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Other formats

You can also ask for this publication in large print, Braille or on audio cassette and we can also provide translations into other languages. Please contact Janette Campbell on 0131 479 5162 or email her at janette.campbell@communitiesScotland.gsi.gov.uk



LEARNING POINT 23: Involving communities in Scotland with an ageing population

What are learning points?

Learning points are a series of publications designed to share the lessons learned from regeneration activities, research and evaluation. They are one of the ways in which the Scottish Centre for Regeneration – part of Communities Scotland – passes on what people learn from working and talking together. Learning points encourage good practice and networking and build up a picture of what is happening in the field. We hope they will help people discover what has worked in other areas and might work for them.

What is this learning point about?

This learning point is about 'active ageing', a term used to describe an ideal, integrated and aware community that offers choice to the older

person. It looks at how we could develop our communities to support an older population that has very different expectations from previous generations.

In an 'active ageing' community there are no barriers to adopting a healthy lifestyle; good nutritional food is available, as is access to exercise and mental stimulation. Either voluntary or paid work exists for those who want or need it, supported by relevant training or further study. The community runs social activities to bring everyone together regardless of age, colour and creed.

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Where did this learning point come from?

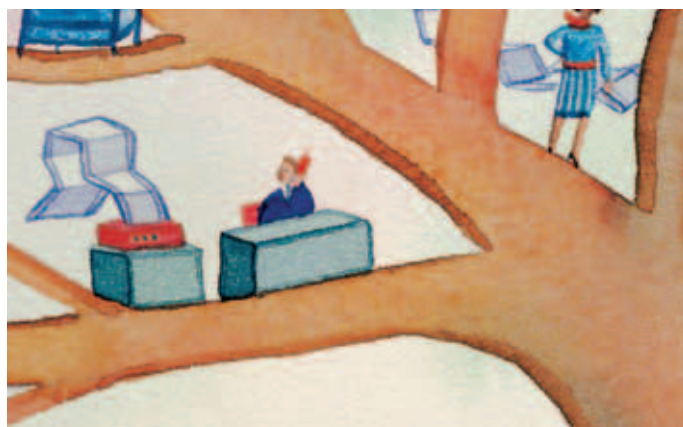
This learning point is the product of a conference in Dumfries & Galloway that considered the growing elderly population and explored ways of planning positively for 'active ageing' and a healthy old age. Dumfries & Galloway was an appropriate place for the discussion to happen. It has a growing elderly population, as young people leave the area and more retirees come to live there. There are difficulties associated with this. Dumfries & Galloway has problems recruiting for specific professions such as nurses, contrasting with a general lack of jobs. To identify innovative approaches to these issues the conference audience was drawn from widely different sectors of the community.

What issues were examined?

- The ability of people to take responsibility for their own health and reduce the years of ill health.
- The part played by housing and community in supporting people as they grow older.
- Including people in the community planning process.
- Changing patterns of work as there are fewer young people, and older members of the community need to continue to work for longer.

What underlying principles did people identify?

- Everyone has a right to a healthy and productive old age.
- People have a fundamental right to be involved in planning their community, and to have a voice in what type of housing and care they have.
- Older people have the right to work if that is their choice.
- Employers need to see the benefits of having older workers in the workforce, and to offer them the right training.
- The state pension was a hard-won right and should not be given up easily.
- Information on health and demographics should be made easily digestible and more widely available.



- Learn from other countries' best practice on ageing well.

What problems or barriers did people identify?

- Inequalities in health in Dumfries & Galloway are related to problems of poverty and rural isolation.
- Employers still do not appear to be investing in training older workers even though they may stay longer than many young workers.
- Elderly people are sometimes treated in a patronising way, for example, when people speak slowly and loudly.
- Many women live in poverty because their pension contributions were limited.
- People in poorer housing, on low incomes and the frail elderly are the biggest consumers of health and social care but are excluded by negative attitudes to them.
- Businesses and services still see older people as a niche market, and do not address issues that can arise with ageing such as poor eyesight and being less familiar with technology.

What did people learn from all this?

Demographic change will be significant

- By 2020, over half the UK's population will be over 50.
- Across the whole of Scotland the proportion of older people is growing – and the biggest change will be in Dumfries & Galloway.
- In Dumfries & Galloway, by 2016 there will be 28 per cent fewer children aged 14 or under, and 38 per cent fewer adults aged 30 to 44.

- A quarter of the resulting older population will be living in rural isolation.

Community planning has a role

- The community planning processes could support decisions to enhance older people's independence and help ensure they are better integrated into the wider community.

Employment patterns will need to change

- In future, businesses will be able to draw on a pool of older workers and recruits.
- Raising employer and employee awareness of career development and the value of older people as workers could benefit business.
- Older people are generally considered to be industrious with plenty of experience and good communication skills
- Computer technology could be adapted to be more widely accessible
- From October 2006 it will be illegal to discriminate on employment and training based on age.

Technology can help

- To ensure that older people continue to be mobile and independent in later life.
- Monitors that offer an early warning of ill health and can track the whereabouts of dementia sufferers are already being tested.
- Through the internet older people will be able to keep in touch with friends and families.
- Work is being done to improve cars for older drivers, and make exercise machines much more appealing.

Our attitude to health, well-being and life styles are changing

- The ideal is to live a full and happy life, ending with a short period of illness.

Innovations in housing may create new communities

- Eco and co-housing can provide mutual support through communal living

- Members share a vision, values and gain freedom and privacy
- Benefits include the creation of real community centres that provide access, for example to local fruit and vegetables or local work opportunities

Creating a culture of active ageing could build up a legacy of ageing well

- The experience in other countries should be looked at, for example France appears to approach this issue at an earlier age.

Questions for the future

- How can active ageing be promoted to support opportunities for better lives?
- How can we enable self-management, ownership and empowerment in the area of housing, social and home care of older people?
- How can community centres be developed to bring about public service delivery within local social networks?
- What transport arrangements will support new ways of delivering public services?
- How can we continue to address fuel poverty?
- How can we create a mix of opportunities for older people to include not only work but also leisure, training and volunteering opportunities?

