Bingo & Beyond

Starting to look at Good Practice when working with Older People

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

This Good Practice Manual was written by Jane Field, Education and Development with support from the Engage with Age Team, namely Elma Greer, Christine Acheson, Darren Curtis, Stephen Gourley and Naomi Millar.

Many thanks to those members of the Engage with Age Board and Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum who provided advice and feedback on the draft document.

Engage with Age is a consortium of voluntary, community and statutory organisations established to develop new ways of working with older people (aged over 50 years old) in South and East Belfast and Castlereagh. Older people resident in these areas are subject to the needs associated with older citizens, compounded by the effects of the troubles, both in inner city areas and outlying estates. The primary aim of Engage with Age is to enable older people to achieve and sustain better health and well-being.

Engage with Age has been funded throughout it's first three year phase by the Belfast Regeneration Office Action Plan, sponsored by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety with additional contributions from the partnership since it's establishment in August 2001. New funding will take Engage with Age into it's second phase and this phase begins Summer 2004.

The Engage with Age Management Board comprises of representatives from a number of different agencies, namely:
- Age Concern NI
- Belfast City Council
- Castlereagh Borough Council
- East Belfast Partnership
- Help the Aged
- South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust
- Castlereagh Lifestyle Forum
- South Belfast Community Lifestyle Forum
- South Belfast Partnership Board/Highway to Health

For further information about Engage with Age please contact Marie Gribbon or Carol Simpson on telephone number 028 90 649 649
E-mail info@engagewithgage.org.uk website www.engagewithage.org.uk or write to Engage with Age, 36 Knockbreda Road Belfast BT6 OJB

> **Dedication:** This manual is dedicated to the memory of **Drew Donaldson**, who sadly died in April 2004. Drew was involved in his local Wandsworth Community Association but also an enthusiastic and committed Engage with Age Board Member and Ambassador. He was a dedicated advocate for Older People who pioneered and promoted many of the ideas and approaches mentioned below. He was also a founder member of the Wise Men from the East Network and Belfast East Seniors Forum.
> Drew is already greatly missed but his example will continue to inspire us all.

Aim of Manual

The aim of this Manual is to start looking at good practice when working with older people through a community development process. *Bingo & Beyond* looks at lessons learnt from experience, taken from the first phase of Engage with Age - experiences of partner agencies, workers, volunteers and older people.

This Manual is a practical resource for:
- **Community workers**
- **Older peoples groups**
- **Working with older people one-to-one**
- **Health and social services professionals**
- **Statutory agencies working with older people.**

It should be emphasised that this Manual is not intended as a blue print but rather is starting to look at good practice issues. It is intended to be a contribution towards discussion about practical approaches to working effectively with older people and also a contribution towards current debate and strategic development. *Bingo & Beyond* has been written with a view to sharing the experiences and skills of the Engage with Age Team, their partners and other groups and individuals working with older people across Belfast. As such, the experiences and strategies offered have predominantly been used within an urban environment; although many of the activities and approaches can be transferred or adapted to accommodate working with older people in rural locations.

Throughout this Manual a community development approach has been taken to working with older people. Community development encompasses the delivery of services within the community that not only meet identified need but also contribute to the capacity building of individuals and groups and the transformation of communities. A community development approach facilitates the participation of target groups in both the identification and solution of their problems and encourages communities to think more proactively about their own development, often within a climate of change. Effective community development instills greater confidence, independence and empowerment for individuals, groups and communities.

Context and Background

Across Europe there is change in the age distribution of the population. By the year 2020, people aged 60 and over will comprise one in five of the European Union's population. This silent revolution in Europe's age structure has been taking place largely unnoticed by the general public and until relatively recently by policy makers as well. Today, there are more than 70 million people aged 60 and over in the European Union, representing just under one in five of the population.

The demographic population of Northern Ireland is changing in line with these statistics. The 2001 census statistics showed that approximately 16% of the population was over 65 years. In 2013 this will increase to 24% based on 1998 mid year estimates (Statistics and Research Agency). Until recently, the focus of the majority of funding initiatives was on employability and sustainability with little financial input into developing and delivering projects for older people.

In the past, many solutions to meeting the needs of older people is that things were 'done' for them; often without consultation or identification of needs or interests. More recent approaches have taken an alternative approach of working with older people and supporting the development of groups, activities and programmes with capacity building, enabling older people to take on the initiative for themselves.

Working effectively with older people is a positive investment in the future and in re-establishing social infrastructure across local communities. Older people present an opportunity to significantly contribute to the communities in which they live; yet too often society views older people as a burden rather than recognising the considerable skills and experience they can offer. This Manual is based on the experiences of the Engage with Age Team, their partners, other individuals and groups who have taken a community development approach to engaging older people and developed partnerships with community groups, voluntary organisations and statutory agencies to better meet the needs and interests expressed by older people.

Engage with Age is one of a number of recent initiatives across Northern Ireland that was piloted as an approach to work with older people, with a focus on the promotion of health and social well-being. The focus on health and social well-being has also encompassed such issues as community safety, social isolation (including the promotion of social inclusion), targeting social need and promoting user involvement in services. Through evidence of need, consultation, surveys and listening to what older people want, Engage with Age has developed a range of services, support mechanisms, activities and programmes in collaboration with community workers, community groups, volunteers, voluntary organisations and statutory agencies; with some considerable success, to the extent that some core funding has now been made available to the project.

It should be emphasised that the experiences presented in this Manual are not entirely the ideas and actions of Engage with Age but also examples of good practice which the team have observed or encountered in the course of their work to date. The final section of this Manual offers a list of key contacts and resources of Northern Ireland wide organisations and agencies that work with or provide services for older people.

Engaging Older People; Consultation and Planning.

In any community development process there is a need to give people the opportunity to have their say. This can be a challenge when working with a established group of people but is an even greater challenge when the target group is spread across the community and may not be actively participating in any community group. The Engage with Age Team has experience both in working with established older peoples groups and in engaging individuals in the first instance.

Engagement of Older People

Before setting out to involve new people in community activities it is necessary to have the support of community groups and professionals involved with the target group and the neighbourhood. As everyone vouches, word of mouth is one of the most effective ways that a community learns about a new initiative. Furthermore word of mouth can make or break any initiative - credibility and the ability to deliver are addressed in other sections of this report.

