



Informal Community Action & Reshaping Care for Older People: Case Studies

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This document outlines three case studies which illustrate the role of the informal community sector in supporting the Reshaping Care for Older People agenda.



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This proposal was written by Midlothian Voluntary Action (MVA), part of the Third Sector Interface in Midlothian. Established in 1974, we provide a range of support, training, and advice to community groups, voluntary organisations, and social enterprises in Midlothian. We also represent their interests in the local community planning structures.

All funding MVA earn from consultancy activity is used to further our work supporting the Midlothian third sector.

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Executive Summary

The Informal Community Action & Reshaping Care for Older People Case Studies aimed to identify the following:

- What information is currently available to older people in Midlothian, and are there any improvements needed?
- What are the key pressures on informal groups and what could mitigate them?
- How do mainstream groups support older participants, and is there any assistance they require to do so?

In order to answer these questions we undertook three case studies, which examined:

- **Information Available for Older People in Midlothian:** this study looked at the information collected by the Libraries Service, Ageing Well, and the Local Area Coordinators;
- **Premises and Other Pressures:** this case study examined the pressure points on the sustainability of an older people's organisation in Bonnyrigg;
- **Intergenerational groups:** this case study focused on the issues of supporting older members in a Brass Band in Penicuik.

The case studies identified that community groups provide a huge source of support to older people in assisting them to stay physically and mentally active, and contributing toward their well-being. This can be through organisations which are specifically led by older people either to provide them with a service, such as the Bonnyrigg Older People's Forum shopping service, or to provide them with social activities, such as the Bonnyrigg Social Club. However, many mainstream organisations, such as Penicuik Silver Band, also support older members, providing them with social interaction and links to their own community. They do this as an everyday part of their activity, and value the experience of older people.

Third Sector organisations tend to only look for evidence in relation to funding; if small community organisations are not actively seeking funding, they will not be actively seeking to identify their impact. Therefore the questions are, should anyone else be attempting to do this, and if so, who?

There is easily accessible quantitative information about the numbers of older people attending older peoples' groups, although the information about older members in mainstream groups would be more difficult to collect.

Logic models for third sector involvement need to consider the assumptions that underpin the outcome of preventing avoidable future use of health and social care service and optimising the independence, interdependence, and well-being for older people. It is a reasonable assumption that continuing to attend the silver band you have attended all your life will help you to remain healthy and connected to your local community.

Third Sector Interfaces support grass roots older people's organisations to deal with the everyday issues of running their organisations, such as gaining funding, troubleshooting premises

etc and are well placed to provide information on what is working at a community level. Similarly, the move toward local area coordination is also providing a rich source of information and support.

Funders and organisations such as the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator need mechanisms for feedback from groups who do not apply for funding or registration as well as those who do.

Using the information gathered from the case studies, a small working group consisting of members of the research team, the Older People’s Planning Group, and Midlothian Council, drafted a list of actions flowing from the research, which are summarised below.

Summary of Next Steps

Action	Who will lead?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A short life working group meets to draft action points to support grandparents to remain active and engaged in spite of their childcare commitments. 	Joint Older People’s Planning Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A newly established community sub-group of the Joint Older People’s Planning Group will meet four times annually, supporting and developing community activists, and facilitating excellent up-to-date information available across a whole range of community activities. More inter-organisation communication would be useful, focusing on getting information on older peoples’ activities to people who deal with old people regularly. Health and social care front-line practitioners need to be involved in the process of disseminating information to older people. Further research should be undertaken regarding how best to market activities to people aged 50+ 	Joint Older People’s Planning Group sub-group examining community connections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss with the Funders’ Forum how the concerns of front-line staff can feed into funding practice. Discuss with the Funders’ Forum the potential gap in the market for micro-grants. 	MVA to contact Funders’ Forum on behalf of the Steering Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The collection, collation and promotion of information on older people’s activities needs to feed into the technological action planning taking place in Midlothian. 	Midlothian Voluntary Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The views of older people’s groups regarding OSCR requirements to be fed back to OSCR. 	MVA to contact Funders’ Forum on behalf of the Steering Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community hobby and recreation groups would benefit from a leaflet with information about how to support older group members, and who to contact if they have concerns about the well-being of an older member. Groups need support to resource transport issues, think through the options and engage with local providers of community transport. Practitioners need to give further thought to how we support older people to make the transition from long-term attendance at a hobby or activity to other ways of keeping connected. 	MVA to undertake further research to establish if this information already exists, and if not, work with partner agencies such as Age Scotland to see if we can develop it

Purpose of this Document

This document outlines three case studies relevant to the role of the informal community sector in supporting the Reshaping Care for Older People agenda.

