

Improving outcomes for older people:

Role of the sector: how voluntary and community organisations can help you deliver more for less

A collection of case studies for the
West Midlands Later Life Forum and RAWM

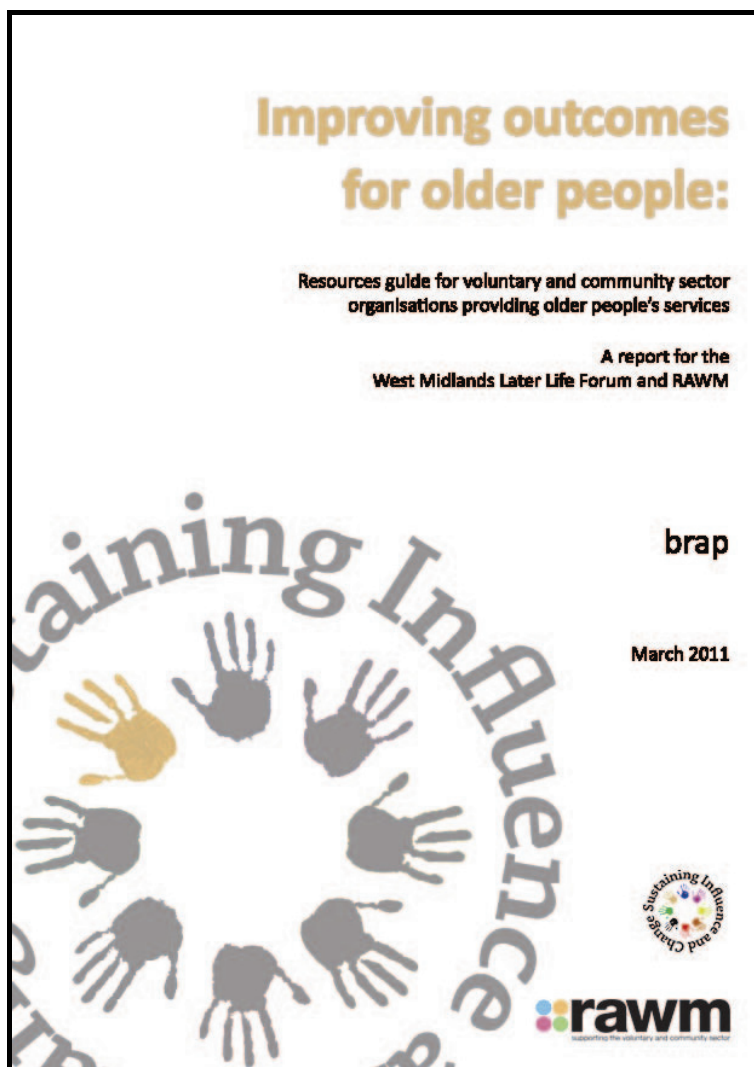
brap

March 2011



READERS NOTE

This guide has been produced alongside a resource guide, outlining the resources that may help you navigate the changes in the current environment.



About RAWM

RAWM exists to enable a sustainable, influential, effective and inclusive voluntary and community sector in the West Midlands area.

About brap

brap is a think fair tank, inspiring and leading change to make public, private, and community sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. brap offers tailored, progressive, and common sense approaches to equality training, consultancy, and community engagement issues.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all the organisations who provided case studies for this report.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A BIT OF BACKGROUND

Running from 2008-11, RAWM's Sustaining Influence and Change Programme was a highly successful project aimed at increasing the voluntary and community sector's capacity to engage and influence regional policy makers.

One strand of the programme was targeted at organisations working with older people. As part of this strand, RAWM commissioned brap to produce a series of case studies that highlight the role and impact of voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in delivering a broad range of later life support services. These are contained in this short report.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

To prepare this report, the research was conducted in three phases.

Literature and policy review: in this phase we reviewed relevant research into the needs and aspirations of older people. We also reviewed specific older people strategies published by local authorities, PCTs, and local strategic partnerships to identify key commissioning priorities in the region. Finally, key national and local policy documents were analysed to determine current and potential changes to policy and service delivery as a result of proposed legislative changes, announcements arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review, and government agendas such as the Big Society.

Regional scoping: in this stage we contacted over 3,000 VCOs in the West Midlands asking them to provide examples of innovative service delivery to older people. Organisations were contacted through a variety of sources, including RAWM's database of organisations and brap's own contacts and networks. Over 35 organisations responded, from which eight were selected as case studies. Shortlisting criteria aimed to ensure that case studies reflected:

- particular examples of innovative or distinctive service provision
- the geographical spread of services across the West Midlands
- how services are meeting the key needs and aspirations of older people
- how services are meeting key commissioning priorities, as set out in statutory organisations' plans and strategies
- how later life organisations are helping public bodies respond to key changes in the political, economic, and policy environment

Case study generation: telephone interviews were conducted with shortlisted organisations and background, desk-based research conducted into their reach, delivery constituency, history, and impact on service users.

