wirral

'Wirral Older People's Parliament carried out its own research into patients' experiences of hospital discharge in their own area in 2008. Sandra Wall, its Chair, told us: "Our identification of problems led to a council investigation and some great changes, including immediate provision of short-stay parking spaces outside the discharge lounge and a volunteer scheme to provide low-level support to recently discharged patients. Don't stand back and assume it's got to be done in the same way it always has. It is possible to make change happen."'

Wirral Older People's Parliament was formed in January 2008 to provide a direct mechanism for people in later life to campaign, lobby, challenge and influence council decisions that impact upon their lives. With over 1,000 Associate Members, the Parliament represents a significant cross-section of Wirral's diverse older community. In addition, there is a specific patron for ethnic minority groups, in recognition of the particular efforts that are required to ensure that older members of BME communities do not experience 'double discrimination'.

The Parliament's work is governed by older people themselves – 12 members of the Executive Committee, 44 Parliament Members and 1,000 Associate Members – while much of the Parliament's operational work is undertaken through its seven sub-committees. These are: National Issues, Health and Social Care, Crime and Respect, Housing, Environment, Education and Life-long Learning, and Transport.

Benefits and outcomes

- Provides older people with a say in decisions that affect their lives.
- Enables local communities to take greater control.
- Provides statutory and other organisations with a consultative body of older people.
- Helps tackle discrimination in all areas of later life.

How the work is delivered

The Parliament itself meets quarterly in the prestigious Wirral Council Chambers, with the Executive Committee meeting at least monthly to discuss current overarching issues. Sub-committees then meet at locations across the borough. The Parliament is hosted by Age UK Wirral, which provides office accommodation, project staff, financial management systems and senior staff support. In addition, the Parliament employs two people – a full-time co-ordinator and part-time administrator. Over 6,000 newsletters are distributed quarterly and bi-monthly Parliament topical events attract over 100 people on average.

Contact

Jamie Anderson
Senior Manager – Support Services
e jamie.anderson@ageukwirral.org.uk
t 0151 653 4404
www.ageukwirral.org.uk

Age UK Wirral
Devonshire Resource Centre, 141 Park Road North
Birkenhead
Wirral CH41 0DD

Welcoming older women who are lesbian, bisexual and transgender

Opening Doors London women's group Age UK Camden (leading on behalf of Age UKs across London)

'I wouldn't want to have to travel far, especially at night. Having a local Hackney venue has really made a difference. When they started the Hackney women's group, I was in my element.'

'It's great to know that she [the befriending volunteer] will be round. I don't feel so alone now. She understands me and I don't need to hide who I am.'

Women may be by far the biggest users of Age UK services, but older lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) women do not always feel comfortable using them, not least because of the constant need to 'come out' when talking about family, friends or partner to strangers. By the same token, mixed LGBT venues tend to be rather male dominated and can feel similarly unwelcoming for women. Discomfort is not solely a consequence of prejudice, although this can be very real. It is also because of the pretty universal need to spend time with people with whom we share experiences and can simply 'be ourselves'.

Since 2008, Age UK Camden, leading a consortium of Age UKs, has developed activities and provided information, befriending and social events specifically for older LBT women, to complement its existing work with gay, bisexual and transgender men. Opening Doors is funded by Trust for London, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, City Bridge Trust and the Metropolitan Police Authority, and works in close partnership with many other agencies. It also campaigns and provides training to raise awareness of the needs of older LGBT people within statutory and voluntary services.

Benefits and outcomes

- Creates a safe and welcoming environment for older LBT women.
- Reduces social isolation.
- Helps improve social wellbeing and mental health.
- Offers support to remain independent for longer.
- Increases awareness within other statutory and voluntary agencies.

How the work is delivered

Opening Doors London hosts a variety of different women's, men's and mixed groups and meetings including regular film nights, guest speakers, walking groups, coffee evenings, lunch clubs, theatre and cinema trips, museum and day trips and good old-fashioned nights out in the pub. There are special events for LGBT History Month in February and Pride London in July, where the group now takes pride of place at the front of the parade. There are dedicated women's and men's project workers and a free monthly newsletter is distributed to all members.

Contact

Stacey Halls
Development Co-ordinator (women)
e stacey.halls@ageukcamden.org.uk
t 020 7121 3331
www.openingdoorslondon.org.uk

Age UK Camden
Tavis House
1-6 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9NA



Taking age and faith seriously

PSALM: Project for Seniors and Lifelong Ministry London

'How wonderful today has been. It has lifted my spirits – not just mine, but so many people's.'