An audit of existing provision to support and work with older people is a valuable, if time-consuming exercise. This can include older peoples groups already established within the area; professionals involved in delivering services to older people and voluntary and statutory organisations that have a presence in the area. Such a mapping exercise has a number of benefits; it not only provides a strategic planning tool but is also useful for producing a local directory or 'what's on?' leaflet. It is important that new initiatives support and promote groups and activities that already exist within the community sector and to older people.

Personal visits to these organisations and groups will contribute towards raising awareness of the initiative; which can be further backed up by promotional literature. The next section considers working with established groups in further detail.

The following table identifies some of the practical strategies used to make initial contact with older people.

Engagement Activity	Comment
Having a stand in a shopping centre	Having a ballot for everyone who completes a form with contact details/requesting further information can work well. Success can vary depending on shopping centre location and shopper profile.
Visiting community groups who do not have specific provision for older people	Raise awareness of potential to involve older people in generic community issues. Talk with community workers, council workers and volunteers. May signpost you onto other groups so always ask "do you know anyone else we could talk to?" (similar at times to working as a detective.)
Professionals working with older people	Health trust staff, agencies, voluntary and charitable organisations, housing scheme coordinators and Housing Executive neighbourhood wardens who are working with older people. Encourage referrals and discuss how your initiative complements their work. Look to building and sustaining positive partnerships.
Promotional Materials: leaflets e.g 'what's on?,' posters, newsletters, websites	Focus on the target group when developing promotional materials. For older people, information must be easy to read and attractively presented. (Arial, font size 14, black ink on yellow paper looks well). Place in libraries, community centres, health centres etc. Post offices may put leaflets in pension books. Always carry some leaflets with you and ask your 'Ambassadors' (see later) to carry leaflets with them too.
House to house surveys and street surveys	Volunteers can help out with house surveys - a good way of meeting people for the first time. Always follow up with information promised, this supports the consultation process. Keep it simple, short and focused. Offer to fill in for people, tick boxes make life easier for everyone. A conversation approach with the survey works well and entry into a ballot for all completed surveys can be an added incentive.
Local papers and bulletins.	Announce 'what's on?' in local newspapers, bulletins and community newsletters.
Churches	Involve local churches and church groups - may be willing to put information in church bulletin.
Bus stops, buses, people in the street	Response will vary. Some people like this, others do not. Pass on a leaflet, invite people to contact you or their local group.
Through existing group members	Word of mouth should never be underestimated as one of the most powerful ways of engaging people. Members should be encouraged to talk to friends, neighbours and their families.

Consultation and Planning

The consultation process essentially involves listening to older people to find out what the issues are and what they would like to be doing. This can be done through:

- Low-key group consultation; perhaps as part of another planned meeting or even informally over a cup of tea
- Focus groups with specific areas for discussion outlined beforehand and involving a good mix of people with an interest in the topic and who have something to say
- Making reference to and taking on board consultation and research that other agencies are doing and have done well
- Straw poll surveys - a simple form asking older people to prioritise issues or preferred activities from 1 – 5 - can be used on a bus trip, within a session or during other engagement activities (quick and simple)
- Linking in with other groups and networks
- Conferences - as well as impacting information and sharing experiences, conferences can also be ideal events for consultation activities
- Residentials - some older people may be willing to attend a residential that engages them in the consultation and planning process
- Statutory agency consultation sessions - older people should be invited and supported to attend statutory agency consultation events, not only on issues specific to older people but also generic issues such as housing or the environment.

The latter three consultation activities will require older people to have a certain level of confidence to be willing to agree to participate in the first place and then feel able to effectively 'have their say'. Engage with Age, Age Concern and Help The Aged have supported training opportunities that build confidence for public speaking and enable people to be Ambassadors and to lobby on behalf of their group.

Generally it helps to give people a few ideas to start off with as quite often the response to "what do you want to do?" is "we're ok as we are." Groups also tend to reach a level of realism by themselves - for example one men's group first meeting held to discuss what they might do as a group started the list with 'a trip to the Algarve' and ended with ' a visit to Armagh'.

It often helps when groups can find some common ground from which to move forward. Anecdotal evidence and case stories can be effectively used during consultation sessions and can subsequently be linked to developmental and strategic planning and also within any lobbying activity.

The social opportunities offered through meetings should not be underestimated. Furthermore, people like to be involved when they feel that this could make a difference and that their views are valued. There should always be a follow-up to

consultation sessions. At a different level, many older people attended a 'Right to be Safe' march organised by Help the Aged in Belfast in 2003. For a lot of those attending it was the first time they had participated in any sort of protest march and they gained confidence from feeling they were not alone in their concerns about community safety.

One of the positive experiences of the Engage with Age Team is that very often people come away from a planning session feeling very positive. They have had the opportunity to put ideas into a programme (which for some may be the first time they have engaged in a consultation process) and they value the fact that they have been listened to. This is often accompanied by a feeling of self-worth as they have participated in a new experience, which can feel very daunting at the start.

Identifying Needs and Interests

Part of the engagement process and a significant factor contributing to the success (or otherwise) of working with older people is to endeavor to support activities and programmes in which older people are interested. As such, it is necessary to be aware of the needs and interests of the older people within the target communities.

Not surprisingly, part of this process involves taking the time to meet and talk with older people and to actively listen to what is being said. Sometimes older people will be unaware of or not given much thought to alternative activities. Comments such as "we can carry on doing what we do" are common; as is the statement "we don't plan ahead at our age." However, when a few options about sessions, trips, courses or other activities are suggested the group or individuals often start to think more 'out of the box' and usually it is possible to draw up a wide list of needs and interests which may subsequently need to be prioritised.

It is worth taking into account that many older people are reluctant to ask for help and they might also express a commonly held feeling that they "do not need charity." When groups do seek funding it is often for small amounts of funding that can kick-start a new activity or support the development of a new group.