1.3 HOW OLD IS OLD?

With regard to the case studies, organisations were deemed eligible if they worked with people over the age of 55. Elsewhere in this report, however – particular in the sections outlining research findings – the definition of ‘older person’ ranges from 50 and over to 65 and over. Where appropriate, we make this clear.

1.4 HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Given the aims of this report, we hope it will be of interest not only to commissioners of services for older people, but to anyone interested in health, wellbeing, and social care. By highlighting some of the innovative ways VCOs are working with the public sector, the report may also be useful to those with responsibility for determining commissioning policy at a strategic level. The accounts of early intervention and preventative action – and the examples of the needs and aspirations of older people – may also be of interest to those concerned with where funding should be allocated to maximise benefit.

This report may also be useful to later life organisations themselves as they look to inform their conversations with commissioners with evidence of how VCOs are providing better outcomes for older people. It not only contains best practice and a useful summary of commissioning priorities, but, if sent to local commissioners, this report may also serve as convenient grounds for outlining how the organisation’s service can help make older people’s lives more fulfilling, fair, and independent.

2. THE VALUE OF VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

In this section, we outline the role, contribution and value of VCOs in delivering better and fairer outcomes for older people.

The commissioning environment has changed immensely over the last few years, and – even with the change of government in 2010 – the pace of this change shows no signs of abating.

In fact, with a range of new policies, strategies, and initiatives in areas of health, social care and public health, there is even more for local commissioners and decision makers to get their heads around when allocating resources that support older people in particular. Here's a quick briefing on some of the key demographic, political, and economic changes that will shape approaches to commissioning in the future.

Demographic changes¹

There are now more people in the UK aged 60 and above than there are under 18; and the number of people aged 60 or over is projected to rise by over 50% in the next 25 years. This increase in the number of older people is expected to bring with it particular challenges – for example, the rate of incidences of dementia is expected to increase by over 20% in the next 15 years. Similarly, there will be over 6 million people with a long-term limiting illness or disability by 2030, if nothing is done to tackle age-related disease.

Within these trends, there are also changes to the makeup and features of the older population. Those in later life are more likely to live alone, and so experience problems associated with social isolation and depression. The proportion of people over 60 from black and minority ethnic backgrounds has grown to 6%, with many from this group likely to experience poverty (for example, 49% of pensioners from a Pakistani or Bangladeshi background live in poverty).

Obviously, all the organisations in this report are helping to meet challenges arising from these changing demographics, but in particular there are many organisations...

- working to improve the quality of life for those with particular illnesses such as dementia
- actively looking to improve the health of those in later life through bespoke exercise plans
- removing obstacles to social inclusion by helping older people organise events and activities
- working with BME older people

¹ All the statistics in this section are taken from Age UK (2011) *Later Life in the UK*, available at <http://tinyurl.com/5rzgs9d>

Doing more for less

The Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 announced swingeing cuts across a range of departments, along with reductions in local authority spending of approximately 28% over the next four years. Additionally, other programmes – such as Supporting People – have been ‘un-ring-fenced’, giving local authorities greater autonomy on allocating spending; and there are already instances where resources have been diverted to other projects.

Advice on dealing with shrinking budgets has come from a variety of sources, with central government suggesting efficiencies can be found in rationalising back room costs. Whatever the solution, however, it is clear resources will have to be allocated strategically to ensure the greatest return in terms of outcomes for older people.

As this report shows, there are many organisations...

- helping statutory bodies spend more time delivering specialist provision by providing additional, frontline support
- engaging in knowledge transfer so research and expertise relating to older people is widely disseminated and benefits of service innovation highlighted
- offering services that provide that ‘extra bit of help’, which research shows can have a huge impact on older people’s lives without demanding a great deal of investment
- mapping how resources are allocated across a locality to highlight gaps and ensure rationalisation of spending
- engaging in preventative activities that can reduce long-term expenditure on health and social care

Acting on equality

The Equality Act 2010 consolidated nine major pieces of legislation and extended and harmonised the legal protection afforded to a range of vulnerable groups. As well as protecting people from discrimination when accessing public services² the Act also places a duty on statutory organisations to actively eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and foster good relations between people from different groups.

As this report shows, there are many organisations...

- helping make workplaces fairer and more age-friendly through audits and management coaching
- breaking down barriers between different groups through inter-generational events and mainstreaming provision

² due to come onto force April 2012

Personalisation, localism, and the Big Society

The Big Society is a big agenda for change, overarching and informing many different policy areas. Its key aims of opening up public services to VCOs, empowering communities, and stimulating social action build on work already being carried out by a range of service providers. The current emphasis on personalisation in health and social care, moves to include the public in commissioning decisions, and a focus on promoting people's independence are just some of the policies we can expect to become more important over the next few years.

