

Warwickshire Forum Digest

Issue 8
October 2006

WARWICKSHIRE OLDER PEOPLE'S FORUM

EDITORIAL

Once again it gives me great pleasure to report on the incredible amount of work that has gone into keeping our Forums functioning so well. In this issue, in addition to the reports, I have included some articles about the activities of some of our members. For example Andrew Cowan's piece on "Hard of Hearing" is worth reading.

There is also more about the Older People's Partnership Board, set up by WCC to help us to have a better quality of life. Some of the six volunteers, who feed back to the Board our feelings about the agencies that are represented, have given their personal views. Our input into the Board is vital. We have so much to offer and this is our opportunity to have our voice heard. It is up to us to give guidance and the benefit of our knowledge to help the Board to help us.

Joan Draper, Editor
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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The Planning Committee spent a lot of time and energy preparing for the Annual Event, "**Thrive and Survive**". The aim is to look at wellbeing, and hopefully to keep our independence, enabling us to remain in our own homes.

I can see from the Reports that all the Forums have been very busy, and I think, by what I hear, the majority feel that we are being listened to and taken on board by having a seat on other committees. I am aware that this is not every Forum, and that it is taking time to happen, but I know we will get there in the end.

We have changed the venue of the meetings of WOPF from the Hyland Hotel to the Business Training and Development Centre in Leamington. This is due to having a person in a wheelchair who is unable to get up stairs or to the toilets. This is Discrimination, so we had to move, although we are still looking at other venues.

Most of you will know that Dorothy Goodwin was interviewed by WCC and offered a place as volunteer on the Partnership Board, to represent Nuneaton and Bedworth. She was welcomed in this capacity at our last meeting - she will prove to be an asset.

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At the end of July we had the first issue of *Prime Time*, explaining the work of the Partnership Board. This makes very good reading I am sure your Chair will get you a copy.

The Low Level Support Service: The aims are to prevent inappropriate hospital admission, and improve the ability for people to remain living in their own homes as long as possible, by getting help with many small jobs, such as gardening, repairs, advocacy, domestic help, community involvement, lunch clubs, and many more. Each area will have a broker, who will have training. The brokers will signpost clients to the appropriate place, to help them whatever their problem is. I think one of the most important tasks is to get people who have recently been bereaved, or out of hospital, into a befriending group, and into social activities as soon as possible. These are the most vulnerable people.

Brenda Hardy, Chair

Warwickshire Older People's Forum

Contact Tel. 01788 571633

FORUM NEWS

RUGBY CORE COUNSEL OF OLDER RESIDENTS

The CORE group has maintained its commitment over the last few months. We have had a good attendance at the monthly meetings, with speakers talking on different topics. Alison Chapel gave us a talk on Rural issues; Veronica Carter, Nursing Manager of the A&E services at St Cross, our local hospital spoke of her work, also of the Walk in Services, Out of Hours Services, and Urgent Care Services. This was an excellent talk with a lot of passion. Many questions were asked, and she will come back later to let us know how these services are faring.

One of our regular speakers is Joyce Woodings from Adult Health and Community Services, (which used to be Social Services). As usual she had a lot of information for us, explaining new ways that services will be put into place. She also told us about the Low Level Services that will soon be available. This is a new service that hopefully will keep people out of Hospital or Homes longer, by receiving support from local services. Information about where to get this support will be given through a Broker Scheme - each of our five regions will have one - so that people get the right advice on how to receive the services they need.

Mark Farthing, Emergency Care Practitioner Clinical Co-ordinator, told us how this service worked and how very well trained these people are. This was another excellent talk.

Four of our members have been involved with the presentations on Age Discrimination, which I believe is coming to a conclusion. We have found this a worth while project. Many conferences, seminars and consultation meetings have been attended by our members.

We held a coffee morning on 21 July at Age Concern. Jeremy Wright MP Sheila Hinds from the Pension Service, and Dawn from Transport attended, and we received some new members - which was the aim. In the coming months we hope to have another coffee morning and an open day. This is when we invite new members who do not want to attend all our meetings.

Brenda Hardy, Chair

Contact Tel. 01788 571633

THE SENIOR PEOPLE'S FORUM OF WARWICK DISTRICT

It has been quite a busy time since our last report. We held a public meeting at the end of April at St Peter's Conference Centre. This was organised as a joint venture between the health and the transport groups. We tried out a new format of having the discussion groups in the morning and questions for the invited guests after lunch. This proved to be very popular as the people who attended felt that they had more time to put their questions.