Offering taster sessions to a group or opening up a taster event to a number of groups gives people an opportunity to try out new activities or skills. This can be done as an Open Day within the community. Engage with Age has been involved in two Senior Games Festivals which have been very well attended with older people trying out new physical and sporting activities such as archery, Tai Chi, horseshoe throwing; as well as having the opportunity to participate in activities that they may not have done for some time (such as swimming) or to enjoy a game of bowls with a new group of people. Very often the opportunity to try out or 'taste' a number of alternative activities provides people with the interest and confidence to want to engage in and pursue a new hobby or interest. Peer leadership also plays an important role at taster sessions and more generally in encouraging individuals or groups to take up something new. A further benefit from taster sessions is that individuals can take ideas for new activities back to their groups. Those running the taster event should make tutor contact details available (subject to agreement from tutors or facilitators) so that groups can make contact with a particular tutor and bring the activity back to their members.

There is also the scope to share hobbies and interests; older people often respond well to arts and crafts based activities and there is considerable interest in local history. It can be useful to develop a "what do you think?" interests and ideas tick sheet that offers a range of different ideas and activities that older people might be interested in. As well as stimulating ideas, this also helps to produce a consensus of opinion.

When identifying needs and interests it is possible to identify key trends or common issues raised by different people at a range of meetings. Reading through local newspapers can also bring pertinent issues to light.

Working with Existing Community Groups

When working with any group it is important to clearly explain what it is you can offer the group. The role of the Engage with Age Development Workers for example is to facilitate groups – i.e. they are not the key worker and as such have considerable reliance on paid workers and volunteers to support the development of new activities and to sustain momentum. When meeting with groups it is important not to raise expectations unrealistically but to deliver what you say you will and to be clear as to what this is.

When discussing what can be done, make sure that everyone knows and understands the general response to and outcomes of any idea to avoid future disappointment or misunderstanding.

When working with an established group of older people it is important to identify the 'leaders' and 'motivators'. It is important to get these individuals onside and to encourage them to take on new ideas suggested by the wider group. The reality can be that only one or two people within a group or neighbourhood are doing most of the work. It is worthwhile trying to involve others and to share peoples skills across the group. One of the problems of having only one or two people taking on all the responsibility is that if they are ill or become less mobile the group will very often flounder. The programme is stronger if the group as a whole is involved in the planning process as the members have a feeling of ownership. This may also encourage them to invite their friends along to something that into which they have had an input.

It should go without saying that the goodwill of volunteers should be valued and recognised. Developing networks of volunteers and others working with older people has been much valued (see later section). Giving affirmation raises self-confidence and volunteers welcome those who can offer advice, both on new activities or programmes and on practical issues such as funding applications and running an effective committee. These volunteers are very often the people who support facilitators and new activities; saying things like "I'll come along and support you" is an example of the good relationship and loyalty that many give and it also encourages them to participate in something new in the first instance. Equally, when encouraging someone to attend something new the "come along with me" approach often works well.

One of the outcomes of working with established groups is to encourage the integration and participation of older people within wider community issues; for example Forum Boards, Area Partnerships and Management Committees. There may be a need to establish two-way communication between groups for older people and other community groups. Sometimes people need to be encouraged and shown

the value and input that they can have into a group and there is a lot of mileage to be gained from helping groups and individuals make the first links.

Starting up a Group for Older People

Surveys and research have shown that there are a lot of groups for older people; some may meet on a regular basis to participate in a specific activity (for example bowls or bingo); whilst others may offer a wider choice of activity for their members or run different programmes throughout the year. However when there is nothing in the neighbourhood or a new interest has been identified or where the group does not really cater for the needs of older men, there may be an opportunity to support the establishment of a new group.

The first step is to identify a core group of potential regulars which will ideally be a mix of leaders, doers, talkers and others. These people may have expressed an interest in starting up a new group or may have been referred through another agency or community group. When starting some new groups, information meetings have been held in residents houses. This has proven to be a good way to develop potential start-up groups; those attending meetings have a lot of questions and start to take ownership of the idea of meeting together regularly and what they would like to do.

Successful approaches for the first activity through which people will become involved include a taster event - a six week project or a trip that relates to the interests of the new group. Future developments can be discussed informally 'over a cup of tea'; making sure that activities proposed fit in with older peoples routines and take into account that establishing a group takes time.

Understandably, new groups will vary in the support that they need to get up and running. Generally facilitators are needed to:
- Develop ideas and use their knowledge of good speakers and other contacts, funding opportunities and activities that might engage the group
- Provide contacts in the community
- Inform about appropriate venues
- Develop a budget
- Access some start-up/bridging funds available to the group before they reach the constitution stage (many funders criteria excludes groups that do not have a formal constitution)
- Provide sample constitutions
- Network the new group with other groups
- Wider networking e.g. with appropriate agencies and service providers
- Bring new people into the group
- Identify resources such as transport, access to funding, support from workers (e.g. Council Community Workers)

When providing assistance to a group at the start, it is important to make it clear that the time and investment given to the group will become less over time and to try to ensure that the group does not become too reliant on the external individual. This can be made easier if members of the group are encouraged to take on roles and responsibilities.

Inevitably there may be problems when groups are starting up. The table below shows some of the most common problems and offers possible solutions.

Problem	Possible Solution
Conflict within the group – e.g. conflict of interests between personalities or about the decision making process	The facilitator should remain impartial and focus on keeping the group together. There may be a need to mediate or to bring in an independent mediator or trainer. It is important to provide reassurance and support for the leader and to find common ground within the group.
Lack of focus – unsure of what the group wants to do	Make suggestions to the group as to what activities or programmes are possible. Organise a planning session; look at prioritising, get inspiration from other groups or suggest that the group has a go at something in which they might be interested.
Reluctance to formalise the group or to form a committee	Look at alternative ways in which the group can constitute themselves (formal vs informal); help the group apply for funding; look at insurance issues; find other workers or mechanisms to help put things in place and put the group in touch with other groups who can talk about how they went through a similar process.
Reluctance on the part of individuals to become office bearers	Provide training and support about the role and responsibilities of committee members. Motivate and encourage. Also point out that it is necessary to have a committee and a constitution to apply for funding in most cases. Encourage two people to take on the same role (maybe one as an assistant or deputy). Explain that office bearer positions are time bound and put systems in place to train up new people.
Transport	Drawing up a budget, fundraising, sharing cars when possible. Make use of free senior travel passes. Some Trusts and Councils have buses available to community groups. Advise groups that bus companies may offer special deals at certain times of the day.

