

LinkAge Plus Devon Summary of Broad Outreach Focus Groups Learning

1. Common Themes

- 1.1. To get the message on available services to those who need them, the information should be in a written form (not just via the Internet), be in plain English, and available at a local venue.
- 1.2. The groups felt that advertising had to be targeted to be cost effective. Commercial publications are expensive and few organisations have a lot of budget for advertising.
- 1.3. Hand delivery works, posters and fliers can be useful, but not on their own. The first stop for many older people, their local GP surgery, is not always the most helpful place for signposting of services, although it remains the most obvious place to start.
- 1.4. Parish magazines were seen as a good, widely read and distributed medium for advertising local services to local people. Equally, parish councils are a good local source of active contacts.
- 1.5. Information Fairs have proved most effective locally, and networking outcomes have been clearly beneficial. However, they must be held regularly. The contacts that are made between services exhibiting are as useful as the people attending the fairs. Regular events build on the success of previous ones. One-off fairs are alright in themselves, but do not take advantage of this opportunity.
- 1.6. Word-of-mouth and face-to-face contacts are regarded as the best means of communication to those who need information and services. Older people like to speak to people locally about their needs and taking the message to them, literally, via drop-in surgeries and coffee mornings is the best way to establish awareness of the services in the places where the those who need them live.
- 1.7. Older people often find telephoning an ordeal, and do not like to speak to someone they think is not local. Many older people are often reluctant to use any phone number which does not appear to be local (e.g. 0845 numbers). They have an equal reluctance to ring call centres, again because they prefer to speak to someone local, and assume that they will be diverted to a call centre far away.
- 1.8. Transport is a major obstacle to getting services or information out to people who need them, especially in a rural location.
- 1.9. A concept similar to the Devon information bus (DORRIS) was considered by two groups, as was approaching DCC for the local use of DORRIS. By pooling resources, a network could maximise the delivery of information on all services to the places where people have the greatest need. The "harder to reach".

- 1.10. A local hub, to a developed network of organisations, is key to helping spread the word (and facilitate delivery) of services available. Both groups felt that government bodies wishing to enhance information and service distribution should look to a local area's existing network, and seek to provide assistance through its hub. If such a hub does not exist, the network is probably poor too. In such cases, a hub should be encouraged, based on an existing working model.
- 1.11. Standardising the approach across an area (county) can lose the identification of local needs.

2. Other Learning Points

- 2.1. Many older people have a distrust of "official" bodies, like councils and health authorities. More should be done to take advantage of trusted brands within the charitable and voluntary sectors when working jointly.
- 2.2. The group recognised that paperwork, even among their own organisations, could inhibit the free networking and cross-referral of clients needing help. Work to ease this problem would be beneficial.
- 2.3. Utilising active contacts – people who have a lot of friends and active interests – to spread the word, is very effective. This means going to the localities and finding them. They are outgoing, involved people who are not difficult to find!
- 2.4. In addressing the communication of available services to those who need them, local knowledge is vital. There are different issues to take account of in rural and urban settings, as well the socio-political interaction between towns and villages.
- 2.5. With an increasing demand on the voluntary sector, issues which inhibit volunteer recruitment and retention should be addressed. Volunteers are largely drawn from people who have just retired, often early. The government's emphasis on people having employment, prohibits some of these people from volunteering. Also, there is a culture change in that people expect "as of right" to get the help they need from local authorities/health bodies, without having to resort to "charity" voluntary sector. The costs of CRB checks, insurance, transport, etc need to be considered.