We have decided to hold a Partnership Day on Thursday 16 November at the same venue. This time we are inviting other organisations, connected with older people, to join us and demonstrate what is available in the area to help us all to live an independent healthy life.



In May we had a speaker from WCC Trading Standards who told us about the latest 'scams' in the neighbourhood intent on making money from vulnerable older people, and how to avoid being taken in by these rogue traders. The June meeting was our AGM and we welcomed some new members to the committee and said *au revoir* to some long standing members. Our constitution states that a member can only serve on the committee for a maximum of six years. We are fortunate in finding a member who was willing to take on the position of Treasurer, and for this we are all (particularly me) very grateful.

In July we had a representative from Community Fire Safety who told us how it is possible to make our homes safer to live in, and gave us some very good tips on how to achieve this. He also offered members the chance to have a safety check on their homes, and a number took advantage of this offer. It will be interesting to hear what the results of this will be.

This month we have a coffee morning at Chandos Court, which gives our members a chance to socialise in comfortable surroundings.

Rena Sanders, Hon Sec
Warwick District SPF
Contact Tel. 01926 312955

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS CAMPAIGN ON FULLY FUNDED CARE

Many old, sick and vulnerable people are entitled to free nursing care which the NHS is obliged to provide by law. This is not happening and they are having to pay for their own care. For those who know that they are entitled to fully funded care, have to put up a fight to receive it- this is very stressful for carers.

The Sunday Express has launched a campaign to ensure more people know about their rights. Send your comments to:

Dept of Health
Room 116
Wellington House,
133-135, Waterloo Road
London
SE1 8UG.

LETTER TO MR BLAIR

Like you Mr Blair I don't want a country where the only way pensioners can get long-term care is by selling their homes. WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE THIS A REALITY!! Send to:

JUSTICE for the ELDERLY.
News desk.
The Daily Express.
The Northern and Shell Building
10 Lower Thomas Street
London
EC 37 6EN.

Marion Grimwood. RGN CMB
Lead for Health and Social Care.
Senior People Forum Warwick District

Transport

The Transport Group

Free bus travel in Warwickshire is naturally proving popular, with reports of some members testing various routes to their limits beyond county boundaries. However, we do not intend to let rest the question of rural areas, left out in the cold by the withdrawal of the token system.

In May the group invited Adrian Hart, leader of County Council Transport Planning, to talk about the second five-year phase of the County Transport Plan. He said this would 'focus on shared priorities, setting transport in a wider context of how it affects our lives'. Although Mr Hart told us that funding was not forthcoming for the Warwick District Transport Plan – SPARK – it was announced recently that money has been released for this plan. We await news....

Recently local Stagecoach Manager John Bottomley came to tell us about changes to bus routes, imminent and for the autumn. The changes to two services mean that now the Croft Medical Centre in Sydenham is covered; but some changes to routes and stops in Lillington do not suit some passengers. The bus terminal in Warwick is to be totally redesigned to cut out the route round town, where at present most of the damage has been done to wing mirrors, but worse accidents are feared.

Margaret Ellis

Warwick SPF Transport Group

NUNEATON AND BEDWORTH OLDER PEOPLE'S FORUM

We have had our usual meetings once a month with good attendance, with a few new faces joining us.

Our speakers have been of the usual high calibre, Heather Paige brought us up to date with the Age Discrimination Training Project which some of the Forum members contributed to, where the project goes in the future is still in debate.

Peter Allen, of Cedar Lawns Associates gave a very good talk on 'Funding Care without Losing Your Home' He was able to answer many questions which concerned a lot of people.
A visit from the Community Safety Officer, PC Marki kept everyone on their toes and enlightened them about many of the problems the Police are dealing with every day and how they are resolving them.

Home Start is mainly for the younger generation but Yvonne Spencer Senior Volunteer Co-ordinator spoke about the need to recruit people of 50 yrs plus to assist families in difficulties. Yvonne says she believed people over 50 yrs who volunteered were more reliable and take their commitments seriously. So another request on our time if we have any to spare.

We have speakers booked for the next few months like Neighbourhood Watch, Victim Support, Energy Efficiency.