Access to buildings (due to immobility or disability)	Look at and suggest alternative venues – issues of access should improve by the end of 2004.
Competition between groups in the area for the same pots of money	Explore possibilities of bringing groups together to share resources and facilities at a neighbourhood level.
Lack of financial resources	Advise group of writing applications for funding and identify appropriate funding opportunities. Keep groups informed. Look at activities that do not have costs associated to them
'Top Table' mentality	Look at alternative ways of planning and developing the group. Demonstrate different ways of running meetings.
Lack of knowledge and fear of legal responsibilities; for example insurance, health and safety or risk assessment.	Awareness raising about the issues without scaring people off. Knowing those insurance companies who provide good deals to community groups. Keeping a sense of balance and realism about these issues.

Once again the key lessons are to take the time to get to know the individuals with whom you are working and to engage in active listening. Knowing the local community and other groups; having a range of contacts and sharing such information all positively contribute to supporting new groups.

Networking and Forums

Putting groups and individuals in contact with other people who share common interests and challenges can be very beneficial for those involved. People realise that they can learn from others and that sharing information, good practice and experiences sometimes works more effectively than on their own.

Networking can take the form of making contact with new organisations and people or representing a group on a wider forum or committee; thus ensuring that the voice of older people will be heard.

The benefits of networking are many and varied. Some of the benefits experienced are given in the list below:
- Information sharing
- Support
- Generation of new ideas
- Transferability or adaptation of good practice
- New groups and workers meeting others
- Recharging the batteries – motivation
- Looking at new ideas for change
- Taking pride in what your own organisation has achieved
- Inspiration
- Making contact and arranging visitors to come to your group or visiting other groups
- Going somewhere new and different and seeing another venue or group
- Overcomes isolation between groups and workers
- Discuss issues – often very similar
- Breaks down barriers
- Opportunity for consultation
- Develop joint projects between groups
- New friendships and social opportunity
- Look at differences and similarities – comparisons
- Celebration

There can be problems associated with networks; not least the element of competition. With the culture of limited funds available for projects over the past decade there has been a tendency for many groups to work in isolation and to guard information. Networking and sharing information may be a new way of working for many people; facilitators need to promote the benefits and show how this approach can support their group's aims and objectives.

Experience over the past few years has also pointed to some of the constraints and frustrations that becoming a member of a community forum can lead to. There have

been examples of power struggles, lengthy meetings (that people feel are talking shops, rather than leading to activity and doing something) and a lack of clarity around the purpose of a forum. Lessons taken from these difficulties are the need to communicate why the forum was established, what the remit is, clear outcomes from meetings, realistic action plans and ensuring that no one feels excluded from consultation and communication. A good forum can achieve more with the members working together than any member could achieve alone which is the added value gained from taking time to participate in meetings and forum activities.

Good practice identified for those who participate in networks and forums is that:
- Individuals take ideas and new information back to their groups and cascade this more widely
- When feasible, opportunities to be involved with the network or forum are shared amongst the group
- The representative/s report back to the network or forum as to what their own group is doing
- Groups recognise and take opportunities for representation
- Networking and participation in wider community activity can be a useful way to gain recognition with statutory agencies and other organisations.
- Forums participate in wider structures such as the Interforum and Age Sector Reference Group

Group Activities and Cultural Events

The variety of group activities carried out by the Engage with Age Team has been considerable and wide ranging. This section of this Manual provides a brief overview of the range of activities (excluding Education and Training – see next section). The table below offers examples about activities for older people and also brief comments.

Activity	Comment
Armchair Aerobics	Participants enjoyed light exercise (many had not engaged in any form of exercise in years). Very popular and accessible activity.
Arts and Crafts Workshop	Sense of achievement of having something to show at the end of a session. Enjoyment of 'doing something' creative.
Using Computers	Enjoyed games, the internet. Confidence building. A chance to learn new skills. Involves men as well as women. Many want to progress onto another course. Need voiced by some for more one-to-one support - not possible with large numbers so try to keep classes small with beginners. Opportunity for people to document their story (which otherwise might be lost) or publicise their group's activities. Now some older people have been trained to teach computer skills to other older people.
Storytelling and Reminiscence	Enjoyment of talking about memories and stories from the past; although some people can be shy or lack confidence to share their own experiences. Story Sacks are stories of the individual's past with items corresponding to the story in the story sack. Items can be homemade and the story sack is made by the individual, thus including a crafts element into the activity. There is a real sense of achievement if this can end in a product – e.g. printed stories to share with others; story sacks can be used in schools.
Senior Games Festival	Opportunity to spend a day engaging in physical activity; both tried before and new challenges. Included archery, swimming, bowls, dance, badminton, Tai Chi, horseshoe throwing, massage, table tennis, arts and crafts.
Learning New Skills	Popular examples include microwave cooking for one, Christmas present wrapping and text messaging classes.
Oval/Glentoran Football Club visit	A lot of talk about this event beforehand and afterwards. Good starting point for formation of regular men's group.

Memories of Belfast Bus Tour	People mixed well (4 different groups involved). Tour was informative and generated a lot of conversation.
Breakfast for Workers and Representatives from Older Peoples Groups	Excellent opportunity for networking and to share information. High numbers at these events. Encourages group leaders to show support and to validate what they do.
Falling in Love with Sport	Enjoyed trying new activities and an interest in taking new activities into own community groups and clubs.
Boat Trips	Sense of risk and adventure; lunch an important element; bringing individuals and groups together.
Digital Film Archives Ulster Museum Reminiscence Room	Visits by the Digital Film Archives to groups or visits by the group to the Ulster Museum Reminiscence Room. Always enjoyed by groups and encourages personal reminiscence and discussion.
City Wide Events	Link in with local exhibitions and themed events; for example Titanic Festival, Cathedral Arts Festival or Lantern Parades
Open Days	Open up a centre to everyone. An opportunity for groups to show and publicise what they do. Provide a range of activities for people to take part in. Works better if there is a free lunch and free transport.
Tea Dances	These can be run as an internal group activity by inviting another group to join in a tea dance or on a neighbourhood basis where the groups are collected by a bus and taken to a neighbourhood wide tea dance on a monthly basis (venue rotates). Promotes physical exercise and are enjoyed by all who participate.
Cinema	There is a home cinema at Comber that works better than general visits to the cinema as the group can book in as a group and choose the film that they want to see; usually a classic film from some years ago. An alternative is to make a group booking at one of the arts cinemas that show classic films from time to time.
Bingo	Still enjoyed by many people – one group has linked the bingo ball numbers to energy saving issues.

