

THE NEILSTON CONVERSATION

IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS OF OVER 60s IN NEILSTON

Exploring the potential role of volunteers in supporting
East Renfrewshire Community Health and Care Partnership
Older People's Services Strategy



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
PURPOSE AND COMPONENTS OF THE CONVERSATION.....	3
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	4
CONCLUSIONS	7
THANKS	8

INTRODUCTION



This report presents the findings of The Neilston Conversation, a series of conversations with residents in the over 60's age group. The 'Conversation', a collaboration between Neilston Development Trust (NDT) and East Renfrewshire Community Health and Care Partnership (CHCP), was initiated by Neilston Development Trust in order to gain an understanding of the lives of over 60's and their relationship to the wider community, with an underlying interest in the role of organisations such as NDT in contributing to, and benefiting from, the lived experience of this age group.

The CHCP became involved in the interests of working jointly with a community voluntary organisation to provide a local perspective to their Older People's Service Strategy. The CHCP was also interested in exploring the potential role of volunteers in supporting this strategy, through the recruitment of volunteers to carry out the Conversations.

Context

Policy around older people's care in Scotland has undergone major review in recent years and in 2010, the 'Reshaping Care for Older People' initiative was launched. This was launched to a background of a whole culture change in the way that health policy, and indeed care, was evolving, with an importance placed on health improvement, preventative care and the consideration of the public as partners in their care.

'Reshaping Care for Older People' is a national programme with the remit of looking at new ways to deliver older people's care while maintaining a commitment to providing it free of charge. With

the recognition of the rapidly aging population and financial constraints of both NHS Boards and Local Authorities, there is a need to look at reducing the reliance on hospital services and changing the balance of care to providing local care which meets the needs and aspirations of older people.

To support the implementation of 'Reshaping Care for Older People', the Change Fund was set up by the Scottish Government, with an allocation of £70m in 2011-12 'to enable health and social care partners to implement local plans for making better use of their combined resources for older people's services' (Scottish Government, 2010). This would create a national programme, driven by local need, and delivered locally. East Renfrewshire Council, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire Public Partnership Forum and Scottish Care created a partnership to identify and investigate proposals for shaping the delivery of local services. A significant part of East Renfrewshire's plan identifies the role of voluntary sector as a partner in delivering specific proposals, for example creating local opportunities for older people to stay involved in the community and providing support to help them do this, for example by creating community transport schemes. It is hoped this will allow people to remain active in later life as part of their local community.

The Neilston Conversation project aimed to achieve a similar objective, by gathering qualitative information from local residents in order to paint a picture of what life is like for local people; what aspirations they have for the future of the village; and what they feel is important at a local level to improve their general health and wellbeing. In the collaboration with the CHCP, this has provided cross-boundary working, providing a local perspective to a national initiative.

Throughout this document '*The Conversation*' refers to whole project and '*the conversation*' refers to the individual exchanges

PURPOSE AND COMPONENTS OF THE NEILSTON CONVERSATION

The Neilston Conversation formed part of the wider work of NDT in supporting the aspirations of the community, and had a dual purpose:

1. To explore the role that community volunteers can play in the assessment of need of the target group and build capacity within volunteering to support the CHCP in future service delivery in the community.
2. To explore the experience of over 60's of life in the community and their relationship with the social, civic and physical environments and identify their needs in order to help the CHCP in planning and targeting appropriate services in the future.

The conversations consisted of face-to-face interviews with residents in the over 60's age group to get an understanding of their experiences of life in the community and identify any unmet needs that may emerge. Conversations, using a pre-determined topic guide were carried out by volunteers, specially recruited for the purpose

Approach

Development of conversation topics

A sub-group of the NDT Board of Directors convened to develop a list of topics of interest for the conversations. The group included two member with research backgrounds in health issues.

Volunteer recruitment and training

Eight volunteers were recruited from within the village to carry out the community interviews. Volunteers were selected on the basis of their skills and experience; principally good communication skills and the ability to listen.

Volunteers were then provided with training sessions in:

- Community Health and Wellbeing Profiles within East Renfrewshire.
- The wider determinants of Health i.e. poor housing, poverty, isolation, mental health.
- Interviewing skills

Interviewee recruitment

Potential interviewees were identified and recruited through existing community-based groups.

Volunteers were also encouraged to identify potential participants from within their own contacts. This resulted in 4 people being recruited.

Data collection

Twenty interviews were completed during the course of the Conversation with volunteers visiting participants in their homes to conduct the interviews. The conversations were digitally recorded with participants' permission.

Volunteer focus group

Following the Conversations, a focus group was held with the volunteers to assess their reflections on their experiences and to enable them to share their thoughts on the process.

Limitations of the study

It should be noted that this group of residents may not be representative of the population of over 60s in Neilston, due to the difficulty experienced in identifying and accessing harder to reach residents. Participants were largely a self-selected group, and therefore likely to be more engaged in the community.