Whilst we have been enjoying the speakers, our Treasurer Mary Slack has been working hard on our project for the year, or I should say her project in the Forum's name. A document 'Final Arrangements' which can go along side your will to help your next of kin or nominated person/s to deal with your affairs, when the time comes. Well Done Mary!

Our Forum still attends as many meetings/workshops as we can to continue bringing new information to our members, and share information with other groups which many of our members belong to. We are given support by many professional staff who regularly attend our Forum meetings.

Dorothy Goodwin Vice Chair

Nuneaton and Bedworth Older Peoples Forum

Contact Tel. 02476 366941



NORTH WARWICKSHIRE OLDER PEOPLE'S FORUM

At our recent meetings our speakers have been: Car-Go-Bus; Victim Support; Community Matrons; Guidepost Care Support and Age Concern.

I have attended a number of meetings:-

- A **POP (Policy for Older People)** meeting. For the future there are no firm plans as to how this is going forward.
- A **“Closer Working”** meeting
- A **“Wellness Project”** meeting on rural Warwickshire. This covered five main areas – IT, technology, transport, marketing and mapping.
- The **“Patients’ Participation”** meeting at Dordon Surgery. A PCT support pharmacist gave advice on treating drugs carefully and storing them properly. She also reminded us that people could go to the chemists for advice on minor ailments.
- I spent a day at Lea Marston with the North Warwickshire Community Partnership. The morning meeting celebrated the success of the different themes, and in the afternoon the LAA was introduced.

The LAA Event

LAA is a Local Area Agreement – a contract between central and local government to deliver the priorities of local people. It is in place to support partnership working to make a difference in local communities.

The main areas that the Warwickshire agreement will focus on are:

Children and young people

- Stronger communities
- Safer communities
- Healthier communities and older people
- Economic development and enterprise
- Environment and sustainability

The first draft will be ready for the end of August and parties will sign up to the agreement by March 2007. There will be some mandatory outcomes from this, for example reducing health inequalities. Grants are available to achieve these outcomes by funding projects. In total £14 million will be available by March 2009.

We need to keep people involved to ensure the agreement comes to fruition. To help with this citizen consultation will take place between September and December this year.

Iris Filmer, Chair

Contact Tel. 01827 712040



SCAN (Senior Citizens Action Network)

There are six SCAN forums in the Stratford District, and membership is around 450.
For information about any of the SCANs please
contact Chris Mitchell on 01788 260108.

ALCESTER SCAN

Alcester Hospital

The expenditure for this new build project has now been approved by both the South Warwickshire Primary Care Trust and the West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority. Both organisations have confirmed that their agreement is binding on subsequent statutory bodies which will emerge after the reorganisation of the PCTs and SHAs. The Alcester Doctors' Consortium are now in a position to obtain quotes for this project. Completion will be approximately 18 months after construction begins.

Disability Access

We are still trying to persuade organisations and shops to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and at the same time we are in correspondence with our local MP to see if there is any way that the injustices contained within the Act can be rectified.

Achievements

Alcester SCAN has always been a campaigning group and in the last six years we have achieved, either as a single entity or as part of a larger movement, the construction of Meadow View Residential Home, re-routing of bus services to better suit the needs of older people, the provision of additional bus stops, retention and refurbishment of The Greig Centre and the imminent build of a new Alcester Hospital

Speakers

We have had the Active Communities Officer from Stratford District Council talking about 'Activities for Health' and Sarah Bannister from the South Warwickshire Primary Care Trust to tell us about the 'Acute Services Review'.

Adrian Tudge, Chair

Alcester SCAN

BIDFORD ON AVON SCAN

The most popular SCAN occasion since I last reported was the May meeting when Paul Evans, former Alcester teacher turned Activities Officer for Stratford Council, came to speak about his work and to encourage members to take a Leisure Walk weekly. The response was immediate, and Paul is now leading walking groups on the Big Meadow every Wednesday morning. More than twelve people turned out in July for a Sport Relief two-mile walk, raising £50 for Sport Relief into the bargain.

