

Healthy Ageing in the 21st Century

Background

The DWP funded and Local Government Association managed Ageing Well programme focused on how universal services and the development of community capacity can be best used to meet the needs of older people. The starting point was recognising older people as assets and using an asset mapping based approach to identify sustainable community capacity building initiatives. OPM supported 21 different localities across 9 local authorities using an asset based approach, enabling older people to take the lead and develop a new relationship with local agencies. Sustainable developments considered included: village agents; time banking; sharing homes; car pooling; collective internet shopping; intergenerational work with children and young people.

Exploring 'good ageing'

Traditional images and conceptions of ageing do not chime with older people themselves. A lot of older people do not see themselves as an older person.

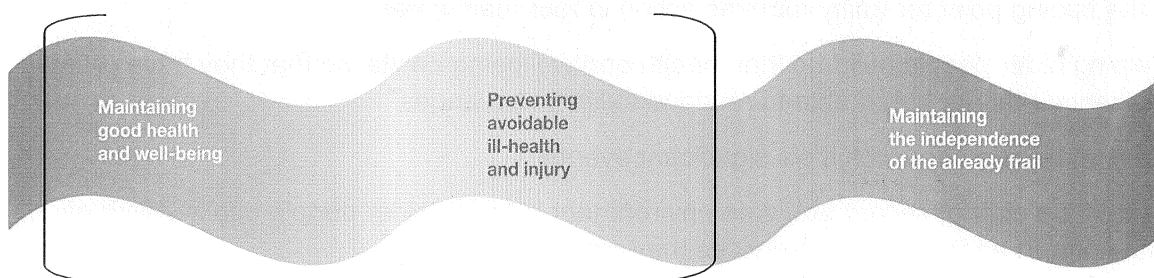
"What do you think of when you think of an older person?"

"Feisty, active, fun, experienced, wisdom, knowledgeable, me, older than me, not me, forgotten, beautiful, enjoying it, respectful respected."

Many older people do not like the term 'pensioner' 'elderly' or 'older person' etc and feel that they are people – just a 'person', who is not defined by their age.

A positive view of ageing focussed on supporting older people as early as possible

"The age range is very wide – although it is useful to consider the younger end as people are coming up to retirement and how they might need to plan for the future."