Background

A Stitch in Time? is a partnership demonstration project facilitated by Evaluation Support Scotland and supported by the Scottish Government Third Sector Division and the Joint Improvement Team (JIT). The JIT is cosponsored by the Scottish Government, COSLA and NHS Scotland.

The primary aim is to fully understand the contribution of third sector-delivered interventions to the outcomes of the Reshaping Care for Older People programme in a defined geographical area.

A secondary aim is to understand what other outcomes associated with older people's health and well-being, other than those prioritised by the Reshaping Care for Older People programme, the third sector in the defined geographical area may be contributing to and/or achieving.

To achieve these aims, the project will support the third sector to collect and present relevant evidence. Critically this will include filling gaps in the collection and presentation of evidence by third sector organisations.

In 2013, MVA undertook research to identify how the informal community sector in Midlothian contributes to older people's health, well-being and care, and identify its capacity and willingness to engage with Reshaping Care for Older People. Key issues that were identified by this research were:

- the need for quality information for older people on opportunities for participation in activities that contribute to their well-being;
- a number of challenges relating to the sustainability of the premises where activities aimed at older people ran;
- there is a mixed economy of provision between activities aimed specifically at older people, and mainstream activity where older people participate.

Previous Research

In early 2013 MVA undertook research to identify the role played by the informal voluntary sector in offering activities to fit older people in Midlothian. A wide range of activities were identified through talking to people in Gorebridge and Bonnyrigg. Older people interviewed have a lively interest in pursuing different activities that give them a sense of purpose and help with their general health and well-being. It was evident that there is no one place to find out about such activity, other than identifying key people in the community who know what goes on where. It was also evident that although the voluntary sector plays a key role in delivering activities, for older people it is just one of several different providers that they use.

The groups identified varied in their structure, funding, and size. Information on some statutory provision has been included because it is an important component of the overall picture. Some groups do not have a membership as such; there is an open door policy where the activity is open to anyone.

Although some groups have a long history of sustainable existence they are now experiencing a drop in membership and may well struggle to stay operational in the longer term. Without further research it is not possible to identify whether the problems are connected with the activity (or perception of the activity), or the current membership profile – or both. There was not enough time to detail the health of all the voluntary groups identified. In fact the mapping part of the project would need more time due to a number of factors including the number of groups and the vagaries of the weather in January.

Key issues of note include the need for planners to increase their awareness of what is there, where the gaps are, and people's preferences. Planners also need to look into where activities take place, and plan ahead for premises being taken out of commission. If provision is moved, care should be taken to ensure transport links make the new location accessible by public transport.

Some groups, especially those meeting an expressed need, are well aware of the role they play in the on-going health and well-being of older people, but other groups exist solely because people want that activity, e.g. dancing. More work would be needed to involve the groups in this category to explore how they could be more engaged if this was deemed necessary. It would be easier to ensure that there is comprehensive information about the range of activities available.

Where gaps are identified, work is required to establish what activities would be supported, and then identifying how these are best delivered, e.g. arts and culture. There will be more than one source for this support, but a co-ordinating role would ensure that information is kept up to date and is comprehensive.

Planners, decision makers and providers need to increase their knowledge and awareness of what is available, where it is provided and by whom to ensure that a holistic approach is taken to caring for an ageing population.

Aims of the Research

This research aims to identify the following:

- What information is currently available to older people in Midlothian, and are there any improvements needed?
- What are the key pressures on informal groups and what could mitigate them?
- How do groups that are not specifically targeted at older people, support older participants, and is there any assistance they require to do so?

Methodology

For each of the case studies we used our local knowledge to identify a person or organisation that represented the issues underpinning each of the research questions. We started by identifying, through desk research, some of the background details for the case studies, then conducted a series of interviews with practitioners who had an in-depth local knowledge. Practitioners we spoke to in the course of the research were:

- Eric Johnstone, Midlothian Community Care Forum/Older People's Planning Group
- Vivian Wallace, Ageing Well
- Red Cross Community Coordinators

For each of the case studies we tried to identify examples of good practice relevant to the issues that arose.

The final stage of the research was to identify actions and learning outcomes relevant to Stitch in Time. The initial actions were drafted by the research team, then we held a meeting of key stakeholders in Midlothian to comment on them. The members of this group were:

- Roisin Fitzsimons, Older People's Manager, Volunteer Midlothian
- Morag Barrell, Planning Officer – Older People's Services, Midlothian Council
- Philip Wark, Libraries Service Manager, Midlothian Council
- Vivian Wallace, Ageing Well
- Eric Johnstone, Midlothian Community Care Forum

Case Study 1: Information Available for Older People in Midlothian

Rationale

This case study examines the ease with which older people can find information about activities in their local area.

Many activities that older people would be interested in operate informally in venues such as church halls. There is no central point for collating this information in Midlothian.