The March and July meetings covered much more serious topics. In March members heard about the switch over to digital TV and the new and challenging consequences of the change. The general response was relief that it will not happen here until 2010, and we don't have to worry about it for another three years! July brought the NHS consultation on the future of acute hospital services in Warwickshire and Coventry. Members are concerned about the ability of GP practices to take on the new work demanded of them, and the willingness of consultants to travel about the country to complete their part of the jigsaw. But their main anxiety is about the travelling that patients and their relatives will have to do under the new regime. The new

ambulance structure is as yet unproven, but even assuming its complete success, there is still the non-emergency travel – to hospital appointments and visiting – with a completely inadequate public transport system and the high cost (and inefficiency) of car and similar travel. The general view is that transport, in all its aspects, needs to be given more thought.

The long-awaited meeting of SCAN chairmen with the Portfolio Holder for Older People and the Chief Executive of Stratford DC took place on 26 May, and Bidford joined forces with Alcester, Stratford, Shipston, Southam and Henley to put a concerted point of view.

We were offered regular six-monthly meetings with them both, and given an invitation to meet and address the council's executive members. The CE told us that we would be welcome to use the Area Community Committees to put a point of view to councillors on local issues, and Mrs Gill Roache, the Portfolio Councillor, offered her services as Older People's Champion for Stratford District.

Bidford SCAN was represented at the Warwickshire County Council "Customer First" conference in Coventry on 22 May, and a healthy contingent is expected to take part in the WOPF October event at Warwick.

Mike Gerrard, Chair
Bidford on Avon SCAN



HENLEY IN ARDEN SCAN

Skate Park Plan

After four years of fundraising, planning and designing, the young people of Henley SK8 CRU have finally built the first stage of their Skate Park Plan. It is now in use. Every evening and at weekends groups of young people meet up to engage in productive activity away from the High Street, the churches and the shops.

This, though is just the start as Henley SK8 CRU plan to build a shelter, to surround the area with their art. Themes representing their aspirations and enjoyment of life will adorn their special area. There are also plans to double the size of the tarmac area and put in more ramps and jumps.

Access to Trains at Henley in Arden Station

Janet Chisholm represented Henley SCAN at a meeting of Stratford upon Avon District Council Arden Area Committee on 6 July, held to discuss the problem of access to trains at Henley in Arden Station.

The Problem: The northbound platform at the station is an island platform. It can only be accessed by a steep footbridge. There is no alternative access for people with restricted mobility, such as wheelchair users, parents with prams and older people.



Henley SCAN took up the issue of access to trains in 2001, supported by Stratford District Council. Despite numerous letters, meetings, demonstrations, involvement of councillors, local MPs, etc, support and official sympathy, the problem has remained unresolved.

The view of Henley SCAN is that restricted access to trains at Henley Station is unreasonable, whereas the 2004 Disability Discrimination Act calls for "reasonableness" of access.

Henley SCAN appealed to Stratford on Avon District Council Arden Area Committee to take up this issue.

Cyril Bengier, Chair
Henley in Arden SCAN

Changes are afoot at Southam SCAN. At the end of June Ann Walker of CVS Stratford upon Avon retired. Ann has been the co-ordinator of the Forum for the past six years, organising meetings, inviting speakers and keeping everyone up-to-date on matters pertaining to our age group. We are sorry to lose Ann, and wish her well in her retirement, but now realise the time has come to run the Forum ourselves.

To that end, five people have volunteered to form a nuclear committee, and at our next meeting we hope to clarify roles. Brenda Hardy has invited me to act as a representative for Southam SCAN at WOPF meetings and I am happy to do so.

Since our last report we have had a speaker from Trading Standards who informed the group of internet scams to look out for, and information on shopping 'on-line'. Paul Lankaster of Stratford District Council told us about the role of the council within the community. He highlighted services particularly for the older age group such as the Handyman Service, Care and Repair and Community Link Transport. Another topic of interest to us locally is that work is to start towards the end of the year to changes to the Library/Co-op building which is to become a 'one-stop shop' – due to be finished by October 2008. We will keep an eye on this.

We were also introduced to Paul Evans, a new Part Time Activities Officer, employed by the council to encourage more use of Leisure Centres and physical activities generally. He is proposing 'taster sessions' of badminton, table tennis, swimming and movement classes as well as making contact with walking groups across the country.