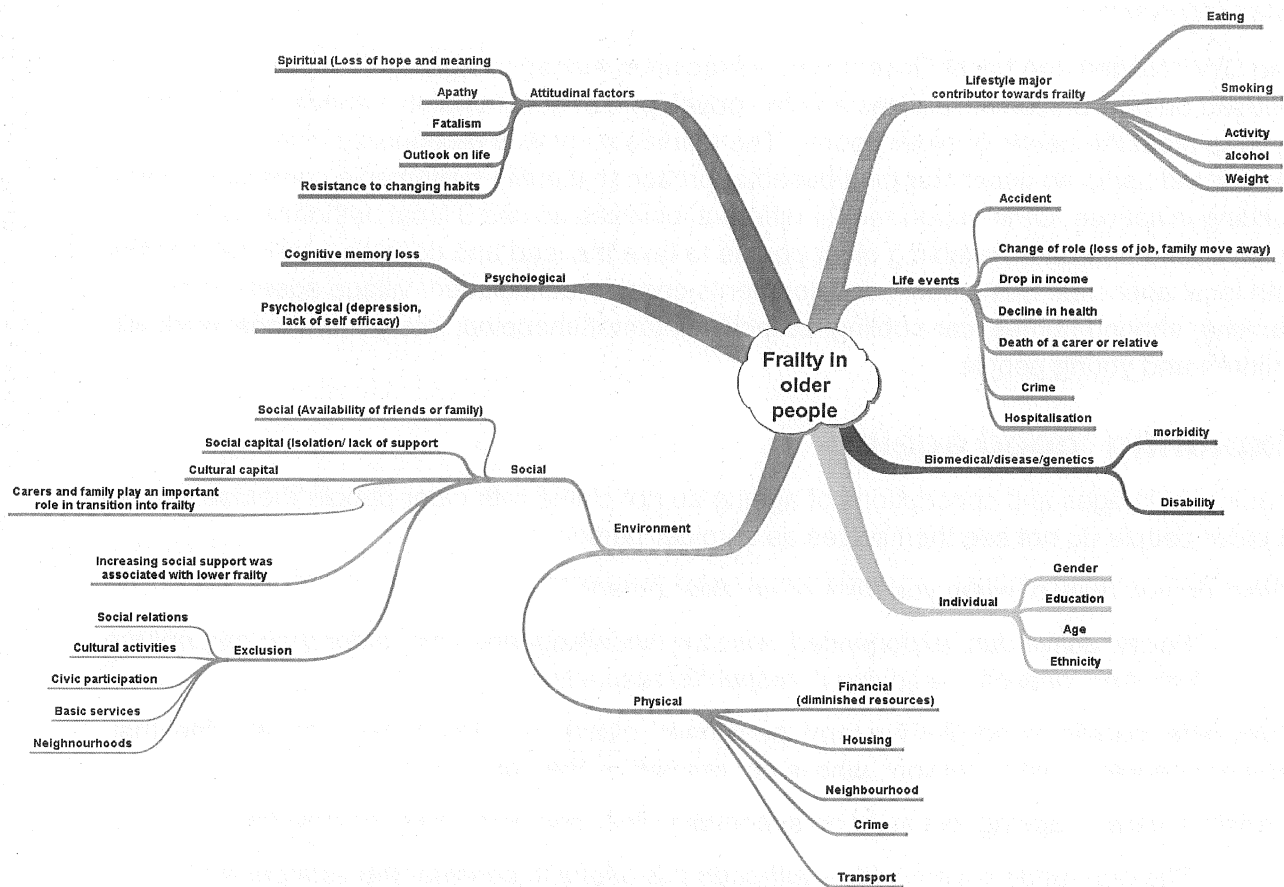


Across the board, older people we spoke to wanted the following outcomes for ageing well:

- Maintaining dignity, independence and control, treated as an equal citizen.
- Having the social activities and networks that connect you to other people.
- Able to make a positive contribution, feeling purposeful and cheerful.
- Having a healthy lifestyle that maintains physical and mental well-being.
- Coping well with difficult life events.
- Living in a place that promotes a good quality of life.
- Able to get around to shops, friends and activities.

What may tip people into ageing badly?

This frailty map shows that there is a wide range of determinants of frailty that relate to all aspects of people's well being, personal social and place¹.



Delaying the tipping point for frailty requires action in four main areas:

- Helping older people build up their health and wellbeing capital so that they have greater resilience and are better able to respond to life's challenges.
- Helping people cope with life's significant events
- Creating a strong, secure and safe environment in which older people can live with ease and comfort and access the services they need.
- Reducing the risk of episodes or incidents involving avoidable injury, illness or hospitalisation.

Older people in the context of their communities

In an asset based approach, the glass is half full rather than half empty. Fundamentally, the shift from using a deficit based approach to an asset based one requires a change in attitudes and values. It starts by looking at the resources available - not simply from the public sector (although including those) but also from the private sector, the community and individuals.

¹ Delaying the Tipping Point of Frailty, May 2011, authored by Judy Rainer, Suffolk County Council

Our experience showed that older people enjoyed the experience of identifying their own skills and resources, and felt it could help older people gain confidence and a sense of personal worth. At a local level, the asset approach has proven successful at:

- generating new and imaginative ideas
- bringing people together
- engaging a wide group of people in the programme
- linking public-sector agencies with the ideas and efforts of the voluntary and community sectors.

Older people have a lot of enthusiasm and energy, which can be tapped into a variety of innovative ways. Older people, community leaders and professionals felt an asset based approach was a very useful way of building individual and community confidence and creating a positive atmosphere and shared agenda. It can help to identify and strengthen the social networks in each locality, and create the basis for thriving social, leisure and cultural activities. It also offers opportunities for older people to volunteer and contribute to activities that would enhance their own lives and those of others.

