

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, QUALITY OF LIFE, COMBATING DISCRIMINATION, DIGNITY AND RESPECT, CHOICE AND CONTROL, ECONOMIC WELL-BEING, CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

KEEPING SAFE, STAYING WARM, PAYING THE BILLS, GETTING PEOPLE TO LISTEN, BETTER TRANSPORT, MORE INFORMATION, KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS

being a part of it all

conversations
with older people in Hull



Conversations with older people in Hull

People enjoy talking. That should come as no surprise. The older people who took part in our consultation events regarding the older people's strategy, **being a part of it all**, enjoyed the experience and want to participate more. Of course, people won't take part without some assurances: it shouldn't cost them money to help us out and some people need help with transport or personal assistance to get to events. People also need assurance that someone's going to take notice of what they say.

We didn't find anyone who was unduly negative even though we found plenty of people who experienced substantial difficulties in their lives. Nor did we find that people weren't open to new ideas. But it is clear that people expect us to have a respect for their established way of life and an understanding of the barriers they face in adapting to new ways of doing things.

Keeping healthy

Like any group in the population we found some people who do more to stay fit than others. We met people who go to the gym, people who take minerals and vitamins, people who are walking or exercising as much as they reasonably can and those who are very aware of the need for a healthy diet. But others do face barriers to keeping healthy. Some people wanted to walk more, close to home but didn't always feel safe. No one rejected the idea of healthy meals but 'healthy food' was not always affordable or available close to home: the questions of income and transport are very important here. People recognise the significance of reducing or giving up smoking but first want to do something about the stresses that lead them to smoke so much.

It's evident that professionals can be very influential here. Given support, prompting and help with

organising activities, many more people will take part in 'healthy living' initiatives. Whether it's a walking group, a gentle exercise class, tai chi or any other kind of activity people will take part as long as (i) there's help to organise the activity and (ii) the organisers understand and respond to the very real barriers that get in the way of people's participation.

The question of 'healthy eating' looks like a more difficult nut to crack. Some of the older people we talked to do live on very restricted diets. Some like the idea of lunch clubs, some want more information, others want practical help to get to the supermarkets where food is cheaper. Some people have to rely on others to do their shopping and cooking for them and just want the help to do more of this for themselves. There are no simple solutions here but this does look like an area crying out for more creative thinking.

Quality of life

People like to get together. We didn't find anyone who likes to spend long hours on their own. One person said 'isolation makes people feel old'. 'Getting together' can mean all sorts of things: coffee mornings, lunch clubs, trips out, social groups, getting out to the cinema with friends. It all needs organising and sometimes resources like transport and premises are also needed.

If people can't get out to socialise they like



someone to keep in touch with them at home. Community wardens who can 'pop in' are valued. Many people also rely on family and friends although we found that people didn't want to ask too much from their family and consequently some of their needs and wants went unmet. The idea



of someone (perhaps a volunteer) who could help out now and then was appreciated by people who needed help with independent living. One lady who was 90 just wanted someone to take her to the shops .. she hadn't done her own food shopping for years.

Then there's practical help around the house. DIY becomes more of a problem as people get older. Who do you ask to change a light bulb or mend a fuse? And when you need a tradesperson who do you ask .. some people wanted a list of trusted cleaners, decorators and gardeners.



People attending day centres spoke highly of

the support they received. The idea of a sound, reliable and friendly place to go is really important for people who are confined to their homes. Day centres offered people friendships and support that were not always available elsewhere. Isolation and disability can really damage a person's confidence; and having somewhere like a day centre to go can help to re-build it.

Some comments were really telling: 'I'd love to get

out on my own and know that I'm safe' .. 'I don't go out and I haven't been on holiday for 30 years'.

Then there was a cascade of ideas of what could make life better including mobile phones that are easy to use; having a shopping bus; community transport into the estates; somewhere to contact when there's an emergency; more door-to-door services; local courses that are easy to access; more help to use the big stores.

Contributing to the community

Not everyone has the time or the capacity to do more than manage the problems of everyday living. But nearly everyone was interested in having more opportunity to contribute. One person at the Octagon consultation event summed up the feelings of many more: 'This is the first time we've been to something like this .. you need to publicise it more through pubs, over 60's clubs, the library and *Hull InPrint*'. There was support for more and better consultation machinery including an older people's parliament for the city. People will contribute to decision-making and plans for the city once they're asked .. as long as doing so is safe and convenient and involves no cost. One person drew attention to the need to involve people who can't get to meetings. Another stated that 'meetings at night are a bad idea'.

