



FIFE USER PANELS

Background

Fife User Panels were launched by Age Concern Scotland in 1992 in response to one of the recommendations of the 1990 NHS & Community Care Act, which states that local authorities should consult with user of their services.

Fife User Panels aim to provide older people with an opportunity to be involved in, and influence, the planning and provision of the health and community care services they depend on to lead an independent lifestyle in their own homes. The Panels are a recognised example of good practice.

Panel members are aged over 70, live in their own homes and are less able to get out and about without assistance. They come together, in small groups of up to 8 people, on a monthly basis to share their experiences of growing older and using services. Staff also meet with Community Groups, meeting the same criteria, on a six weekly basis.

Issues raised are passed on to service planners, frequently resulting in their attendance at Panel meetings enabling discussion to take place around the concerns and experiences of older people with regard to service provision.

Fife User Panels are a recognised part of the consultation process of Fife Council and NHS Fife and also work with researchers and agencies UK wide.

Equal Opportunities Committee – Age Taking Stock

Three Panels and one Community Group (33 older people) took part in discussion and identified the following issues of concern in relation to age.

Where people face discrimination because of their age?

Health

There was a feeling that the attitude and medical decisions of health professionals alters depending on the age of patients -

- One person commented that her GP told her that she would not get a bunion removed because of her age.
- Replacement of joints or other interventions
- Another lady, who is over 90, had experience of being told her cholesterol was high and the Cardio Nurse assuming that the reason for this was that she 'ate any old thing'.

Attitudes

- The 'couldn't care less' attitude of other adults towards older people eg letting doors swing shut without taking into account that the person following could have sight loss.
- The attitude of other older people towards mobility problems.
- Young people who complain about older people do not realise that they will be old themselves one day.

Comment was made that older people are often spoken to in a patronising way and that there is a general lack of respect for them.

Transport

- Lack of accessible and door to door transport.
- Bus drivers not giving enough time for older, less mobile and disabled passengers to be seated before driving off.

Venues

Not all venues are totally accessible. Toilets are often too narrow for people with zimmer frames etc and often there is only one toilet designated for disabled people.

Language and Stereotyping

Older people do not like being referred to as -

- 'an old wife'
- coffin dodgers
- wrinklies
- grave dodgers
- Senior Citizen is preferred rather than 'old age pensioner'

or having the assumption made that they will be grumpy, awkward etc.

One lady was confused when a Lawyer she was consulting used the term 'when you pop your clogs'. When the term was explained to her she was horrified that he, in his line of work in particular, would use this language.

More emphasis should be put on the fact that older people are a valuable part of society with the same aspirations as anyone else.

Shopping

- Clothing shops cater for a younger age group, with very few having a range more suitable for older people. Similar comment was made regarding shoes and the difficulty in finding suitable house slippers.
- Packaged foods being supplied in large quantities and older people without freezers having to use and eat the same food on consecutive days.
- older people feel embarrassed about asking for small quantities eg two sausages or two slices of cold meat and often buy more than they need.
- A large box of cereal could be past its sell-by date by the time and older person gets through it.

- Supermarket special offers of 'buy one get one free' are no good for older people. Suggestion that it would be better if prices were reduced instead.
- Many houses specifically for older people do not have large cupboards for storing food.
- Cellophane wrapped foods can be very difficult for older people to open.

Pensions

Some people find the extra 25p a week, awarded when people become 80, to be an insult.

Comment was made that it is not even enough to buy a stamp.

Insurance

Comment was made that holiday insurance for older people can be more expensive or difficult to obtain.

Instance was given of car insurance being refused because of age.

Council Services

Refuse collection staff should consider older people when leaving emptied Wheelie Bins quite a bit away from their house.

What issues people face because of their age?

The following examples were given –

- General deterioration of strength
- You can do less with yourself
- Loneliness
- One person said that she misses going out on her own
- Unable to do gardening
- Opening bottles/jars a problem
- Cannot bend down to pick things up following hip operation, but expected to be able to do this
- Takes longer to dress eg tights and shoes
- One lady who previously enjoyed dancing expressed disappointment that, following an illness, she was no longer able to dance the Tango! Another lady misses being able to take part in Ballroom Dancing.

Whether there should be age categories, for example should there be a specific age when a person becomes an 'older person'?

The following comments were made –

- Should not have a specific age as different people have different needs whether they are young or old
- It depends on individuals and their outlook
- Old age is a gradual thing – it creeps up on you
- I've been old for a long time
- I'm not old
- Family circumstances can have an impact
- I only feel 25
- I only feel 16
- When I feel old

What the priorities should be, in terms of age, for the Scottish Parliament in the next session from 2007 – 2011?

- Raise awareness of the **importance** of older people. From their discussions at meetings older people would not expect to be treated any differently from anyone else, only that they be treated fairly, respectfully and considerately.
- Whilst recognising that a large number of older people are dependant on services to help them maintain an independent lifestyle, there is an expectation that their **social needs** be addressed.
- They acknowledge the value of a **75+ Annual Health Check** in terms of peace of mind that potential health problems could be identified at an early stage thus preventing advancing conditions and the possible need for hospitalisation and other services. They have also commented on its value for sign-posting to other services, checking on aspects of mental health and well-being and the provision of appropriate and relevant information. There is no obligation for this check to be routinely offered by GP Practices under the current GP Contract.

- **Day Care Centres** are considered important by a large number of older people as it may be the only time they are out of their home and have access to companionship, the outside world and information. One group commented that “more Day Centres like this one are needed as there are not enough”.
- The **Home Care Service** is valued with particular emphasis on low-level domestic care, highlighting its preventative potential in avoiding a crisis situation, as well as addressing the issue of mental health and wellbeing.
- **Podiatry Services** are limited and older people find that having to wait twelve weeks or longer between appointments is too long. The discomfort they experience is debilitating, often resulting in them wearing inappropriate footwear to compensate. Nail cutting is restricted to people with medical problems, but a large number of older people cannot reach their toe-nails to cut them and this again results in discomfort.
- **Information** relevant to older people. Panel members raise this issue on a recurring basis and have suggested that when people reach the age of 70, information around available services and support in their area should be provided. Whilst appreciating that not everyone is ‘old’ at 70, this was considered to be an age when people, in looking to the future, may appreciate receiving this type of information. There is an opinion that people only receive information on a ‘need to know’ basis, or when a crisis occurs, which is not always helpful to those who find themselves in a difficult situation and do not know who to contact.

In Conclusion

The status of older people requires to be raised significantly to remove stigma and ensure dignity and quality of life.

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