

Older People in Rural Communities

Information and Background Note for local areas

About the project

Many older people in the UK live in rural communities.

There are places where people are developing cities that work well for older people. This project brings together people who are working to develop rural communities that are older-people-friendly.

The project is led by Outside the Box, Volunteering Matters Cymru and the National Development Team for Inclusion.

It is supported by the Big Lottery Fund as part of the UK Accelerating Ideas programme.

Scope of older-people-friendly communities

All of the organisations leading this project have been working with older people over the past few years. We are hearing what a good community means for older people, including people who have higher support needs. The list that people raise is much wider than health and social care services. It includes the physical environment, shops, other public services such as libraries and leisure facilities, transport connections and the ways neighbours, friends and families support each other.

Policy and practice context

Communities that work for older people

There are initiatives underway in the UK and in other parts of the world to promote communities that work well for older people, or that encourage communities to plan for including people of all ages, including older people. Examples are Communities for All Ages, Age-Friendly Cities and Silver Cities.

Another important development is work to promote dementia-friendly communities.

Sustainable rural communities

Another part of the context is the aim of supporting rural communities and enabling them to be sustainable places where people live and work. Aspects that are particularly important for older people include:

- Most rural areas have a higher proportion of older people.
- Older people often have a leading role in groups and activities that support the whole community.
- Older people can be affected more heavily when services such as shops and libraries close or move.

- Models of health and care services that are common in towns are not always feasible in rural areas and people are working to find different approaches that will work here.

Public services

Within public services there are developments that are designed to provide services – and especially health and social care services – that work better for the people they support. Increased participation and co-production are central aspects of these developments: greater involvement of people in identifying the gaps, contributing their views on what is needed, and working with the people responsible for services to plan and deliver new services.

Another recent policy and practice developing is the growing focus on prevention and early support, to prevent or reduce crises and avoid the need to higher levels of services. Again, these benefit people of all ages but have especial relevance for older people. This is linked to enabling older people to be part of and contributing to their community.

This project complements all these related initiatives and developments.

What we are doing in the development stage

- We are starting by checking out what is happening, what people need and what will work.
- The initial focus is on Scotland and Wales. We will share ideas and learning with people in other parts of the UK and in other countries.
- We will be linking with national programmes and other organisations in Scotland, Wales and other parts of the UK.
- The development stage happens during 2016. Future plans will be shaped by what we find out and what we learn.
- We are asking people in local areas in Wales and Scotland to tell us about existing activities led by older people in rural areas and what would make a difference in their area.

Work with local areas during the development stage

During 2016 we will be working with 2 small areas that have already started moving towards being a community that works well for older people – one in Scotland and one in Wales.

- Exploring with older people what an older-people-friendly community would look and feel like in their area.
- Finding out what is happening and planned over the next year or so. We want to link into and help with work that is going to be useful to people in that area.

- Looking at where the gaps are. For example, if people are mostly focussing on health and social care developments, can we help with supporting older people's contribution on another aspect of a good community?
- Hearing what people find is helping and what makes it harder: for people being involved, for having an impact on plans and decisions, and for achieving positive changes on the ground.
- Provide some development time or other support on topics that people will find helpful.

The lessons and ideas that people in these 2 areas have will help us plan how we can work over the next few years with people in more rural areas.

We also hope that older people who live in these areas and people who work there will help us think about how people learn from experience and identify the impact of what happens. This will include:

- Helping us develop a Theory of Change model – a way of describing what the issues are, what changes we want to see, how our planned activities can achieve these changes, and how we will know when it has happened.
- Looking at the challenges and successes people have found in describing the impacts of community-based services and developments.
- Thinking about how best to spread 'what works' from one place to another, and keeping the good stuff going over time.

More information

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