As this report shows, there are many organisations...

- including services users not only in the scrutiny of decisions, but in setting strategic goals
- providing an outlet for people looking to volunteer (often because they have a particular passion or interest)
- strengthening communities and building social capital
- organising a constituency of interest which services providers can use to access community views
- promoting independence and personalisation
- working collaboratively with statutory providers to provide a seamless service to frontline users

21st century commissioning

A central plank of the Big Society's aims outlined above is to strengthen the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to participate in the design and delivery of public services. To stimulate this process, the Coalition government have introduced a number of measures aimed at encouraging commissioners to open up the market to new providers and to ensure there is a diversity of suppliers within the market. As a result, there is a greater expectation on commissioners to take account of social value when making decisions, to identify and communicate with VCOs in their area, and to simplify the commissioning process so that smaller organisations are better able to compete for and win public contracts.

As this report shows, there are many organisations...

- employing sophisticated evaluative techniques to demonstrate public and social value
- creating value for money through partnership working or by exploring other funding streams
- reducing costs of hospital and residential social care.
- that are exploring means of demonstrating innovation and impact

3. CASE STUDIES

HOW THE CASE STUDIES ARE STRUCTURED

What they do

Brief description of aims of the organisation and how they do what they do.

Impact on clients

A personal, real life example of how the organisation has had an impact on the life of older people.

Supporting the Public Sector

VCOs across the region are working to support and complement the activities of public sector agencies. Examples of how this is done are included here.

Added value: the 'sector factor'

A compelling reason for commissioning VCOs to deliver services is that they can offer 'added value' compared to other providers (in the private sector for example). This can range from re-investing resources back into the community, right through to supporting beneficiaries to engage in civic engagement (alongside public services they were commissioned to deliver). Many VCOs also have 'unique selling points' that set them apart from the crowd. These are described here.

3.1 THE SOCIAL REHABILITATION PROJECT

Holistic social rehabilitation support

What they do

The Social Rehabilitation Project is run by Age UK North Staffordshire, and is funded by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire County Council, and Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire PCTs. The project arose after a growing concern that hospital-based rehabilitation isn't enough to secure people's lasting independence; and that social or emotional support might be necessary once people arrive home.

As such, the project aims to ensure that patients returning home after a stay in hospital (or those looking to remain in their homes) receive support directly on issues of confidence and motivation. This may be by putting in place social activities, providing support on housing, providing financial advice, as well as providing a range of emotional and social support throughout the rehabilitation journey.

Impact on clients

The Social Rehabilitation Project is a unique voluntary-public sector partnership, with Social Rehabilitation staff working alongside NHS and local authority social services professionals to provide rehabilitation based on personal, as well as physical, needs.

For example, Mary spent several months in hospital and rehabilitation following a severe multiple fracture of her right leg. She was gradually persuaded to return to her local exercise group, and a series of escorted short walks followed by support on her first day back to the exercise group helped rebuild her confidence. Mary now goes out several days a week to the various groups she belonged to prior to her accident.

Supporting the public sector

Since Social Rehabilitation staff are part of integrated multidisciplinary teams, they work closely with nurses, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other health and social care professionals. The benefits to these professionals are immense, as one Nurse Co-ordinator explains: "The Social Rehabilitation staff here help with a vast range of referrals from providing information and installations of Lifeline pendants, to more complex situations such as environmental clean ups. This allows professionals in the team to spend more time in their clinical practice."

Added value: the 'sector factor'

Additionally, despite the project running for a number of years, Social Rehabilitation workers have remained independent, employed by Age UK North Staffordshire themselves. A conscious decision on the part of statutory funders, this has given the team the freedom to speak out on behalf of older people, ensuring clinical workers have access to information from their patients so

that services are more responsive to patients and designed around them. This type of advocacy and public involvement activity will be particularly important for commissioners in the future as they respond to the 'no decision about me without me' mantra in current health policy and seek better feedback from local people about the quality and relevance of services. Gathering evidence like this from older people has also helped the project itself to deliver more effective services.

For more information on the Social Rehabilitation Project

Contact name: Philip Mann, Service Development Manager

Contact details: philip.mann@ageuknorthstaffs.org.uk

3.2 THE MASE

Emotional support for people with Alzheimer's and their carers

What they do

Monthly Alzheimer's Support Evening (MASE) groups held monthly in three rural areas of the Midlands. Each evening is a lively mix of music, food, and entertainment, alongside more 'serious' and practical support from guest speakers. Designed to allow carers the opportunity to relax and let their hair down, each event is attended by Community Psychiatric Nurses who, along with a considerable number of MASE volunteers, ensure people's support needs are met. MASE work closely with the Age UK and the British Legion to provide transport for people who would otherwise find it difficult to attend – and with up to 80 people attending group meetings, it's a service many rely on.