When participating in all the activities, older people commented on the fact that they enjoyed the social element and the company of others. Older people have enjoyed the opportunity to get out, meet new people and try something new. Numbers attending activities can vary and it is important to allow for flexibility.

Some venues work more effectively than others; access, lifts, stairs and location need to be taken into account. Providing lunch or refreshments provides a good opportunity for networking and socialising but care needs to be taken that sufficient variety is offered in order to cater to dietary requirements and tastes. The provision of free transport that picks older people up from their homes also facilitates a good turn-out at events.

Lessons learnt from facilitating and organising activities for older people may be categorised into organisational issues, activities, socialisation and networking:

Organisational Issues:
- Make sure there are enough workers available on trips to help with access onto buses, boats etc.
- Informal venues can work well with soft seating and coffee tables.
- Easy access makes drop-in sessions more successful.
- When using local restaurants ensure that the venue is appropriate, for example in terms of access into the restaurant and bus parking and also it is useful to warn the restaurant of the party's visit in advance.
- When possible, ask that an invoice be issued rather than handling cash
- Ensuring there are sufficient staff available to support activities (e.g. arts and crafts and computer classes); take into account the level of ability and mobility of participants at any given session.
- Brief external experts and facilitators well beforehand about the make-up of the group, previous knowledge, issues of concern etc.

The Activities:
- Ensuring that sessions last an appropriate time (i.e. not too short nor too long).
- Getting the right balance between discussion and action.
- Benefits of evaluating activities; people enjoy the chance to reflect and discuss what they have done, enjoyed, learnt, would do differently etc.
- Sharing the cost i.e. between an organisation and the individual seems to be acceptable for visits.
- Participants enjoy having their photographs taken, particularly if it demonstrates achievement.
- Running a couple of short sessions often works better than one long session.
- One-off events provide the opportunity for face-to-face contact which can be a starting point to engage those experiencing some degree of social isolation.

Socialisation and Networking:
- Use opportunities to link in with local community and group events.
- Potential to involve 'experts' within the community to work with older people.

- Events can be an opportunity to engage people in other activities; for example providing information about other courses available in the community as a follow-up to an event and encouraging people to take up other opportunities.
- Benefits of working closely with community based workers who can support new initiatives or build on existing activities.

Education and Training

One of the most successful opportunities offered to older people is to participate in education and training programmes with their peers. For some people, this may be the first time they have attended a course since leaving school (which may be 50 or 60 years earlier); thus some encouragement and support may be needed to get people to participate in the first instance.

The table below identifies some of the courses that the Engage with Age Team have supported, facilitated or observed which have been well received by older people with supporting comments.

Course	Comments
Welcome All	Very useful course advocated by NI Tourist Board on 'Including Customers with Disabilities'. Disability awareness was more useful for participants than tourism aspects.
Age Awareness	Course was developed to suit need identified. Very worthwhile for workers and volunteers.
First Aid	Went very well. Course consisted 75% theory and 25% hands on. Quite intensive and covered a lot of topics in one day (some attendees felt there was some information they were not able to grasp). Interest in refresher course.
Arts and Crafts – Training for Trainers	Crucial to use acquired skills to justify cost and to encourage participants to run courses with their own group. Good results with support meetings afterwards is essential to ensure the cascading of skills.
Introduction to Computers	Went well. A small group but participants felt they learnt about how they could use computers.
Computer Design	Thoroughly enjoyed by all; appropriate for beginners rather than those with more computer experience. Individuals and groups enjoyed designing flyers and posters for their local group.
Older People Learning and Men in from the Margins: range of WEA courses	Interest from specific groups in a number of topics. Many were well received. Topics included Health, Computers, Confidence Building.
Getting Funding	Very worthwhile. Topics included Committee Skills, Speaking Out for Ourselves, Local History and Politics.
Finding and Keeping New Members	Very good; sharing personal experiences among group representatives.

Event Management	Very good content on organising outings and parties. Participants found course very informative.
Understanding Depression	Good content and feedback with honest exchange of issues.
Understanding Dementia	Excellent all round. Very worthwhile and well facilitated.
Understanding Bereavement	Well facilitated by CRUSE. Worthwhile. People benefited on both an individual and group basis. Positive and reassuring.
Relaxation Exercises	Very worthwhile and well received. Occasional support meetings to follow-up
Armchair Aerobics Facilitator Training	Course very worthwhile – excellent response. Individuals running armchair aerobics in their groups need accreditation for insurance purposes. Follow-up support meetings essential.
Media Training through Help The Aged	Very good feedback from participants.
Peoples History Project	Very well received with cross community exhibition at end. Ably facilitated by the Ulster Peoples College.
Public Speaking	Course very informative and has encouraged participants to take further detailed training on same topic.
Committee Skills	Useful for new groups and an opportunity to explore roles and responsibilities; provides self-confidence.
Forum Training	Good as a means of sharing information across groups and geographical area. Those who are new to the Forum benefit from the past experience of others.
Reminiscence	Enjoyed by small groups; good to have something recorded (on paper or audio-tape) afterwards.

The Engage with Age Team identified a number of key conclusions from running a range of courses over a two year period. These include:

- Not promoting too many programmes at one time
- Providing support meetings for courses aimed at people who will train or facilitate similar activities within their own groups maintains motivation and interest with a high level of localised courses then taking place
- Attendance on the day can be as low as only one third of those who signed up or there can be 100% attendance
- Charging in advance does not guarantee attendance but helps
- More women than men attend training courses (which is also the case with the majority of other events); explore the possibility of men only learning opportunities
- Experts with specialist knowledge are useful but must also have good facilitation skills as the individual makes a tremendous difference to how the course is received

- Running courses at a central venue is effective but often incurs high costs and parking problems. City Centre venues can be located near central bus routes and older people can use their free senior passes.

