



Creating Conversations

About older people's mental health and wellbeing



Notes for getting conversations underway

About these notes

This background note is for people who are interested in the conversations about older people's mental health and wellbeing.

Some of the people we met when we were planning this project asked for notes for people who are organising or hosting the sessions. We have included suggestions. We also hope that people taking part will add your suggestions on ways to have positive and creative conversations.

About this project

Creating Conversations is a one-year project which is based at Outside the Box. It is funded through the Scottish Government Equalities Fund, as one of a range of projects working to reduce inequalities in the ways people get access to services.

The aims of the project are to:

- Raise awareness about older people's mental health and wellbeing
- Encourage people to talk about the pattern of services and community supports in their area
- Think about what is working well and what could be better
- Explore ways to make things better – which could be changing attitudes, or preventing poor mental wellbeing, as well as developing more or different responses.

The project is not a consultation about plans or strategies – although there will be opportunities to share what we learn with the Mental Health Team at the Scottish Government and with people in local services.

We are not setting up peer support groups or other services – although people in some areas may decide this is something they want to do as a follow from the conversations.

What we hope the conversations will do

The conversations can bring together any mix of people:

- Older people
- Their families and friends
- People who live in a community who want to see good opportunities for people who live there

- People who share experience or a situation, such as family carers, or men, or people who have recently moved to an area, or people who belong to a minority ethnic community
- Staff and volunteers in community groups or services
- Staff from mental health services
- Staff from services that support older people
- Any other people who want to contribute.

Conversations that involve a mix of people usually lead to more creative conversations.

We hope that people will meet several times, to give them time to get to know each other and develop their thoughts and ideas. You can decide if the same group of people meet each time or if other people can join later sessions.

On the practical side, our suggestions are:

- Find a place that is easy to get to, is comfortable for people and encourages people to think creatively
- Offer tea, make people feel welcome. We hope the people hosting the conversations can help with this, or people can share costs. But we have a budget to help you get the conversations going if this helps.
- Aim for 1 and a half to 2 hours for each conversation.

The people in each group decide how they want to handle the conversations. It will probably vary from group to group, depending on who is involved. Our starter suggestions are:

- Decide if someone is going to facilitate or lead the conversation
- Agree how the group works and where the boundaries are
- Respect each other's experiences and views, try to understand what brought people to where they are today
- Treat what is discussed in the group as in confidence
- People look after themselves and each other
- Remember this is more about exploring issues and ideas rather than deciding on solutions, especially at the start.

Although this is not a support group, we hope the conversations will happen in a supportive way.

- Have physical space for anyone wants to go out for a bit
- Allow some time for people to stay afterwards to talk to someone (about anything, not just what came up in the conversation)
- Have a list of services in your area that can provide support for individual people who want this, for example if someone decides they want look for support for themselves or someone they care about.
- There will also be a list on the Outside the Box website of sources of on-line and phone support that anyone can use.

People may also want to hold conversations in other ways.

- It could be 2 or 3 people talking to each other
- You can go for a walk and talk as you go
- You can use visual ways of exploring ideas and showing what happens in your community.... And more.

Scope of the conversations

We are flexible in what is meant by 'older people'.

- In some contexts this is people aged 50 and older.
- In others it is people aged 65 and over – because that is the age that often marks the transition between the mental health teams that give people care and treatment
- Some people will want to focus on people aged over 75, or on people who need higher levels of support in their day-to-day life.
- You can decide if you want to focus your conversation on what happens for a particular group of people or situation.

We are also taking a wide approach to what is meant by 'mental health and wellbeing'.

- Some people will want to talk about mental wellbeing in a wide, holistic sense.
- Other people will want to focus on the circumstances of people who live with more significant mental health problems.
- It includes people who experience mental health problems for the first time when they are older.
- It also includes people who have lived with mental health problems for many years.

We have a list of starter questions if you want to use these. We do not expect people will use them all – use as you think best. They cover 3 broad areas:

- Awareness and experience around mental health and wellbeing
- Access to support and care
- How the future could look

Feeding back to other people

You might decide to share what you discuss with other people in your area.

- Think about who you want to reach.
- Make a summary of the main points that people taking part in your conversations are happy to share with others.
- Agree how people taking part can bring in the experiences and views of others in their team or group, and how they feed back to them.

We hope that you will also share what you discuss with us and with the other people who are part of these conversations in other places.

- We are asking for a summary of the points you are happy to share.
- We are also interested in how the conversations go – what helps people have a good conversation? Are there any tips you would give to other people doing this?

Feedback does not have to be a written report.

- You may want to try using other approaches: graphics, photographs of flip chart notes, social media

- There may be a mix of communication forms that help you reach the range of people you want to involve.

What happens next?

We will share the material that local groups send to us about your conversations through the website. You can then follow up with other people who are discussing similar issues to you, for example.

If people ask us for more sources of useful information, we will follow that up.

You decide how you want to take forward points that come up in your conversations.

- For example, if you decide that it would be good for a mental health team to offer training to older people's groups, or produce a joint leaflet to raise awareness, just start working out how to do this.
- You can use the points you came up with to feed in to local plans of consultations about mental health services or services for older people, or to community planning.

If you want to talk to the team at Outside the Box about ideas that will take more planning, or would need some extra money, please get in touch. We probably do not have immediate answers but we will be happy to work with you to find solutions.

We are planning to bring together the people who are part of local conversations at an event in Spring 2017.

Contact us

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You can find out more about us and the work we do at: www.otbds.org