Liz Revell
Southam SCAN

Shipston SCAN is still meeting every two months. In June we combined a local meeting with an 'Information Extravaganza' organised by Nancy Singleton from Stratford District Council. She modelled it on the SWOOP events she has previously organised in Stratford and Leamington. Chris Mitchell, also from SDC, had a table there and promoted our local membership. We had about ten new names to add to our mailing list which stands at 69 if you count Mr and Mrs entries as two.

We look forward to having a local pharmacist to explain the new contract between the NHS and pharmacies, and to promote services available at the local chemist.

The group has not become more proactive or involved in local issues, but continues to respond to our invitations if they are interested in the topic/speaker.

Brian Tafft, Chair
Shipston SCAN



EDITORS CORNER

A Forum member decided that their refrigerator was too big, so they bought a smaller one. The old fridge was still perfectly good, so they put it in their front garden and hung a sign on it which said: "Refrigerator in excellent condition – free to anyone who needs it. Enquire within." After a week when no-one had enquired about it, they decided that people were too suspicious about something that was free, so they changed the sign to read: "Fridge for sale £25". The next day it was stolen.

The June meeting of SCAN was given an update on the Project World Class Stratford by its leader, Paul Ogden of Stratford District Council. The talk with slides announced the most ambitious event to take place in Stratford since the opening of the RST in the 19th Century. The project in conjunction with WCC and Advantage West Midlands involves a co-ordinated scheme bringing together education, leisure and tourism, with aspects of transport, and encouraging the private sector industries in the area to update their buildings. The Council will be seeking to co-operate with Inland Waterways to maximise the canal and its tow paths for leisure pursuits. However, although this is to cost millions of pounds to develop, members were informed that the majority of the finance is to be in the form of grants and only a very small percentage is through the council tax. The public is to be consulted on various aspects of the plans, but at present the majority of those present were against the proposal to put another bridge over the Avon.

The Chair, Mrs E Cole reported on the National Pensioners Convention in Blackpool. Five delegates from Stratford attended the 3-day conference which discussed all aspects of pensioner concerns.

In August the speaker was Andrew Cooper, the Manager of Stratford Town Centre Partnership. In a wide ranging talk he spoke of the development of the partnership which includes hotels, councils, retail properties, guest houses, business and leisure, working together on issues that benefit the town for tourists and residents. The economy of the town is important for employment prospects. The RST reported that the theatres alone brought in £58 million, and with all the Shakespeare Properties the opportunity is there to make this a world class Stratford. It is important that the infrastructure and investment is put in place, that marketing is effective, and people are brought into the town. The Town Centre Partnership Board is an independent body for the good of the town, which issues to visitors leaflets of where to eat, stay and shop, where to park, and what are the main events in the year.

Mrs Elizabeth Cole, Chair
Stratford SCAN

REPORTS OF MEETINGS AND OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

RUGBY PRIMARY CARE TRUST PEC Sub Group – MENTAL HEALTH

This was held at Swift Park on 12 June 2006. We were told that the launch of the Enterprise Centre went very well after its refurbishment. There are now a lot of clients, some just go for one day, others up to three or four. They are thinking of installing 10-pin bowling – it is important to do social things together in large groups as the clients are reluctant to take part alone.

It appears that there is money to support these activities, although it requires about ten people to make them viable.

It was agreed that the PCT do have to find more resources, but Mental Health is the one that gets left out. It is hoped that:

- The achievements of the Mental Health Team should be acknowledged
- The potential PEC arrangements of good practice and structures need to be made
- It is ensured that carers are taken on board.

I was asked to give a talk on the Depression Report we produced at our AGM last week. It was received very well, and copies were requested. It was thought that we had done well to obtain so much information.

Brenda Hardy
Contact Tel. 01788 571633

A JOINT REGIONAL CONFERENCE THE ALLEN HIGGS CENTRE COVENTRY 10 May 2006

This was a very interesting Conference, but as usual there were very few older people. Around 130 attended from a very large area. All appeared to have the same old problems. It was called A Stitch in Time and was all about putting Low Level Services in place for older people to keep themselves healthier longer. Some suggested options were:

- Increasing over 65s voluntary hours
- Joining leisure centres
- Organised walks
- Luncheon clubs

I do agree with a lot of their ideas, but if people do not have transport and are not well enough to arrange these options, they have little hope of obtaining what is on offer. Also it was plain that there was no new money. In fact I think they want to cut the budget. All agreed that if we are going to have brokers (planned for each area) they must be properly trained. How will the general public know where to go ?

