

A Review of Service Provision for Men Aged 50+ (Belfast)

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Aims of the study

- Review the extent and impact of current services to combat social isolation in Belfast, for men aged 50+, who are retired/unable to work and isolated
- Identify how services are meeting need and ways they may be developed to meet future requirements

Methodology

January to May 2014

- Literature review with focus on combating social isolation among older people, to identify key learning and good practice
- Audit of current services, with a specific focus on socially-isolated men aged 50+
- 10 in-depth interviews with older men aged 50+ to explore their use and opinions of services
- Consultation with 6 stakeholders to reflect on provision, funding and sustainability of relevant services

Peer researchers

- Reviewed the interview strategy and question themes
- At the end of the project, discussed the key findings, themes and suggestions

Literature review

- Outlined different interventions used to address social isolation
- Group work schemes appeared to be effective, whilst one-to-one interventions were least effective in this context
- More structural issues, such as transport and poverty, are significant factors associated with social isolation of older men

Audit of Belfast services

- 125 for men and women of any age (eg libraries)
- 20 actively target men of any age
- 12 services to combat isolation in men aged 50+ (including 4 Men's Sheds)
- Many different types of services were identified, eg Men's Sheds; one-to-one befriending schemes
- Some open to all; some for specific groups, eg dementia
- Churches often kept services going - now recognise the needs of men

Well served?

Limited snapshot in time

Services provided comprehensive and diverse range of activities

Two key concerns:

- funding/sustainability
- capacity

Interviews – ‘expert voices’

- The pathways to, and reasons for, accessing services varied:
- ***Feeling demoralised following retirement or unemployment:***
 - Importance of work, and the identity and self-esteem that come with a job
 - Home is the domain of women, and many men felt in the way
- ***Impact of ill-health:***
 - Mental ill health, addictions, physical ill health, cancer
 - ‘Epiphany’ after a health scare – give something back

Barriers to participation

- ***Masculinity and ‘pride’:***
 - Stigma in admitting that they are lonely or are going through difficult times, especially in mixed-sex setting
 - Fear of attending a group and being unable to carry out the activities on offer
- ***Limited engagement with very isolated men:***
 - Word of mouth important for making initial contact, but this misses out very isolated men

Legacy of the conflict

- Strong link between conflict, masculinity and identity
- For some men, the legacy of the conflict, and current events, are central in their life
- Services can be places of tension or potential reconciliation
- Specific needs of ex-prisoners, eg mental health, addiction and dealing with the past (which includes life in prison and post-release life)

Impact of services: lives were 'transformed'

- Accessing these services played a pivotal role in men's mental and physical well-being:
 - Social contact
 - Friendship
 - Sense of purpose in a post-work context
 - Improvements to mental and physical health
 - Feelings of usefulness
- Other men suggested that membership of clubs sustained them in behaviours which helped to control their addictions

Stakeholder interviews

- No funder had a strategic focus on services for (older) men, but will fund if need is identified
- Men's groups under-represented as applicants, and grantees of, funding programmes
- Limited experience and capacity in relation to funding and governance hinders sustainability
- Lack of knowledge of services across sectors inhibits collaboration between service providers, and service uptake by users



Suggestions for moving forward ...

Information, training and collaboration

- Increase the capacity of voluntary and community organisations in relation to funding and governance issues
- Take part in government consultations
- Join relevant networks
- Develop a clear and up to date directory of services for statutory and third sectors
- Involve and train health and social care professionals
- Evaluate what works

Programmes and services

- Think about how to engage with men
 - Consider inter-generational work
 - Recognise the legacy of the conflict
 - Acknowledge diversity
 - Think about the range and type of activities that are offered
 - Consider if men-only services are the most appropriate
- Need a sustained, flexible and creative multi-sectoral approach, with input from older men themselves

Next steps

- Develop an action plan
- Prioritise actions and future directions