

Ageing Well case study

North East Lincolnshire (health and wellbeing boards/
involving older people/partnership working)

Introduction

The aim of this small piece of qualitative research was to establish what older people in North East Lincolnshire need/want/choose to enable them to maintain their independence and live the lives they choose. Key objectives were:

- to agree some key high level messages for the shadow health and wellbeing board in respect of what is required to improve older people's health, wellbeing and independence and prevent or delay entry into residential care and/or hospital
- to explore possible alternative uses for existing funding to ensure it helps individuals to achieve their desired outcomes in terms of preventative services
- to present findings to North East Lincolnshire's shadow health and wellbeing board and agree a way forward.

The findings will help to influence the work of the shadow health and wellbeing board in respect of future priorities for older people and help to progress the action plan agreed following the 2010 Ageing Well IDEA peer review.

Reasons for applying to be a development area

Balancing rapidly increasing population numbers in terms of older people and very different expectations of lifestyle choice, against the need to achieve significant funding reductions in many key service delivery areas presents significant challenges for all local authorities. North East Lincolnshire wanted to use this project to explore some of the issues for integrating ageing in to the work of the council and its partners.

What North East Lincolnshire did

An approach called appreciative inquiry (AI) was used to underpin this work. The key feature of AI is its positive focus. It aims to harness good practice, creativity and positive thinking – to reaffirm people's confidence and enthusiasm – and to use this to deliver long-term, sustainable improvements.

AI does not ignore past failures but encourages people to use their experiences to facilitate new ideas, change and progress. At each stage of the project there was a focus on what is currently working well, what has worked well in the past, what people are proud of and what they would like to see more of. The project engaged with a wide range of older people, stakeholders, providers and commissioners to explore these issues and identify common messages and key themes.

Partnership working has been very effective and thanks to active support and input from the Care Trust Plus the work was able to obtain the views of a wide range of older people.

Key milestones to date have been:

- Training session for 15 volunteers from ACCORD, The Older Peoples Collaborative and Engage Forum. These individuals, together with a small group of local authority officers, were introduced to the concept of appreciative inquiry via a half-day practical facilitator training event. There was particular focus on appreciative interviewing techniques, to equip the team of volunteers with the skills and confidence to go out into their respective communities and interview friends, neighbours, relatives, carers etc to establish what older people want and need to enable them to maintain their health, wellbeing and independence and prevent or delay entry into residential care and/or hospital.
- Interviewing local people - in partnership with a representative from Care Trust Plus, a total of 24 older members of the public were interviewed. Interviews took place in local libraries. The intention had been to also interview people at a local Age UK day centre and local garden centre, but unfortunately this was not possible. In addition to this a variety of people, groups and organisations were consulted via a short questionnaire issued by North East Lincolnshire Care Trust Plus. They were asked:
 - What kind of things helps us remain independent and enjoy life to the full?
 - In your experience, what has helped you?
 - What has helped someone you know?

- What things helped the most, for example family, friends, a club, visits, exercise, adult education classes, social activities?
- What would you like to see more of in the future that would help you maintain a healthy lifestyle?

- An appreciative inquiry was held with key stakeholders including older people, local authority officers, elected members, strategic leads and a member of the shadow health and wellbeing board, to share findings and explore potential ways forward.
- A report detailing all of the findings is being produced and will be reported to the shadow wellbeing board.

Key messages from this project

- Feeling part of the local community, staying active and helping to contribute were of major importance to the older people we spoke to.
- Social interaction is key and needs to be very local.
- Make sure access to social networks etc is not just easy for the confident or the supported.
- Consider how it might be possible to replicate what happens in some streets where people look out for each other?
- Use different ways to check on people that are at risk of losing independence, make better use of healthcare workers, neighbours, local tradesmen.
- Keeping people company/providing friendship/popping in/someone to talk to/ go to the shops with is important.
- There are demonstrable benefits (for both parties) of a good befriending and volunteering network.

USP

One key distinguishing feature of this project is its focus on direct engagement with a wide range of older people, particularly those who may not wish to engage via more traditional channels. The other is the focus on what is working well and what people are proud of. Although many of the findings from this piece of work are not new, it has shown how much importance people place on certain issues.

Taking regular exercise (at the appropriate level) and continuing to feel a valued member of the community, with something to contribute and a purpose in life were of key importance to many of the people we interviewed.

A significant number of people mentioned the importance of having good health care and support and there was also frequent reference to the value of having good social networks and not feeling isolated, which several people said helped prevent mental ill health.

Key learning points

Initial findings have been fed in to the shadow health and wellbeing board, with a further detailed report and recommendations being presented at the March 2012 meeting. We are considering the final make up of the board and how citizens will get involved with it and help to set the priorities. The findings from the Ageing Well work will be undertaken by a task and finish group reporting through existing partner structures and community groups. These conversations, which will be ongoing, are planned activity and will formulate a meaningful and relevant action plan.

We feel that the concept of asking older people to obtain feedback from others in their social networks in a structured way is a good one, but that it needs more time and support to embed effectively. We will be giving this more thought in future.

Highlighting innovation

This project is innovative in the following respects:

- It sustained focus on identifying and sharing existing good practice, creativity and positive thinking in respect of improving health and wellbeing opportunities for older people, reaffirming people's confidence and enthusiasm – and using this to deliver long-term, sustainable improvements
- Engaging with a wide range of older people as they go about their daily lives meant we were able to obtain information that may not be forthcoming via more formal routes.
- Working in partnership with the North East Lincolnshire Care Trust Plus was valuable to engage with the a wide range of local people using an appreciative approach.

Models of engagement

As stated above, the key model of engagement was appreciative inquiry (AI). This approach, which is gaining popularity with both public and private sector organisations in the UK, focuses on what is working well and what people would love to see happening in the future. A major assumption of AI is that in every community something works. Focusing on what works as opposed to what problems the community is having differentiates AI from traditional problem solving approaches.