Impact on clients

By providing leisure and social activities, the MASE provides the kind of low-level intervention that can prevent isolation and depression for those looking after people with dementia. For example, when Alice's husband, Duff, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's she found it incredibly difficult to get information on the illness and by the time her husband was taken into hospital for assessment she was at her wits end. After hearing about MASE and attending one of its sessions, she was able to meet other carers who, like her, desperately needed some form of social interaction. As Alice says: "The MASE Groups have put light back into my life, given me something to look forward to, and I have made the most wonderful friends. At the age of 77 I cannot tell you how much this group has done for my self esteem, and how much courage it has given me to deal with life now that my husband has dementia."

Supporting the public sector

An excellent example of a cross-sector working, the MASE provides space for a range of health, social care, employment and training professionals to come together in one place to support a particular target group. This availability to advice from a range of different services in one place reduces the effort and time taken for older people and their carers to access services.

Added value: the 'sector factor'

MASE group meetings are organised and run by a strong team of 40 volunteers. Many of the volunteers are ex-carers themselves, and this first-hand experience of the emotional stresses of looking after someone with dementia is an invaluable resource for service users. This type of client-centred approach, supported by the strong knowledge and experience of volunteers, has also helped to build an environment of safety and trust amongst those involved in the group. Supporting preventative services of this type will be a key priority for public health commissioning strategies in the future and MASE have established a strong model for work to prevent isolation and depression amongst this target group.

For more information on The MASE

Contact name: Daphne Sharp

Contact details: daphne.ssharp@ntlworld.com

3.3 AGE WELL BROMSGROVE

Physical activity tasters

What they do

Funded by the Bromsgrove Partnership – the area’s local strategic partnership – the Age Well project aims to introduce older people to activities to help them stay physically, mentally and socially active by developing a short course of taster activities. Each session is in three parts: a brief introduction from the project co-ordinator; a talk on one of a range of topics (such as nutrition, home personal safety, financial advice); and then a brief taster of an activity designed to get people fitter, healthier, or more involved. This ranges from tai chi and Pilates to gentle exercise and walking.

Impact on clients

Arising from the Partnership’s priority to improve the health of older people by creating an integrated referral pathway to wellbeing services, Age Well was based on a number of aims.

By surveying hundreds of older people about what kinds of activities they’d like to take part in (and with answers ranging from swimming to yoga) Age Well achieved its first aim of giving older people a greater say in the composition of the services available to them. By providing a holistic, integrated approach to wellbeing, it has succeeded in its second by making health services more accessible to older people.

Supporting the public sector

As new Health and Wellbeing Boards establish themselves at a local level, they will be looking for projects that embody a truly ‘joined’ up approach to promoting public health and wellbeing. Although the original aim of Age Well Bromsgrove’s project was to reduce health inequalities in Bromsgrove, the project team quickly spotted the opportunity to introduce older people to a variety of organisations providing services that can improve wellbeing. The project also identified organisations providing support around home safety, security and finance; education and employment; and leisure activities and hobbies. This holistic approach to health care has not only combined the physical activities necessary for a healthy life with low-level preventative support, but has also brought together a range of organisations who are aiming to achieve the same outcomes.

Added value: the ‘sector factor’

All the information gathered during the establishment of the Age Well project has been collated into a stand-alone Facilitator’s Handbook. Not only is this an invaluable directory of organisations, but it includes information on how to run and organise a course, meaning anyone can pick up and deliver a similar service, even after funding for Age Well has expired. Useful for anyone looking to stimulate the social enterprise market in their local area, the handbook maps local organisations that provide activities of interest to older people.

For more information on Age Well Bromsgrove

Contact name: Ian Anderson (Project Co-ordinator)

Contact details: i.anderson@bromsgrove.gov.uk

3.4 SUPPORT AT HOME

Supported living

What they do

Run by Festival Housing, the Support at Home project responds to people's needs relating to their housing and financial circumstances. The service also helps people to retain or make new social networks in the community – for example, a recent project aimed to break down intergenerational barriers by getting older tenants to create a film with young homeless people. Support at Home also gives people the chance to gain or improve IT skills through an in-house tutor, and the installation of computers in communal housing and office reception areas.