Engage with Age has developed a portfolio of tutors and speakers who are able to run courses and sessions for older people across South and East Belfast and Castlereagh at various costs. The team also promote courses run by other agencies and organisations that are targeted at older people.

Information and Signposting

Providing information and effective signposting is a vital part of the role of anyone working with older people, both one-to-one or with a group. Very often, people are not aware of what is available within their own local community, let alone within easy travelling distance.

It is the responsibility of facilitators, workers and volunteers to know what is available in the community; this includes one off events, regular programmes, contact details for service providers, organisations offering support or advice, adult education courses and local community groups. People have a right to know about the options and choices available to them and to be able to easily access such information. Groups can be encouraged to keep abreast of what is happening and available locally; which will empower them to be able to further provide a service to their members.

Information can be accessed through workers team meetings, networks, inclusion in other organisations mailing lists, local newspapers and newsletters.
Information can be shared through team meetings, networks, leaflets, newsletters and group sessions.

The Engage with Age Team have produced several leaflets that bring together a range of information on a similar topic. These include:
- Computer Rooms and Courses in East Belfast
- Council Sports Facilities in Castlereagh
- Transport for Community Groups
- Sources of Funding
- Speakers List
- Activities for Men
- Employment for People Aged 50+

Other organisations have their own information leaflets and directories that groups should be encouraged to have on file; for example Translink Timetables, Disability A-Z Manual, Contacts for Older People, course prospectuses from local colleges and community directories.

From Loneliness and Isolation to Social Well-being

Reaching older people who are lonely or socially isolated is one of the biggest challenges for anyone working with older people. In recent years there has been a growing emphasis focusing on the area of social isolation. This is not a problem unique to Northern Ireland; although in some communities the 'troubles' have added an additional dimension to fractured communities resulting in self-imposed isolation. A number of strategies, policies and initiatives have been established which amongst other issues address social isolation; these include: Strategy 2010, Targeting Social Need, Promoting Social Inclusion, Investing for Health and the Community Safety Strategy. In response, a number of community based projects (very often with inter-agency partnerships) have been established.

For the purposes of this Manual, social well-being is defined as having a sense of belonging; feeling involved in the community; having friendships and relationships; possessing a sense of self-worth and self-confidence; feeling useful, having a purpose and having a stake in the community.

The benefits of promoting health and social well-being are currently the subject of considerable research (both by organisations such as the Social Exclusion Unit, the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion and academics across the world). Health related projects should consider how best to promote and raise awareness about both mental and physical health for older people through information sessions and running a varied programme of activities that support individuals mental and physical well-being.

Identifying those who are socially excluded is the first stage in the process of reaching out to and engaging those who are socially isolated. House-to-house surveys, street surveys and referrals from other agencies can contribute to getting a picture of who to visit. It is then a question of engaging the individual and finding ways that might contribute to addressing their isolation and engaging the individual in an activity that suits them. This might include going along to a local community group or club, signing up for a course, going on a trip or linking up with a befriender. There is often a need to facilitate this process as the person may initially find it hard to fit into a new scenario easily. Sometimes it is possible to involve another person for example a member of a group or someone local who is going on the same course or trip who could meet up with the new person and accompany them.

During the engagement process (as with any other activity), if someone says they will call or find out a certain piece of information they must make sure that they deliver on what they said they would do. Some people are not naturally inclined towards social gatherings, whilst others will quickly find that they want to do anything that gets them out of the house and into a social gathering. Those who do not wish to join in with a

community based group may benefit from involvement in a befriending scheme and may over time choose to participate in one off activities.

In one case known to Engage with Age, eight older women who live alone within the same area set up their own group and found this to be a very effective way of doing a range of activities with peer support.

In February 2003, Engage with Age ran a conference targeting social isolation issues. Highlights from this conference included the fact that older people wish to remain independent, maintain social networks and make their own choices. The conference speakers and participants focused on the need for service providers to tailor services to meet individual need; to offer meaningful activities and to involve older people in service planning.

Working with Older Men

When working with older peoples groups it has become evident that as with many other community activities more women than men are participating in activities and programmes. Mapping exercises across South and East Belfast and Castlereagh identified that only 17% of those involved in community groups were men; whilst 35% of Trust clients in the same geographical area were men. It is apparent that there is a need for a different approach to be taken with men, which in turn points to the potential benefit of establishing older men's groups to meet this identified gap in levels of participation.

Men tend to be involved in their communities through:
- Going to pubs, clubs or the bookies
- Trade unions, politics, churches
- Task oriented activities
- Spectator sports, football matches, bowls.

Issues that affect men's involvement in community groups have been identified as including:
- Reluctance to attend groups where there are many more women attending than men
- Community groups/activity seen as 'women's world'
- Men's feelings of vulnerability in groups – need for safe non-threatening environment – men must be made to feel welcome
- Men face barriers to getting involved in men's groups/activities – there appears to be a stigma which needs to be overcome
- Many activities are female oriented
- Women seem more willing and interested in becoming involved with committees and organising whereas men prefer practical tasks
- Venues need to be accessible – go where men feel comfortable
- Feelings of isolation of men at a club – should they mix or segregate? Going to a community centre is seen as a strange thing to do
- Ill-health can exclude men from social involvement and can lead to a downward spiral of dependency
- Need for confidence building, especially around health issues
- Perception of 'man's world'/male bread winners now outdated or not 'politically correct'
- Large numbers of isolated and dependent older men
- Men whose partners have passed away have different coping mechanisms - many do not become socially involved
- Men find it difficult to adjust to the massive change of retirement.

The Engage with Age Team have found that the following approaches work well when engaging older men:

- Work at the pace that the men want
- Involve older men in planning activities
- Organise a visit to somewhere of interest to start the engagement process
- Initially focus on activities rather than discussion
- It takes time to develop a group feeling
- Invite speakers and encourage discussion
- Allow time and a number of meetings to take place before there is a 'natural' feeling to the group
- Getting the right venue is important
- Encourage men to attend with a friend
- Look at the potential for networking with other older men's groups
- Work in partnership and involve workers
- Aim to offer a mix of localised group sessions and area-wide high profile events.