In the afternoon each table was asked to agree on a question we would like to put to the panel. My question was: we have seen and heard it all before. When are we going to see action, with results? We are fed up with promises and we are not seeing any results. I was told it takes time, but it will happen!

Brenda Hardy

Contact Tel. 01788 571633

WEST MIDLANDS OLDER PEOPLE'S ADVISORY GROUP (OPAG)

On 14 March 2006 the AGM was held. After the main reports from the chair, secretaries and treasurer, the election took place, and of course they all stayed the same.

At the meeting on 23 May 2006 the subject of transport in Shrewsbury came up. Due to lack of support from the Local Authority the free bus pass had not been actioned as the older people anticipated. The Government cannot help as they have given the Local Authority funding for this to be set up. But some Local Councils have not reached agreement for an inclusive Concessionary Travel Package. It does appear that a lot of areas are having problems. These issues have now been raised with the Department of Transport who are going to monitor the situation. If there is no commitment to the free bus pass scheme then funding will be withdrawn.

Shropshire is proposing to launch a confederation of 31 shires, and the intention is that a Federation would be launched at a conference in November.

Mervyn Eastman was due to attend this meeting, but unfortunately he was not able to be present. All were anticipating the BGOP event at Brighton and Hove in July.

Brenda Hardy

Contact Tel. 01788 571633



CUSTOMER FIRST CONFERENCE

Being a member of the North Warwickshire Older People's Forum I also attend meetings of the Customer First Steering Team. Among other things we do we helped to organise the Customer First Conference which was held on 22 May this year. It was the fourth conference we have held and it turned out to be very successful. The event was held at the Ricoh Arena, the new football stadium for Coventry. It was a brilliant venue, although we had difficulties finding our way into the car park. There was a good mixture of people there, some elderly, some disabled, those who had learning disabilities as well as representatives and managers from Social Services.

Some of the subjects we covered in the morning session were:

- The new buses which have been enlarged for the benefit of wheelchair users
- Direct payments for people who have to employ carers
- Better training for staff employed in Home Care, so that they don't just offer basic care but are also able to give support
- The need to recruit more Social Workers

And many other subjects.

Various people spoke about how things had changed for them – some things had improved for the better, others were still waiting for improvements to their circumstances to change.

Later we held a workshop called "What Services Would You Like Where You Live". Each table had a map of an imaginary town, we had stickers and had to discuss among the people on each table where we thought various services would get best sited.

During the afternoon there was a feedback session, and then we had a presentation by Graeme Betts, the newly appointed Strategic Director, talking about his aims for the future.

Joan Bown

N.Warwickshire Older People's Forum

COMMUNITY PHARMACY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

This meeting was held at Swift Park on 10 March 2006, and it made me realise how much pharmacists have to do and know. They have to be accountable in many ways, and they are frequently being monitored by the PCT. All pharmacies are visited to make sure they are complying with the standards laid down and have the proper procedures in place, such as Clinical Audit Support. Information about the PCT audits are available to all pharmacists. There have been many problems regarding the change in the supply of oxygen cylinders. They should be delivered from one supplier, but this is still creating problems. One person was unable to be discharged from hospital due to the delay in their oxygen being delivered. A National Review is being undertaken into:

- Health promotion
- Chronic heart disease
- Safety with medicine
- Waste reduction
- Monitoring

Two pharmacies are involved with smoking cessation, and it is hoped more will be involved.

Brenda Hardy

Contact Tel. 01788 571633

WARWICKSHIRE HEALTH IMPROVEMENT AND WELLBEING PARTNERSHIP

Friday 30 June 2006

We were told that Warwickshire PCT has now been approved. It is to be one PCT. Presentations have been given all over the County showing how one PCT will work.

The Health Improvement workshop that was held on 31 March had very few older people present, which I feel is wrong. How can services get better if older people are not consulted?

The workshops that were run put forward a number of ideas including:

- Drop in centres
- Day care
- Group activities
- Transport for outings
- Leisure pursuits
- Befriending services for people unable to attend social activities



Nick Gower-Johnson spoke on Local Area Agreements, contracts between central government and local government. We have to have LAAs, there is no choice. The idea is that they will make a real difference in local communities, support effective and meaningful partnership relationships, and they *should* reduce bureaucracy.