Impact on clients

The focus of the project is maintaining independence through flexible home visits. For example, John lived in a caravan in a remote rural setting. The location was such that in bad weather visitors could not reach him by car. This put him at increased risk as he had no running water or electricity and relied on others to collect his prescriptions, and deliver essentials like bottled drinking water. Following a referral by his social worker he started getting visits twice a week from a Support at Home worker. Over the summer months the Support Worker established a relationship with John that enabled her to raise safety concerns regarding his use of candles and mobile gas. She monitored his health and organised GP appointments when his health worsened. Eventually, John was placed in a flat in a scheme for older people in a rural setting. His support worker helped him to furnish his flat, checked he was on correct benefits, arranged an appointment with the mobile hairdresser and helped him to register with the local GP. She showed him how to use the cooker and continues to help him manage his correspondence, form filling and budgeting. He spent a short while in hospital but his health has now stabilised and he has carers calling in at least daily.

Supporting the public sector

In an era of large public sector cuts, it will be important to encourage work that invests money and skills back into the community. Being a voluntary and community organisation, Festival Housing's business model allows it the flexibility to pursue other avenues of funding if it spots an opportunity. In an innovative twist, its older people's services make use of a fundraiser to raise funds for different activities, such as IT training – which recently gained £10,000 from UK Online – and a fitness programme which raised £50,000 from the Worcestershire Health Improvement Fund. This approach allowed resources from other funding streams to be invested back into providing high-quality preventative health services and delivering high-quality outcomes for the community.

Added value: the 'sector factor'

By focusing on flexible home support, the project offers an alternative to residential-based care, which may be more expensive. Worcestershire's Research and Intelligence Team estimated that Festival Housing's support programme in Worcestershire saved £2.4m from other budgets and departments. In Herefordshire the cost benefit savings of the service have been estimated at £443,000 during 2009/10. Put another way, for every pound spent in Herefordshire, another £2 was saved. Savings are achieved through reduced visits by District Nurses and visits to GPs; reduced hospital admissions for neglected health and falls; and delayed needs for residential care.

For more information on Support at Home

Contact name: Hilary Deakin, Business Development Manager

Contact details: hdeakin@festivalhousing.org

3.5 CARES

Innovative support for carers

What they do

The Carers Advice and Resource Establishment Sandwell (CARES) is part of The Princess Royal Trust for Carers Centres Network. Funded by both Sandwell Council and Sandwell PCT, CARES is a user-led organisation, managed and run by unpaid family carers. It provides the only specialist carers support in the area, providing a range of services designed to support those who help look after people with chronic conditions. As well as signposting people to information and advice about the condition they have, CARES also provides respite support, carers support groups to reduce isolation, and consultation events and activities. It also helps administer the Carers Emergency Card scheme, about which there's more below.

Impact on clients

Amongst its portfolio of services, CARES provides targeted interventions based on assessments of clients' need. For example, Deborah suffered a stroke that left her paralysed down one side and with extreme stiffness in the muscles and joints of the other. Within a month she received a letter from her employer terminating her contract on the grounds of ill health. This placed Deborah in a great deal of financial pressure at a time when she was already experiencing stress and emotional upheaval. A CARES support worker visited Deborah over a number of weeks, gradually building trust and rapport by taking the time to chat about the Deborah's worries and concerns. Eventually, Deborah felt comfortable enough to share her financial problems with CARES, revealing years of unopened bills she had been too scared to open. By getting Deborah to gradually confront her issues, CARES was able to help her take control of her finances and make arrangement with various creditors to settle some of her outstanding debts.

Supporting the public sector

Under the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act, local authorities have a range of duties to ensure carers' lives are fairer and fuller, and that services are delivered in a joined-up, coherent manner. Among its services, CARES runs the Carer Consultation Network. The Network gives carers the chance to have their say about health and social care services in Sandwell. Regular consultations take place with the Network, by post, by telephone and through focus groups. Organisations ranging from the Care Quality Commission to Sandwell Council have asked for events to be put on, with agencies sometimes fielding guest speakers to hear feedback first hand. This has provided an invaluable source of evidence and input to improve statutory responses to carer and patient support in the area.

Added value: the sector factor

As mentioned above, CARES also helps administer the Carers Emergency Card scheme. Provided in partnership by Sandwell Adult Services and Health, Sandwell Homes and Sandwell PCT, the card alerts emergency services to the fact that they are dealing with a carer. By calling a number on the card, local services can call up key information about the cared for person contained on Sandwell Homes' database. CARES has particularly strong links within the local community and it has supported local public sector agencies to identify carers, signing up hundreds of beneficiaries to date. Shortlisted for a number of innovation awards, the card pre-empt's possibly serious cases of isolation for those with long-term illnesses – not only providing welcome peace of mind for carers, but encouraging users to be more outgoing, sociable, and active.

