

INVOLVING OLDER PEOPLE

What standards should we expect?

In the past there has been little involvement of older people in planning services intended to meet their needs: one older representative on social services committees; Community Care plans published before going out for consultation; national and local strategies about older people developed by professionals without the involvement of older people; conferences discussing older people's issues with no older people on the platform.

Recent findings show that older people expect to be involved in the development of strategies like these, but despite the fact that they represent a large sector of the general population and are major recipients of public and private expenditure, the standards on involving older people fall short of those in other areas of user involvement.

Older people explained that it is not simply about having their rights recognised. It is also frustrating to see so much being spent without anybody first consulting them on what is important in their lives, what works and what doesn't.

1. WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Involvement is NOT about:

- a token representative
- consultation after decisions have been made
- one-off meetings
- an agenda set by officers
- set-piece committee meetings
- older people being unsupported or unprepared
- management-centred engagement
- giving information out
- market research

Involvement IS about:

- older people being involved from start to finish
 - older people having a say in setting the agenda
 - older people represented in sufficient numbers
 - older people being resourced to take part
 - the potential for action as a result of involving older people
 - involving older people in decisions about their own lives
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2. MESSAGES FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

- It is important to be as clear as possible about who holds the power and which decisions older people can influence. Older people do not value meaningless consultation.
- It is important to ensure there are sufficient older people in a meeting – at least one-third – to be truly representative and feel supported. Otherwise they risk being isolated or the meeting may be dominated by one older person's views.
- Involve older people before defining the project's remit, otherwise they may be left behind.
- Don't worry too much about representative involvement. People are at the table because of their skills and knowledge, and focusing on being totally representative can risk excluding people.
- Don't try to reinvent the wheel and don't be afraid to make mistakes.
- Try to imagine how you would want to be treated if it was your life.

3. MESSAGES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

- Ask why you are being involved in this process. How will it make a difference to older people's lives? Is there adequate funding available to enable older people to be involved in the project? Will older people influence what it does? Will older people have a say in the conclusions?
- Involvement in projects implies you also have a responsibility to try and include other older people – particularly the 'non-joiners' and those whose voices might otherwise not be heard.
- Not everyone wants to be involved in the same way; some want to plan, some to campaign and some to make the tea.
- Involvement doesn't mean you have to do everything; managers, for example, don't do everything but they do have some control over the process.
- It is about what older people want, not just what services can offer.
- It is reasonable for you to request help, support, training, time and money.

4. DIFFERENT APPROACHES

- Newcastle City Council has funded the Elders' Council (£250,000) to be a partner in strategy development.
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's programme was driven by older people.
- The London Borough of Camden has developed a Quality of Life Strategy for (and with) Older Citizens.
- There are many different reference groups and expert groups who have advised on strategies – for example, Health & Older People (HOPE) on the National Services Framework.
- Local community groups can, with funding, have a powerful role in supporting people and shaping services – for example, Caring Together in Leeds; Pepperpot Club in Kensington & Chelsea; Wai Yin in Manchester.
- Individual involvement is important too. There are examples of communicating with people with dementia, aphasia and other impairments. Involvement starts with talking but it shouldn't end there.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

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FURTHER INFORMATION

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published a number of reports based on the Older People's Programme. These reports can be downloaded free of charge from www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop or can be bought in paperback by calling 01904 430033.

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