Strengthening this at a local level is simple and is something that can be done by anyone – community activities, citizens, volunteers, and does not necessitate intervention by statutory agencies. People in local communities can do the following to build better community networks:

- Identify key individuals in the locality
- Begin a conversation about 'ageing well' – ask them to describe activity and their role, and identify other active citizens
- Hold further conversations with this wider group – create enthusiasm about the ageing well project –design a process
- Bring people together in a workshop event – map individual and community assets – generate good ideas
- Second workshop to explore how to take ideas forward
- Identify the energy and resources to make things happen – Agree actions

The role of the state

It is essential to build distributed leadership across the system and across levels from a local council down to a ward councillor or nursing assistant. Health and Wellbeing Boards can be an effective place to drive this forward, but local support is also needed to build older people's community networks. Some key recommendations include:

Operational support to communities - Support local communities to take forward the asset based approach – this may be as simple as a small amount of funding for a community champion, booking rooms and lunches etc.

Strategic support to communities –parish councils and plans were highlighted as vital to driving forward community led improvements for older people. There is a role for strategic level partners to ensure statutory agencies at community level are supported and understand the asset based approach, its benefits and how to support its implementation.

Mindset change – This is more than just structures, partnership agreements and processes. It requires a change in the mindset of professionals, older people and their communities. It necessitates seeing older people positively as assets, not as a burden or a deficit. Staff,

members and managers should have opportunities to exchange learning about the asset based approach, share ideas and support each other.

Targeted support in some areas - Where there is a very small community, such as a hamlet, or where there are low levels of energy and community connectedness, the statutory sector may need to deploy its resources in ways that compensate for this lower levels energy.

Ensure strategic leadership and commitment – this may be through developing an Ageing Well strategy or embedding this firmly and clearly in the draft adult services strategy. Monitoring and oversight can be done via Scrutiny Committee, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the other local partnerships.

Promote positive messages around ageing - There needs to be consistent messages from strategic partners that promote ageing as a positive experience.

Encourage partnership – support groups at local and county level to work together, not compete. Part of this may be about understanding which organisations and initiatives are currently supporting older people in the area and 'joining the dots' as well as identifying gaps.

Demonstrate impact - Help local communities show value and the outcomes achieved from the focus on community-led bottom up approaches to supporting older people. Strategic partners could ensure there are clear markers of success that will allow them to measure impact

Encourage volunteering – this may be by reducing bureaucracy, supporting preretirement workshops to capture older people as they come up to retirement etc.

Support socially isolated older people - Develop specific targeted initiatives and support for this group of older people. Identification is a key issue and the role of GPs, social workers and other frontline health, social care and housing staff is crucial here.

An example of results from an asset-based approach: Central Bedfordshire

A whole system event brought together older people, health services and other local organisations, including community and voluntary organisations. Older people attending the event identified the individual and community assets available to their communities and generated good ideas for using them to enable people to age well. Three key ideas for further development, out of a long list of good ideas generated at the whole systems events, were centred on Arlesey Village and Biggleswade Town.

Two half day locality workshops to consolidate the three good ideas for making better use of the local assets were therefore held in Biggleswade and in Arlesey. This was then followed with a final whole systems workshop, which included those who had attended the initial whole systems event and workshops. This enabled participants to reflect on the work in Arlesey and Biggleswade and draw out the lessons for the use of the asset based approach across Central Bedfordshire as a whole, as well as identifying who the key players are in the locality, and Central Bedfordshire wide, to get best value out of the approach.

As a result of the asset mapping workshops a Village Agent has recently been recruited to support the local area. The Village Agent will identify vulnerable and isolated adults of all ages living in Arlesey, and ensure that they can access the services and support they need. This involves building local support networks as well as acting to bridge the gap between local people and statutory organisations. The Agent will work with any resident in need, not just those who are eligible for social services. Central Bedfordshire Council has also started to explore with Timebank UK, opportunities to take forward and develop Timebank models in the area.