Nick said that the older people should be taken on board, such as the Older People's Forums throughout the county. Most of the members said it would make the group too big, and perhaps a focus group could be formed. **I said that Older People's Forums are very informed people and it was about time we had our say.**

Brenda Hardy

Contact Tel. 01788 571633

BETTER GOVERNMENT FOR OLDER PEOPLE CONFERENCE

The Brighton Centre 27-28 July 2006

We were welcomed by the Deputy Mayor of Brighton and Hove who hoped we would enjoy the hospitality of the town. Many stands were manned by different organisations including:

- Ransackers
- Better Government for Older People
- Older People's Advisory Group
- Help the Aged
- Age Concern

And many more.

Mervyn Eastman, Director of UK BGFOP, set the scene for the Conference. He told us that we must work together with OPAG as a partnership. He was one of four recipients of Action on Elder Abuse, Five Year Anniversary Awards, for a significant contribution to raising awareness of elder abuse in the UK, and in the same year he was conferred with a Honorary Doctorate by Middlesex University for his work with older people. He has for many years challenged the way professionals, organisations and society generally view older people, and considers that public services will only change radically once older people are fully engaged at all levels of decision making, and are seen as a resource, not a health and social care drain.

The next speaker was the Minister of State for Pension Reform, Department for Work and Pensions. He said that there is a problem about pensions for the large number of older people who will be eligible in the years to come. His main aim is to get young people to save into a pension scheme, but as someone said to him, could he guarantee the money would still be there when they retire.

Dr Agis Tsouros of the World Health Organisation told us he is particularly interested in health policy development at all levels. Most of his talk was around people taking the responsibility of keeping active, physically and mentally, for a healthy longer life.

Over the two days we had many more excellent speakers, and the main theme was how to keep healthy into older age, by eating healthily, exercising within ones capability, and keeping the mind active. Among the other speakers was the Chair of the Third Age Trust, and a founder member of the Association for Education and Ageing who co-founded the University of the Third Age in 1982. The Ransackers also had a slot to talk about their experiences.

On Friday we had four workshops. We were told we would be split into four groups, but that was not what people wanted – they wanted choice and soon said so. We got our way. I went into the Mental Health, Wellbeing and Social Inclusion. This was a good group but I do think that Rugby is way ahead of other areas.

The Conference was not all work, we did a lot of networking and socialising too.

Brenda Hardy

Contact Tel. 01788 571633

HARD OF HEARING IN SHREWSBURY - A Thriving Group

I learned of this voluntary group by an A4 poster in Shrewsbury Reference Library entrance, an admirable location for attention from passers by. (Contact: Lyn Whalley 01939 240489). Hooray! An organisation to support us, the one-in-seven hearing-disabled, appealed to me and there is always something to learn from experiencing other voluntary activity, on their own home ground. But I was not prepared for the sheer pleasure of an afternoon of clear audibility – a major raising in standards of possibility.

Some seventy members attended on 8 May, for a presentation from Vicky Sadler, who was obviously “family”, and recounted her personal journey to become the local Hearing Therapist, and some of her experiences in the role. In her family, Vicky has related to her deaf grandmother and then her mother’s progressive hearing loss, support from Guide Dog William and her eventual hearing and communication through a cochlear implant. This north country lass had to go to London for expensive Hearing Therapy Training (although with her nature it did not agree). Then she found Shropshire the farthest north she could get a position, offered as a fresh field with three years to “make a go of it”. Each case, said she, is different and there is an opportunity for licensed nosiness (we enjoyed this frank admission). Some examples of trading in signing, lip reading and finger spelling showed a relationship with members of this audience, as a web of interactive partnership in hearing work, obviously home grown and dynamic.

After the talk and questions, leaflets and a historical display of hearing aids were available in the main hall, whilst tea and biscuits were laid on in another room to mix and mingle without that overwhelming cocktail party effect of high noise level. A simple pictorial card of “Rules of Engagement with a Deaf Person” raised the comment that these are more honoured in the breach than the observance by “educated” people. The rules seem easier for those “less lettered”. And how can doctors know what your problems are when they never pay attention and listen?