For more information on CARES

Contact name: Geoff Foster (Chief Executive Officer)

Contact details: cares.sandwell@btinternet.com

3.6 NEHEMIAH UCHA

Mainstreaming support

What they do

Originally set up to support the housing needs of African-Caribbean elders, Nehemiah now provides services to people from a variety of ethnic groups across Birmingham, Smethwick, Wolverhampton, Dudley. Each resident has an individualised support plan, which means that the help they receive is tailored, responsive, and progressive.

Impact on clients

When Arthur was first referred to Nehemiah UCHA, he was suffering with high blood pressure, epilepsy, diabetes, and was prone to falls. Through the support of staff, he was able to regain some of his independence and can now leave the building on his own to fetch a newspaper, do small amounts of shopping, or visit friends. As Arthur says, the support he has received from staff has given him the confidence to carry out routines, knowing that if he has a query or problem someone is on hand to help.

Supporting the public sector

As budgets get tighter, it's increasingly important local authorities target resources at those things that will do most to achieve better outcomes for older people. Investment in housing will be considered alongside work to improve other aspects of people's lives (e.g. public health) through Health and Wellbeing Boards. Research shows that, when asked, older people often say it's the 'little things' that improve quality of life.³ Investing in low-level support can generate high returns in terms of satisfaction and outcomes. Helping people fill in their own forms, making small adjustments to keep them in their homes, and building confidence through social interaction can have huge – even disproportionate – benefits. Nehemia UCHA has recognised the importance of these 'little things' to build the skills and confidence of its residents and embodies this approach in its work.

Added value: the 'sector factor'

Nehemiah UCHA has a Tenant Scrutiny Panel which investigates key features of the housing association's service provision and makes recommendation for improvements to current arrangements. Nehemiah have implemented a robust set of service standards relating not only to quantitative targets, but also qualitative measures outlining how people feel about the way in which services are delivered. The Scrutiny Panel has an important role in setting and monitoring standards. This has meant that Nehemiah has focused attention on improving aspects of its service that have a meaningful impact on its residents, such as the reducing the average cost of repairs, responding speedily to emergency repair work, reducing incidences of neighbour disputes, and improving resident safety through the use of CCTV.

For more information on Nehemiah UCHA

Contact name: Jenny Evans

Contact details: jenny.evans@nehemiah-ucha.co.uk

³ Clark, Angela (2011) *How can local authorities with less money support better outcomes for older people?*. JRF

3.7 LINKING PEOPLE

Improving access to services

What they do

Based in Solihull, Linking People is a one-stop-shop providing information, advice and practical help that older people living in Solihull might need. Beneficiaries are identified through a comprehensive outreach strategy and referrals made by 40 partner agencies across the borough. Through an initial assessment, Linking People identifies people's needs and then makes referrals to appropriate organisations. In this way, the project has also built up an important picture of gaps in Solihull's service provision. In an age of austerity, Linking People is working with local services to advise them of where there might be duplication and offers a useful overview for older people of the range of local services available to them.

Impact on clients

As well as referring people to appropriate organizations, Linking People also makes representations on behalf of vulnerable groups if appropriate. For example, Susan contacted Linking People in January after her boiler broke down, leaving her with no heating and hot water. Suffering from osteoarthritis, she was very distressed. Through Solihull Partnership's Winter Warmth Campaign, Linking People were able to supply her with two oil filled heaters and an electric blanket to ensure she could keep warm until the problem was resolved. The project liaised with the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre to push Susan's claim under the Warmfront Scheme for help replacing her boiler. So, instead of waiting the proposed six months, Susan soon found herself with hot water and heating.

Supporting the public sector

Linking People's outreach and referral scheme is of great benefit to a range of public services. A social worker based at Solihull MBC states the importance of the scheme in this way: "As social workers we have to work within our resources. I have been able to monitor people by using the excellent communication between myself and Linking People. Concerns are passed to me and then I can act on this information. Linking People has highlighted to us people who are in a crisis situation and have not contacted this office."

Added value: the 'sector factor'

As a community-based project, Linking People have links and access to a wide range of organisations, giving it the reach which has been identified as such an invaluable benefit by partner organisations. Having the time, flexibility, and organisational 'space' to pursue leads and possible beneficiaries has helped enormously. As Project Co-ordinator Sue Newman explains: "When the project was first set up, I spoke to all the different arms of social services, occupational therapists, pension advisors; I wrote to the Alzheimer's Society, osteoporosis support groups. I think I wrote to every club or society that has some connection with older people, and I've certainly been to most of them." As older people come to use their personal budgets, they will need support along with impartial and informed advice about the quality and relevance of particular services. Linking People's overview of statutory, private and voluntary sector services in the area makes it well placed to support this aspect of the personalisation agenda in the future.