'These have been refreshing experiences. The personal approach of the leader was compelling and fascinating.'

PSALM began in 2004 with the aim of addressing matters of interest and concern to people over 60, those approaching retirement or anyone with an interest in ageing and spirituality. Based at St Pancras Church, the project is active London-wide and works in partnership with churches and Age UKs across the capital. PSALM is an ecumenical organisation so, while its programmes draw on insights from the Christian faith, its events are open to people of all faiths or with no faith. Its strapline, 'Taking age and faith seriously', is all about promoting the role of faith as a helpful tool in negotiating later life, making use of 'themed conversations' to explore the issues raised by our new longevity.

Its success is due in large part to what participants bring and the openness and mutuality that develop during the workshops. PSALM is a registered charity with a mixture of funding sources, such as fees, donations and grants.

Benefits and outcomes

- Encourages people to draw on the resources of their faith as a means of retaining wellbeing in old age.
- Provides opportunities to 'hear ourselves think' about how to live well as we grow older.
- Encourages churches to counter the traditional undervaluing of older people.
- Provides opportunities for older people to reflect and contribute.
- Promotes a novel and simple approach that can be shared with others.

How the project is delivered

PSALM provides lectures, workshops and seminars, hosting three or four workshops each year on themes such as 'grandparenting', 'when I die' and 'decluttering in later life'. There is a charge of £8 for a day workshop, with a reduction for members (who can be of any age).

These workshops are promoted via PSALM's database and website and advertised as far as possible. PSALM can also deliver a seminar for any group, congregation, synod or chapter at a cost of £20 an hour, and will help groups fundraise for this amount. These seminars are promoted in its catalogue, produced with support from Awards for All and available in print and online.

Contact

Gaynor Dunmall, Claire Pinney or Ann Morisy

e PSALM@stpancraschurch.org

t 020 7388 1461

www.PSALM.org.uk

PSALM

St Pancras Church

Euston Road

London NW1 2BA

Enabling older people to tackle age discrimination

Voices of Experience Age UK Redbridge

'We are like a dripping tap. If you tell people often enough, someone will listen.'

'Many of the topics addressed by Voices of Experience are, in effect, an equality impact questionnaire, showing how strategies and services often openly or indirectly discriminate against older people. Cheque books are a good example, as they are used far more by the older generation.'

Voices of Experience enables older people in Redbridge to influence a range of social and health providers, as well as Transport for London and other statutory organisations, by giving them the opportunity to express their views in a range of ways. These include a panel of older citizens, regular questionnaires on matters of concern, focus groups, meetings with MPs and local government officers, consultations and campaigns.

As statutory organisations are often required to consult their service users about the services they provide, it is crucial that older people have their say. Voices of Experience was therefore developed in 2003 to help give them this voice. With the help of volunteer translators, the service also targets local black and minority ethnic groups through questionnaires and focus groups. It is funded by NHS Redbridge.

Benefits and outcomes

- Empowers older people to speak up.
- Influences local service providers.
- Gives older people a sense of self-worth and inclusion.
- Provides information on services, changes and developments.

How the work is delivered

The panel meets at least once a month, at which statutory service providers or representatives from organisations such as the police often give a presentation. The panel also receives reports from Redbridge LINK, the Hospitals' Trust Dignity Steering Group and a number of other working groups that individual members sit on. Members read government legislation, take part in national, pan-London or local consultations and contact MPs, councillors and others on issues of concern.

Questionnaires are mailed three to four times a year, with a good 50 to 60 per cent response rate. These are also taken to various BME groups locally and any variation in responses is noted. Reports showing the views of older people are produced following questionnaires and focus groups, and these are sent to relevant statutory authorities. In addition to a general publicity leaflet, there is a leaflet directed at professionals and a newsletter is sent to councillors and other influential people as well as to all members.

Contact

Janet West
Service Co-ordinator
e janet.west@acredbridge.co.uk
t 020 8220 6000
www.acredbridge.co.uk

Age UK Redbridge
4th Floor, 103 Cranbrook Road
Ilford
Essex IG1 4PU

Expert series

The Age UK expert series is for people influencing, designing, commissioning and delivering services for later life. The reports present evidence, lessons from experience and practical solutions.

Tavis House
1–6 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9NA
0800 169 80 80
www.ageuk.org.uk

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