Experience has also shown a tendency for there to be a greater reliance from the members of the group on the worker at the outset.

Useful discussion topics at the early stages of a meeting with the group include:

- How are men involved in their communities at the minute?
- What could succeed/be of interest to men?
- Who should be involved?
- What partnerships/co-operation are/is needed?
- What kind of resources are needed?
- Who should take things forward?
- What next?

Men's group activities that have gone well include:

- Walk and Talk Programme
- Health Roadshow
- Men's Games
- Projects with Football Clubs
- Visits; for example the Oval or the Ulster Transport Museum
- Handy Person Schemes.

When consulted, older men have identified the following priority areas:

- Social: identify a good meeting place, tea, company and chat
- Activity: for example walking, local history and outings
- Information sessions: for example men's health
- Creative: for example craft work, DIY, making things.

Intergenerational Activities

Intergenerational activities can be hard to develop and implement; yet they can contribute to greater community awareness and an increased feeling of community safety (particularly if older people can meet with local youth groups).

Activities that have been tried are shown in the table below with additional comments.

Intergenerational Activity	Comment
Older people visiting primary schools	This can be done within the schools Citizenship Curriculum. Support is needed from the teaching staff as well as from the group of older people and the subject matter must be clarified at the outset. Subjects that fit in well with the National Curriculum include the war years and the 1950s. Museums can help with artefacts. Pupils enjoy visits from people into the classroom and both young and old like the fact that they recognise each other in the street afterwards and can say hello.
Teenagers: Community Safety	Joint meetings can raise issues about community safety and perceptions but this is an area that requires intensive facilitation by those with expertise in the area
Reminiscence	Older people invited along to a get together with youth groups. The young people are interested in what their community was like in the past, particularly if work has been done with the group beforehand. Works well if a social element is included (eg a dance).
Sharing experiences e.g. a visit to a pantomime or museum	An opportunity to share feelings about having participated in a similar experience. Also encourages both groups of people to reflect on the activity.
Story Sacks	A nice idea as older people tell their story with props in the sack that support the story. Some of the older people lost their confidence about going into a classroom but it worked well in a library setting.
Time Lines	Comparing a day in the life of a teenager in the 1950s with a teenager today. Share activities (such as ten-pin bowling, computer games, skipping and hop-scotch).

Lessons gained from these intergenerational experiences include:
▪ The need to make any activity meaningful
▪ Focus on a defined theme

- It helps if the older people in the group know each other beforehand
- The need to appoint an experienced facilitator to work with both groups
- Look at progression opportunities
- Brief older people on child protection issues and have a Child Protection Policy
- A good starting point is to link older peoples groups with primary age children which builds good relationships with the school sector

Cross Community Activities

It is widely acknowledged that older people are often forgotten about when it comes to community relations work. As tends to happen in other groups, religion and politics are often avoided and ignored in Northern Ireland for fear of causing division and conflict among groups and individuals.

The Troubles had not started when people over fifty were children or in their teens. As such, people from different communities may have been at school together or worked together and cross community activities today can bring people back together again who have not met for a number of years and quickly re-establish common ground.

Sensitivity should be exercised as some older people may have been victims themselves or had family members who were victims of the Troubles in many of the neighbourhoods where Engage with Age works.

Developing cross community activities can be easier with many older peoples groups than working with younger generations. Reminiscence activities and joint visits work well; sometimes groups want to move onto a deeper level and discuss some of the historical issues that have led to divided communities but more often they are happy just to enjoy the craic and each others company. Some groups are happy to go to visit a centre in another community which helps to build understanding and connections.

When there are tensions within a community during the summer months there is a real benefit to be gained by organising a trip to take the older people out of the area for a day; which is both needed and appreciated for respite purposes.

Engage with Age has also included a cross border element within the programme through working with groups from both communities in Belfast and linking up with older peoples groups in Dublin. These events have been very successful; imaginative, ice-breakers encourage people from different groups to mix together.

Engage with Age acknowledges the community relations work of specialist agencies and welcomes their expertise and input as programmes develop.

Minority Ethnic Groups

Engage with Age has recently started to involve minority ethnic older groups within the initiative. A multi-cultural event was held to provide opportunities for a large number of people to try different foods and activity sessions. This event was beneficial as a first step. Another activity that is being developed is the Exchange Luncheons where older people from different ethnic minorities visit a group for lunch and then return the invitation. This exposes the different groups to an awareness of the different cultures and can often be the first time that older people have experienced a new cuisine. In addition, small numbers of minority ethnic older people have attended several cultural trips, a senior games event and a residential for older people.

There are established groups for some minority ethnic older people who are providing vital services and social contact. However, increasing numbers of older people are emerging in a range of minority ethnic communities and it is important that Engage with Age and other initiatives working for the benefit of older people actively work to support minority ethnic communities as older generations emerge.

There is a need to look at cultural awareness and understanding; which tends to work best with small groups. It can be difficult to challenge very ingrained ideas and perceptions; although some of the cultural beliefs (such as a respect for age within Chinese communities) can lead to interesting debates and a willingness to learn more. Genuine equality for minority ethnic older people is a long-term challenge.

Benefits and Impact

Evaluation, formal feedback, informal comments and anecdotes have shown the wide range of benefits that older people have gained and the considerable impact that initiatives for older people have, both for individuals and communities.

From a social capital perspective, through a number of different approaches to empowerment and capacity building, older people have been encouraged and given the self-confidence to actively participate at a community level. Tapping into the potential and experiences of older people has led them to become involved with a range of community activities such as befriending and volunteering. Older people are more involved with the generic community infrastructure, participating in networks and forums and linking the age sector more extensively into the overall community sector. Through consultation and involvement in action planning, older people have taken on the concept of active citizenship and are also proactively involved in neighbourhood renewal through information sharing, intergenerational activities, cross community activities and participating on community forums.

At an individual level, older people who have participated in some of the activities outlined in this manual and who have taken ownership of programme planning and engaging other older people, have identified a range of personal benefits. These include:
▪ Enjoying life more
▪ Learning new skills
▪ Passing on new skills to members of their group
▪ Greater socialisation and networking with others.