For more information on Linking People

Contact name: Sue Newman

Contact details: snewman@acsolihull.org

3.8 COMING OF AGE PARTNERSHIP

Campaigning for age equality

What they do

Based in Bromsgrove, but working throughout the West Midlands, CoAP is a campaign, lobbying and advocacy organisation. The Partnership aims to remove age barriers, create employment opportunities within different sectors, and promote the views and concerns of older people to public and private organisations across a range of sectors. The Partnership provides advice to its members on legislation, work- and employment-related issues, pensions, and learning new skills. It also helps organisations implement legislation such as the Equality Act through an 'age audit'.

Impact on clients

Transform Sandwell is a partnership between British Telecom and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. It acts as a contact point or central call centre for Sandwell residents, providing advice on claiming benefits or helping people identify appropriate local authority departments. When management at Transform Sandwell noticed that older people were under-represented in the workforce, they asked CoAP to audit their policies and procedures. By conducting an age profile, reviewing recruitment practices, and coaching managers, the Partnership was able to design pilot projects aimed at removing barriers to the recruitment of older people.

Supporting the public sector

As an advocacy and lobbying network, CoAP liaises with a range of public organisations to make services fairer and more accessible for older people. In doing so, it draws upon the skills and expertise of experienced and successful people from a range of different backgrounds. For example, as well as the partnership having representatives from the EHRC, the University of Birmingham, and Job Centre Plus, members also include CEOs and Managing Directors of private businesses. As a result of its contacts in the region, CoAP has been able to partner with West Midlands Fire Service, organising and facilitating information days. The fire service is able to raise awareness of preventative measures to tackle home-based fires, while CoAP is able to provide information on financial matters, access to public services, and other areas of concern.

Added value: the 'sector factor'

As well as lobbying on behalf of older people, CoAP also looks to build the skills and capacity of individuals to lobby public services themselves. Through its 'Ambassador Corps' CoAP has recruited a number of volunteers who present CoAP's key messages in public meetings, conferences, and consultation events. As public services are increasingly encouraged to co-produce – that is, actively seek the input of people who use services (as well as those who have traditionally provided them) – it is becoming more important than ever to evidence the involvement of vulnerable groups in the commissioning process, from beginning to end. As part of this process, public bodies are increasingly being asked to allow traditionally marginalised groups such as older people to initiate the focus of debate, rather than comment on policies and projects that have been developed beforehand. The skills and experience CoAP provides its Ambassadors means they have the knowledge, information, and communication skills to make this a fruitful and productive relationship.

For more information on Coming of Age Partnership

Contact name: Andy Finnie

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4. OTHER ORGANISATIONS

In addition to the case studies outlined above we also received information about a range of other activities and projects happening across the region. Here's a flavour of what other organisations are up to and how they might be able to help you make older people's lives fairer, healthier, more independent, and fun!

Accord Housing Association

Contact name: Angela Causton

Contact details: angelac@accordha.org.uk

Among a range of services, Accord provide supported living, especially around palliative and rehabilitative care. They also provide dementia support, including 'night clubs' – late night activities for those who have trouble sleeping.

Action for Blind People

Contact name: Sue Huyton, Head of West Midlands, Action for Blind People

Contact details: Susan.Huyton@actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Whole-system, holistic support for blind people including emotional support, information and advice at the point of diagnosis through hospital based Eye Clinic Liaison Officers, housing, welfare benefits, financial inclusion, expert patient programmes, specialist access technology training and peer support through social groups and self managed common interest groups.

Age UK South Staffordshire

Contact name: Elizabeth Gooch

Contact details: Elizabeth.gooch@ageuksouthstaffs.org.uk

A volunteer-provided service, the Hospital Ward Support Service is delivered to hospitals operating under Mid Staffs Hospital Trust. Volunteers currently provide support over a wide range of activities, including chatting, reading, exercises, hand massage, hair washing, game playing and food ordering. Most recently this has been extended to cover feeding of those who are not able to feed themselves.

Beacon Centre for the Blind

Contact name: Ian Ferguson

Contact details: iferguson@beacon4blind.co.uk

Beacon Centre helps people of all ages with sight loss live fuller and more independent lives by offering them the best facilities and support. Services include a mix of residential, day care and community services, with the Centre itself containing residential apartments, craft and social rooms, IT suite, employment and training centre, a sensory room, a sensory garden, a shop and cafe.

Birmingham Link Older Person's Action Group

Contact name: Andrew John

Contact details: andrew.john@gatewayfs.org

The Group visit sheltered accommodation and organise activities for older people, including a very successful event for International Older Person's Day.

Black Country Housing Group Ltd

Contact name: Sharon Fereday

Contact details: feredays@bcha.co.uk

An all round care service assists elderly home owners and private tenants. It combines domiciliary care offering with the Home Improvement Agency's repair service to enable older people to stay independent for longer. Customers can purchase either the repairs service or care or both.