It was pointed out by the volunteers that only a small proportion of participants were housebound or completely dependent on health or social services. Therefore, further work may be needed with harder to reach people in order to get a true picture of the extent of need for them. This could best be achieved through meaningful collaboration with social and health care providers who have access to this group, for the purpose of recruiting and facilitating conversations with them.

“the library is a great place and now...you do more in the library now than just get a loan of books”
- (NC2)

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Volunteer role

The experience of the volunteers was reviewed to gain better understanding of how volunteers might become more involved in supporting this kind of initiative in the future

Findings

The use of community volunteers to conduct the Conversations was an innovative initiative that provided benefits both to the volunteers and participants in the conversations. This development could be explored further in future community work but requires resources to be devoted to dedicated training.

Recommendations

Where possible volunteers should be involved in all stages of community initiatives, including the planning and developing stages.

For non-routine volunteering roles, such as the Neilston Conversation, more resources should be allocated to support and develop volunteering at a local level.

Interview findings

Four key themes emerged from interviews with participants:

Participation in Community Life

Participants were asked to share their views on community involvement and participation in community events

Findings

- While the majority of people who took part make use of social and leisure facilities, both within and outside the village, some people with increasing mobility difficulties, disabilities or who are caring for others find it more difficult to take part in social and leisure pursuits. As a lot of people with health and support needs had previously enjoyed an active social life in the village when they were younger and disability-free they could, potentially, be supported to be more involved again.
- Participants felt that socialising and attending community events are helpful in bringing people together, keeping in touch and creating social networks. Frail, disabled and housebound residents are

less likely to experience these benefits, the consequence of which could be a risk of isolation.

- Opportunities for meeting people through day-to-day use of village amenities such as shops, cafes, the library, and to a limited extent, the leisure centre, was an important factor for most participants. In particular, the move towards mixed use of the library, to include an elderly health club was valued as another opportunity to meet people as well as take part in health-promoting activities such as massage and exercise.
- Good relationships with family, friends and neighbours were experienced and

“you’ll not go up that village without meeting somebody, that’s the good thing about Neilston”
- (NC3)

valued by the majority of participants and contribute to good support networks. People with more health issues tended to report less contact with friends and neighbours and, therefore, would not expect or ask for support if needed. This self-perpetuating situation could lead to isolation for those less able to move around the community.

- A wide range of private, and some participatory, hobbies and interests are pursued. Creating the conditions in which some of these private hobbies could be enjoyed in group situations would help strengthen networks and relationships among this target group.

Recommendations

- Ways of engaging frail or housebound over 60s in social relationships and activities should be explored to help prevent loneliness and isolation.
- Thought should be given to adopting a mixed-use approach in the leisure centre, similar to that in the library.

- Initiatives aimed at creating and sustaining social support networks could have a positive effect on the experience of people at risk of isolation.
- Extra attention should be focussed on people with health problems as they are least likely to have the benefit of social support.
- There is scope to involve the over 60's in more participatory hobbies and interests by capitalising on private pursuits already enjoyed by this age group and making provision for these to be offered as group activities.
- The possibility of adopting the Community Catalysts Ltd model of delivery of local support services should be explored.

Civic engagement

This theme addressed questions around pro-active participation in and membership of community groups and associations

Findings

- Knowledge and awareness of NDT was variable, suggesting a need for promotion and advertising of the work of NDT amongst this age-group.
- Civic engagement was thought to bring benefits in terms of bringing people together, having something to focus on, generating a feeling of belonging and of community cohesion. These were also viewed as important for providing fun and having a positive effect on mental health.
- It was thought that young people (both families and teenagers) should be encouraged to be more involved in community activities, as the more senior participants felt they “had done their bit” in the past and new blood was needed.
- Suggestions for encouraging involvement in groups and projects were : better advertising; communication on a one-to-one basis; better access to events and services via transport links; a community hub for information provision and awareness-raising about events and services being offered; a befriending service; and safer streets at night to encourage older people to go out.

I thoroughly enjoyed the wee club. I sat and I knitted and I done all sorts of things at it
- (NC12)

Recommendations

- There is a need for increased promotion and advertising of NDT to raise awareness amongst harder to reach residents and encourage participation.
- A community hub, such as The Bank, providing access to a range of community-relevant information, would be an asset to the over 60s and could, potentially, generate more interest in NDT amongst this age group.
- Efforts to encourage interest and involvement in community events and activities, particularly amongst those who are currently least engaged, could help provide social support to residents most at risk of social exclusion, loss of independence, and the resultant deficit in health.

Relationship with Physical Environment

Participants were asked to think about the physical environment in which they live, focussing on their feelings of safety and security and what they thought of their surroundings

Findings

- There was a perceived threat from young people congregating in the streets and indulging in anti-social behaviour that was not borne out by actual individual experience of any harm. Many residents felt that there are not enough facilities for younger people, to “get them off the streets”. This was a deterrent to going out at night which, in the views of participants, could be addressed by provision of a door to door transport service to facilitate attending social events.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS (cont.)

