

## Wider Partnership Conference Workshop: Lifelong Support Workshop Notes

See also presentation handouts from Jonathan Kerr and Centre for Ageing Better publication: *Age Friendly & Inclusive Volunteering*.

Workshop led by Jonathan Kerr (Age UK North Craven), assisted by Fred Callaghan (NYCC Library Service); notes by Marion Tweed-Rycroft (NYCC Stronger Communities).

We considered lifelong support through the lens of the contributions made by older people to society and the intrinsic health and wellbeing benefits derived from volunteering.

What's in name? the word 'volunteering' can be off putting to some, and also tends to refer to formal contributions and fails to capture the multitude of informal contributions made by many older people.

Use of words like contribution / help / support may be more likely to resonate with the audience of older people, and others. These words also broaden the lens of what is possible.

Age UK NC is a partner with The Centre for Ageing Better exploring the barriers to formal volunteering and informal contributions in later life.

*We know that people in later life who are less well-off, or in worse health, are much less likely to contribute their time and talents, especially through formal volunteering. Yet they are most likely to benefit from the improved social connections and wellbeing that come from contributing.*

*Our review of community contributions in later life, in partnership with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, found that people from these groups encounter a number of personal and structural barriers to taking part.*

Barriers to contributing include:

### **Practical, Structural and Emotional Barriers to Volunteering (Centre for Ageing Better)**

#### **Practical barriers**

Costs

Transport needs

Physical access

Language

#### **Structural Barriers**

Inflexible offers

Lack of neutral spaces

Bureaucracy

Lack of resources

Digital divide

#### **Emotional Barriers**

Lack of confidence

Stigma/stereotype

Lack of welcome

Fear of over  
commitment

Not feeling valued

Discussion around the benefits of volunteering / contributing and the need to widen the volunteer 'pool' and become more person centred and inclusive. Look beyond our assumptions and prejudices (unconscious biases) about older people and be more curious, open and person centred. Challenge your organisation to reduce these barriers as much as possible. Example given of prejudice around ex-offenders volunteering, which can serve to increase shame and stigma and drive people not to disclose.

## **Barriers to contribution in later life**

Older people don't want to let people down, and would rather say no than risk over committing.

Kindness and fun attract new people in – Age UK first asks 'are you a lovely person?' not 'would you like to volunteer with us' – this comes further down ad.

Offer support tailored to the person and their specific needs.

Enable people to offer their interest and skills rather than expecting them to fill a vacant volunteer 'vacancy'. It could be they fill it anyway, but it's a different starting place/conversation. Think widely about the ways in which the person can contribute, from back office support functions through to service / activity delivery.

Enable people to be able to say 'no'.

There was some conversation around perceived difference when volunteers are delivering a service and their commitment is necessary, whereas other roles can be built around / utilise the skills, experience and interest of people. So it's important to consider the 'fit' between the person offering their time and the role the organisation needs to fill.

Consider if 'blanket' policies and procedures are necessary. e.g. DBS checks may be requested by very risk averse org but not actually appropriate for role. Nice example given of a group who wanted to offer opportunity to cycle to older people through riding tandem (I think!). They decided not become constituted as this would lead to unnecessary bureaucracy.

Do systems (policies, procedures, practice) support a welcoming and inclusive environment? Systems can unintentionally contribute to the development of a risk averse culture whereby existing staff and volunteers are overly cautious of volunteers who need some support from them to be able to contribute e.g. older people, people with mental health issues.

Key role of organisational leaders in creating an inclusive and welcoming culture.

Organisational flexibility and the ability to create new roles that fit around the persons changed circumstances are valued.

Can other volunteers offer support to enable the person to continue contributing?

### **Centre for Ageing Better: 6 principles to making volunteering opportunities age-friendly and inclusive**

1. Flexible and responsive
2. Enabled and supported
3. Sociable and connected
4. Valued and appreciated
5. Meaningful and purposeful
6. Makes good use of my strengths

More information about these principles is in the publication Age Friendly & Inclusive Volunteering by the Centre for Ageing Better.