Some older people we talked to were already involved in volunteering and others want to know more about what opportunities to volunteer could be available. There was one discussion about how, within communities, older people can share their skills and interests: model making, flower arranging, film editing and so on. But some people were hesitant about being asked to do too much.

There was interest in other ways in which older people could contribute. There was agreement, for example, that older people should be involved in interviewing Council staff and in evaluating Council and health services.

Choice and control

Many people liked the idea of more choice and control in public services but few could see it happening right now for them. Some people saw their choice severely limited. One person had lost a day service and was now at home: 'there was no consultation about whether I could use the old day service'. Another person commented on their home care service: 'the cover that's made available governs when I can use the toilet.' Another said 'Older people are denied choices .. take it or leave it!'. The idea of direct payments for social care interested people but they also wanted choice in the range of more traditional services. There were mixed feelings about controlling your own care budget with some people enthusiastic about being in charge and others hesitant about the level of responsibility involved. Some people complained that the onus was always on them to seek help rather than services approaching them with what's available. One person said assessments could be more dignified. Others felt services could do a lot more to simplify the channels people had to go through for help and the forms they faced. Some people wanted more family involvement either in helping to find solutions to needs or in providing assistance in a paid capacity.

There were mixed feelings about GPs. It was remarked that language problems with some GPs were disempowering. People liked the idea of more choice of GP and hospital. They wanted more control over appointment times and home visits: 'older people can't always get to the GP'.

Information was a problem: 'we need to know what's available in the first place'. No one understood the implications of the Mental Capacity Act and some people wanted more information about it.

The people who used day services praised the staff who supported them but, at the same time, were able to come up with plenty of ideas about what could make things better.

Discrimination and access

People were conscious of the discrimination that some older people face: 'services can be patronising to older people and treat them as daft' .. and for some of those we talked to fighting discrimination against older people is important. The commonest discrimination issue raised was about wheelchair access: problems of cars parked on pavements, not enough dropped kerbs, poor access to some shops. However, there was praise for the assistance bus drivers gave to wheelchair users. (At the same time some people on foot wanted a speed limit placed on mobility scooters.)

The issue of discrimination was very much linked in people's minds with questions of security, dignity and respect (see below).

Security, dignity and respect

Participants were very vocal on these issues. Safety at home is high on people's list of priorities. They talked about being frightened to go out at night, locking the door at 4.30pm, worrying about vandals and canvassers, needing better concierge systems and better security measures in blocks of flats where access was all too easy. There is a strong concern about the perceived threat posed by young people .. but also by drug dealers, prostitutes and alcoholics. It was suggested that the Council should take more care in selecting residents. There was a fear of tenants who drink, make noise



and cause damage. People also worried about truants and youths congregating around shops and intimidating customers.

The ideas of more 'bobbies on the beat' was a popular one: 'the police should come round more often'. So was the idea of contact numbers for the police and community wardens. Some people have no confidence in the system: 'Getting a crime number from the police is no good'.

Some people were very positive about communities designed just for older people. They worry when younger people move into an area which is mainly for older people. However, one person commented that 'we need to stop the segregation of the ages'. People want to bridge the generation gap but don't know how: 'young people have no respect', 'people in hoods are intimidating', 'young people don't know how to talk to older people', 'I feel there's a

barrier between young and old'.

What are people's other concerns about security, dignity and respect? In Health there were negative comments about mixed wards, having to wait long hours for minor treatment and hospital infections. In other services people were anxious not to be patronised: 'I want to be treated like an adult .. If someone I know has died, I want the truth not a fabricated story'.

Economic well-being

For all that we might talk about the rights of older workers, we did

not find too many retired people keen to go back to work: 'I don't want to work any longer thanks'. People did want more information and advice on benefits, help with form-filling, more help to stay warm, more help to get the best deal from the utility suppliers.

Footnote on information

We've mentioned several times above that people want more information. This can't be stressed too much. Nearly all the people we met were hungry for information and advice on all subjects. They suggested making use of Hull InPrint, local tv, providing an older people's helpline, the Council publishing a document signposting older people to sources of help, using tenants associations to disseminate information, a newsletter, and leaflet drops by social services. And whatever information is presented should be in digestible form: one person asked for big, bold print.

And what comes next?

The message from the people who have joined in so far is 'keep talking and keep listening'. We know we've got to carry on the conversation in different places around the city. This involves reaching out to people who aren't able to get to events or who want to give their views in different ways. So there's real gratitude to those people who have joined our conversations to date along with anticipation for what will come out of future conversations and the way they can help to shape attitudes and policies for older people and their families.



being a part of it all
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