- In general, participants were very positive about the physical environment, particularly the surrounding countryside and easy access, via public transport, to the city. The main negative aspect raised was vandalism by young people, thought to stem from a lack of respect for their surroundings.
- Many views were expressed on improvements to the physical environment around aesthetic enhancements to areas around the village to make them more attractive to families as recreation areas and more work to address dog fouling and general street cleanliness. One participant who uses a mobility scooter highlighted the difficulties encountered due to uneven pavements and lack of low areas on pavements to facilitate crossing the road safely.
- express their points of view. This would increase communication between the older and younger generations with the potential to address and challenge some of the fears held by older people.
- Improvements should be made to the aesthetics of the village to make it look 'prettier'.
- More seating and recreational areas should be made available or improved around the village for people to enjoy the environment more and make it look prettier
- Vandalism needs to be tackled. This could be assisted by the presence of a community police officer as previously suggested or through the development of a project using principles such as Secured by Design.

I have got to make some arrangement to get into Paisley or wherever and even then it is difficult because I can't walk

- NC18

Recommendations

- A transport or car pool scheme would be beneficial in helping older people attend community events at night, to reduce the fear they have of walking in the village at night by themselves. This would increase the engagement opportunities available to over 60s in Neilston.
- The reinstating of a community police officer would increase feelings of security for people over 60.
- Exploring options around activities for young people in Neilston would have a positive effect on older people if it meant that the numbers of groups gathering in the street were reduced.
- A separate piece of work could be undertaken to explore where perceptions of fear come from and perhaps an event bringing together the older and younger generations to allow both a chance to

Health & Wellbeing

This theme addressed issues around the general health of the participants and how this affects their day to day life and might affect their participation in community life

Findings

- In terms of the effect of health on day-to-day life, many participants expressed frustration that simple tasks and activities were now proving to be a challenge, such as using a can opener, reading, and listening to music, due to some deterioration in health.
- Loss of independence was also expressed by some participants with more severe physical limitations who have to rely on others for help. While social care was valued by most of the more disabled participants, the loss of independence, due to having to depend on care workers' timetables, was felt keenly by some who require intensive daily help.
- Participants tended not to differentiate between social and leisure activities and activities undertaken for the benefit of health. Walking, playing bowls and attending tea dances were popular activities undertaken but commonly seen as an opportunity to socialise, as opposed to a form of exercise. In general, there was a lack of interest in organised activity that does not include a social aspect.

- Health was viewed as extremely important to the majority of participants and exercise was thought to be key to maintaining health, both physical and mental. The social aspect of exercise was the main contributor to mental well-being for most participants.
- Some participants highlighted the importance of mental determination in overcoming the struggle involved in motivating themselves to be active in the face of increasing health issues.

Recommendations

- A transport or car pool scheme which would take elderly residents to either the local shops (for help with transportation of shopping back to the house) or to the neighbouring supermarket would assist people in getting their shopping, removing the financial burden of relying on taxis.
- More advertising of current schemes such as MyBus, run by SPT which will provide

door to door transport for anybody who finds it difficult to use public transport to access local services and amenities, for example, shops, lunch clubs, visiting friends, and GP and health centre appointments (cannot be used for hospital appointments).

- To improve use of the leisure centre for over 60s, there could be more classes held exclusively for this age group, with perhaps a social element included.
- A variety of age-appropriate activity sessions and classes would help demonstrate that older age is not a barrier to enjoying fitness-oriented pursuits.
- There should be a concentrated effort to engage with the most hard to reach people in the village to address the gaps in involvement.

CONCLUSIONS

The NC provided insights into the lives of the over 60's, the extent to which they are, and feel, part of the community, opportunities for socialising, their family and non-kin based networks, barriers to engaging in community life, views on their surroundings and aspirations for the future.

What these conversations revealed is that, whilst it is encouraging that social capital is high for the majority of participants, there are also unmet needs amongst this population and, therefore, scope for organisations, clubs and statutory services to re-configure their approach to provision to better meet their needs.

In particular there are opportunities for delivery agencies to work better together in creating a cohesive approach.

There is also an opportunity to support the community to build on existing social capital and develop its internal capacity.

*(Re: volunteering)...
fantastic...I feel like
bubbling. That's what
life is about – doing your
best for people and
trying to get on with life*
- (NC7)

THANKS

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We are indebted to the **volunteer interviewers**, who were willing to perform a role not usually associated with volunteering. All gave of their

time freely to engage in training and conduct the interviews. We know we didn't get it right all of the time but with your support and enthusiasm we have a wonderful opportunity to set policy for all our futures.

We are also very grateful to **all those who participated** in the conversations, without whom this project would not have been possible. We hope you enjoyed taking part in the Neilston Conversation and thank you for allowing NDT into your home.

NDT is still a young organisation with a lot to learn, we hope that with your support and wisdom, we can work together in 'reshaping older people's social care programmes' signposting and delivering guidance for the over 60s in Neilston.

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