Bournville Village Trust

Contact name: Tessa Mitchell

Contact details: tessamitchell@bvt.org.uk

Starting in late 2009 BVT in partnership with Shencare introduced a weekly shopping trip for older and disabled residents. Residents have a door to door service going to four local supermarkets on a rota basis, all with a cafe where the residents can have lunch or a coffee together. The monthly trips go a bit further afield to other shopping and garden centres.

Brighter Futures

Contact name: Jane Haswell

Contact details: jane.haswell@brighter-futures.org.uk

Brighter Futures deliver the Safe & Sound service, which supports older people to live independently in their own accommodation, whether this is rented or owned. They work with customers to develop support plans based on their needs, working at their own pace. Brighter Futures use the Outcome Star to help customers to consider their needs in a wide range of areas, looking at their physical and emotional wellbeing, social networks and money issues.

Chase CVS (Council for Voluntary Service)

Contact name: Caroline Bradford, Community Liaison Officer

Contact details: carolinebradford@chase-cvs.org.uk

The Community Liaison Project is funded by Social Care & Health as a preventative initiative to help the voluntary sector support vulnerable adults within their own communities, to prevent isolation and improve their health and wellbeing. This is achieved by supporting new groups set up to serve an identified need within the community, such as running a local neighbourhood network allowing organisers of groups and services to come together and share good practice as well as receive information to help sustain their group or service.

Hamstead Hall Community Learning Centre

Contact name: Julie Gibson, Inclusion Manager

Contact details: gibsonj@hamsteadhall.com

Hamstead Hall Community Learning Centre provides mobile fitness sessions for older residents. The Centre also offers older people the opportunity to learn IT skills at their school site.

Home from Hospital Care

Contact name: Des Workman

Contact details: enquiries@home-from-hospital-care.org.uk

Homes from Hospital Care offer that 'extra bit' of support through their volunteer helpers for up to six weeks following a patient's discharge from hospital.

HOOPS Birmingham

Contact name: Rachel Perks

Contact details: rachel@hoopsbirmingham.org.uk

HOOPS Birmingham supports vulnerable people over the age of 55 in order for them to remain active in their community, maintain maximum independence in their own homes and manage their day to day responsibilities. The service offers a wide range of practical and emotional support, including advice on welfare benefits and assistance with completing forms, and an assisted escort service, accompanying clients to priority appointments or situations where they may be open to financial abuse.

Midland Heart

Contact name: Amanda Govani

Contact details: amanda.govani@midlandheart.org.uk

Among other services, Midland Heart provides a range of initiatives such as Magic Moments, which offers activity-based events that can meet social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs. Each year 1000 customers get involved in a variety of events from abseiling to theatre trips - some have said they are once in a lifetime experience.

Prince's Initiative for Mature Enterprise (PRIME)

Contact name: Martin Sarling

Contact details: martin.sarling@ageuk.org.uk

PRIME's specialist experience is in supporting over-50s back into sustainable work through self-employment. PRIME train advisors and intermediaries to better engage and assist this customer group, and can provide specialist 50+ advisors to support customers into other work.

Reach, the People Charity

Contact name: Helen Litherland

Contact details: HELENL@reachthecharity.org.uk

Reach's Birmingham Older People Services delivers person centred support services to all of its customers. The service aims to meet the needs of its customers through individualised support planning with emphasis on five key areas of work: Achieve Economic Wellbeing, Enjoy and Achieve, Be Healthy, Stay Safe and Making a Positive Contribution.

Homelands Extra-Care Sheltered Scheme

Contact name: Wendy Billings

Contact details: Wendy.Billings@sanctuary-housing.co.uk

Homelands is an extra care sheltered scheme in Birmingham which aims to provide quality, specially designed housing for older people, which offers safety and security. The accommodation and service is tailored to provide independent living with the necessary support facilities to enable residents to stay in their homes as long as feasible and a home for life wherever possible.

Trent and Dove Housing

Contact name: Timothy Evans, Extra Care Scheme Co-ordinator

Contact details: tim.evans@trentanddove.org

Trent and Dove Housing identify those persons in the wider community who could benefit from the service they provide and link up with their own Floating Support. The organisation has strong links with the local social services, who are now based in the same building, and a local day centre.

This report has been produced as part of RAWM's Sustaining Influence and Change project. Sustaining Influence and Change has provided support to a number of voluntary and community sector policy groups and has increased the impact of their work and helped to strengthen relationships with decision-makers in the West Midlands. The report is the result of close collaboration between RAWM and the West Midlands Later Life Forum.

For more information about RAWM please visit www.rawm.org.uk.