Andrew Cowan

Rugby CORE

THE OLDER PEOPLE'S PARTNERSHIP BOARD

A NEW STRATEGY PARTNERSHIP FOR WARWICKSHIRE

In the last issue of the Digest I gave an outline of the Partnership Board, and aired my misgivings about the way the six older people were selected to be volunteers to serve on it. In the event, three of the volunteers selected were members of Forums – the Chair of WOPF; the Chair of Shipston on Stour SCAN; and the Secretary of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Older People's Forum. The others have now become members of their local Forums.

Who are the Volunteers? They are (from north to south) Margaret Smith (North Warwickshire), Dorothy Goodwin (Nuneaton and Bedworth), Brenda Hardy (Rugby), Gillian Brown (Rugby Rural), Michael Piper (Warwick and Leamington) and Mike Gerrard (Stratford on Avon).

I asked Brenda Hardy, Michael Piper and Mike Gerrard to write a few words about the Board and their role in it, and the following extracts are taken from the pieces they wrote.

Brenda Hardy: *"We were asked what we wanted to get out of the meetings and the majority said Quality and Clarity from the Board; To behave as a Partnership; Respect to be given to all."*

"We decided that [the volunteers] should meet on our own from time to time to enable us to share our views. We thought about what we would like to start looking at, and the four main issues were: Residential Care; Hospital Discharge; Transport; Domiciliary Care. These will help us to have a work plan, so the next step will be whom do we consult to enable us to get guidelines to what services are in place, and are they available to the people who should have them. This is my main concern, that unless we get support from the Strategy Services, then we are wasting our time."

Michael Piper: *"Our role as the volunteer representatives is to contribute towards the strategic review process by testing assumptions and ideas about service issues. We will do this by communicating the work of the Board to you, the user community, through the network of Senior Forum Groups and through public notices. More importantly we will obtain reactions and feedback from you to the projects and proposals being taken forward, and make sure your views are heard at the Board meetings."*

"A major project entitled 'Promoting Healthy Independence through Low Level Integrated Support Services' (PHILLISS) is being put in place. You will be asked for your views as PHILLISS is developed. Your volunteer representatives believe that together we can make a difference."

Mike Gerrard: *"The Board was established to make strategic recommendations on the needs of older people in Warwickshire and how they ought to be met. [The volunteers] agreed to share with each other their views on how the Board should operate, what support they need, and what they hope to achieve as members."*

"One early conclusion is that if the term 'Partnership' in its title is to have any meaning, the representatives must be, and be seen as, pivotal figures in its membership. They also realise that to make an impact, the Board has to get its opinions across, not just to each other, but to the key decision-makers in all the participating authorities. Equally, it must earn the confidence of the wider public they represent."

"So, early days yet, and everything still to do. Your representatives are unanimous in their determination to make it a powerful voice for older people's aspirations and the means by which they can become reality."

It is apparent that these volunteers are taking their role very seriously, and I feel that we should rejoice that they do so. It augurs well for the future. In the next issue of the Digest, I hope to air the opinions of the other representatives.

Joan Draper

Warwick District Senior People's Forum

Contact Tel: 02476 301309

ON VOLUNTEERING



Like many other organisations in this country, all our Forums are run by volunteers.

Volunteers increase in number after retirement, although we all do voluntary work throughout our lives (for example helping, as parents, with Scouts and Brownies). After retirement, however, we have time and opportunity to do a lot more. We supplement the services and support the agencies of the Welfare State. Without volunteers the social care that we receive would not be at such a high standard. We are an important part of society.

The danger creeps in that we are taken for granted. It was pointed out to us (by Cathy Traynor of the BGOP at our Annual Event two years ago) that if we charged for our services we would be rich. But if we volunteer and “do it for free” there is a danger that we are undervalued and looked upon as cheap labour.

My plea is for recognition of our worth. Value does not mean money. We volunteer happily and we get a great sense of personal fulfilment. Our bodies and brains are kept more active, even when the task seems to be thankless - we do get satisfaction in helping others. We are more complete when our horizons encompass more than just ourselves.

However it is important to us that we should be listened to, and not simply accepted . Our labour, which is given willingly, is too valuable to be taken for granted.

Volunteering is like the quality of mercy, it is “twice blessed, it blesses him that gives and him that takes”.

Joan Draper

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If any of the information in this publication is difficult to understand, we can provide it in another format. Please call Jane Walkeden on 01926 418012