Individuals have talked about appreciating the activities that are available to them now, getting out of the house, keeping busy and feeling better physically and mentally. The benefits of promoting health and social well-being are currently the subject of considerable research (by organisations such as the Social Exclusion Unit, the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion and academics across the world). There are considerable difficulties in gaining quantitative data that measures the benefits of health promotion but there is a range of qualitative data and anecdotal feedback that points to both social and economic impact.

These qualitatively demonstrated benefits include:
▪ Overcoming isolation
▪ Reducing the financial burden on Health Trusts and other health bodies
▪ Easing the burden and stress for families and carers
▪ Helping community relations
▪ Contribution towards more integrated communities
▪ Improvements in the individual's quality of life

- Contribution towards independent living and delaying the time that an older person may need to move into residential care
- Prevention of health deterioration
- Valuing the impact of physical activity on health
- Providing health information leads to individuals making an appointment with their GP where early intervention has positive outcomes
- Providing information leads to greater personal understanding about their personal health.

The ideas presented in this Manual can be adapted and transferred to suit a wide range of older peoples groups. As with any activity, there are suggestions here that will dovetail perfectly into establishing new programmes or new groups, some ideas that need to be adapted and others that may not meet the specific need.

The key message is that working with older people on an individual or group basis, can have a tremendous impact, not only on the individual but across the whole community. With encouragement and support, older people are willing and able to move ideas forward and take on ownership of new programmes within their neighbourhood.

Engage with Age continues to welcome an exchange of ideas and support in developing good practice when working with older people. The intention is that this Manual with it's associated fact sheets will make a positive and constructive contribution towards ongoing development.

Contacts and Resources

Name	Address	Telephone No
Actively Ageing Well	C/o Age Concern 3 Lower Crescent Belfast BT7 1NR	028 90 245729
Age Concern Information Service	3 Lower Crescent Belfast BT7 1NR	028 90 245729
Age Concern NI	3 Lower Crescent Belfast BT7 1NR	028 90 245729
Age Sector Reference Group	C/o Help The Aged Ascot House 24 – 31 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DB	028 90 230666
Arts for Older People Network	C/o Community Arts Forum 15 Church Street Belfast BT1 1PG	028 90 242910 (Maureen Harkins)
Belfast City Council Home Safety Check Scheme	Health & Environmental Services Department The Cecil Ward Building 4 - 10 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BP	028 90 320202
Community Arts Forum	15 Church Street Belfast BT1 1PG	028 90 242910
Community Relations Council	6 Murray Street Belfast BT1 6DN	028 90 227500
Community Safety Unit	2nd Floor Albany House 73 Great Victoria Street Belfast BT2 7AF	028 90 321229
Community Transport Association UK	Graham House Saintfield Road Belfast BT8 8BH	028 90 403535

CRUSE Bereavement Care	10 College Green Belfast BT7 1LN	028 90 232695
Dark Horse Venture	C/o VSB 34 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DB	028 90 200850
Digital Film Archive	Northern Ireland Film & Television Commission 21 Alfred Street Belfast BT2 8ED	028 90 232444
Disability Action	189 Airport Road West Belfast BT3 9ED	028 90 297880
Equality Commission	Equality House 7 – 9 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DP	028 90 500600
Help the Aged	Ascot House 24 – 31 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DB	028 90 230666
Help the Aged Interforum	Ascot House 24 – 31 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DB	028 90 230666 (Ciara Convey)
Help the Aged Seniorline	Ascot House 24 – 31 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DB	0808 808 7575
Intergenerational Steering Group	Age Concern 3 Lower Crescent Belfast BT7 1NR	028 90 245729 (David McConnell)
Men's Project	Parents Advice Centre Franklin House 12 Brunswick Street Belfast BT2 7GE	028 90 238800 (Colin Fowler)
Multicultural Resource Centre	9 Lower Crescent Belfast BT7 1NR	028 90 244639

NI Befriending Network	C/o VSB 34 Shaftesbury Square Belfast BT2 7DB	028 90 200850
NI Council for Ethnic Minorities	73 Botanic Avenue Belfast BT2 7DB	028 90 238645
NI Reminiscence Network	SEELB Library Headquarters Windmill Hill Ballynahinch BT24 8DH	028 97 566413
Play Resource Trading Co	North City Business Centre Duncairn Gardens Belfast BT15 2GG	028 90 357540
Red Cross	125 University Street Belfast BT7 1HP	028 90 322325
St John's Ambulance	Erne Villa Knockbracken Healthcare Park Saintfield Road Belfast BT8 8BH	028 90 401032
Translink	Europa Buscentre Glengall Street Belfast BT12 5AH	028 90 333000
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum	153 Bangor Road Holywood BT18 0EU	028 90 421444
Ulster Museum	Botanic Gardens Stranmillis Road Belfast BT9 5AB	028 90 383000
Ulster Peoples College/ People's History Project	30 Adelaide Park Belfast BT9 6FY	028 90 665161
WEA – Older People Learning and Men in from the Margins	1 Fitzwilliam Street Belfast BT9 6AW	028 90 329718

Engage with Age Publications

Directory of Older Peoples Groups in South Belfast, East Belfast & Castlereagh

Clubs, Groups and Services for Older People in Ballybeen and Dundonald

Living Alone

Living with Physical Disability

Are you an Older Person who looks after someone? Then you are a Carer

Living in Sheltered Accommodation

What's On for Older People in Wandsworth & Belmont

What's On for Older People in Mersey Street & Newtownards Road

What's On for Older People in Lower Newtownards Road

What's On for Older People in Lower Castlereagh/Beersbridge Road

What's On for Older People in Lagan Village/Ravenhill Road

What's On for Older People in Woodstock & Cregagh

What's On for Men in East Belfast

Sports Facilities on Castlereagh

Some Sources of Funding for Older Peoples Groups & Projects

Ideas for Group Meetings – Speakers List

Transport for Older Peoples Groups

Guide to Computer Rooms & Courses for Older People in East Belfast

Employment & People Aged 50+

Engage With Age/Castlereagh Intergenerational Project in Cregagh

Please contact the Engage with Age office for a copy of any of the above documents by telephoning 028 90 649649.

Engage With Age
36 Knockbreda Road
Belfast
BT6 OJB