Background

There are a number of sources of information for older people in Midlothian, including:

- Midlothian Council website,
- the Older People's Directory,
- Midlothian News,
- Midlothian Info,
- voluntary sector websites,
- Libraries and networks (such as the Local Area Coordinators)

Practitioner's Viewpoints:

Ageing Well Co-ordinator

Vivian Wallace operates the Ageing Well project in Midlothian. She has a free membership scheme for her (formal) older people's groups which gives discounts on activities. To sign up for the card people have to fill in a questionnaire which she uses to gather information to report data back to funders.

One question is "how did you hear about the project?" 70% of the respondents said "word of mouth", followed by the local press, the library and finally posters. Vivian indicated posters are not very effective as there are too many posters causing information overload for people.

There are a number of people (generally volunteers at her projects) who are mavens – "trusted experts in a field who seek to pass information on to others". She finds out lots of information on more informal groups from them. They are generally people who are well known in the community.

'A good example of word of mouth is our Walking Football project.

The project received national media attention through Sky Sports News and a huge amount of local media coverage.

However, almost everyone who attends heard about it through word of mouth.'

*Vivian Wallace,
Ageing Well*

People's own perceptions of activities can limit what they do. It can be difficult persuading older people to go to a project as they think they are either too old or young for different activities. This was covered in the previous research.

Older People's Planning Group

Eric Johnstone is part of the Older People's Planning Group, which is a multi-agency planning group which develops, coordinates and monitors the Midlothian Joint Older People's Strategy and Action Plan. This group produced the Midlothian Older People's Directory. This is a guide to services, organisations and contacts for older people and is aimed directly at them, their carers and families – a one-stop shop for information and services.

In 2014 the Planning Group will increase the distribution of the Older People's Directory – sending it out to neighbourhood watches, local supermarkets and community centres amongst other places.

Eric suggested that getting information on activities to frontline practitioners across health and social care would be very effective as they are best placed to pass the information on – many older people's most regular daily contact may be with a health and social care practitioner. This daily contact must be seen as an opportunity for sharing good information and promoting local activities.

Local Area Co-ordinators (LACs)

There are currently two LACs in Midlothian, with another two posts planned. The Red Cross provide Local Area Co-ordinator provision in Midlothian, with two Neighbourhood Link Buddies and two Community Co-ordinators.

Neighbourhood Link Officers work with individuals to identify and meet the needs of individual elderly people. The two Neighbourhood Link Officers have been in post for a couple of years.

Community Co-ordinators identify needs which are unmet or unknown by groups or organisations and find or establish groups or organisations to meet these needs.

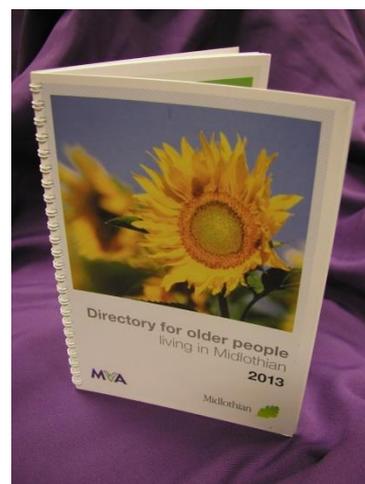
Our researcher met with the two Community Co-ordinators who have been in post for 3 months. They had performed a mapping exercise of groups in the area, starting with information provided by Volunteer Midlothian. We asked how they found information about older people's groups in the area, what the best sources of information were and what problems they'd had.

How they found information

The Community Co-ordinators received lots of information from the Neighbourhood Link Buddies who had built up a database of contacts over the previous two years.

The Neighbourhood Link Officers found that older people predominately found out about activities through word of mouth.

For their mapping exercise the Community Co-ordinators called up organisations, searched the internet, visited groups and went to community council meetings.



Problems finding information

They found that most information online was very out of date or did not have any contact details.

Many activities take place in church halls, however the church websites only have the minister as a contact and he doesn't know very much about what the groups are doing.

They found it very easy to contact the venue that activities took place in but that they were unable to get contact details for the people who ran the groups and the venues themselves were unable to give them more information.

Best sources of information

The Community Co-ordinators found that the best sources of information on groups were local newsletters, followed by the Council's Community Learning and Development team, and local Community Development Trusts.

They also reported there was no substitute for just going out to places at the time they thought a group would be there and hopefully meeting the group in person.

Finding information in practice

Our researcher met with Joanne¹, a recently retired woman in her sixties, to ask her how she would find out about activities in her local area (Danderhall). She said she would go to the library and then the community centre.

She was interested in finding out information about:

- Volunteering
- Line Dancing
- Flower Arranging
- Fitness



Library

Volunteering

She asked the library staff for information on volunteering. They signposted her to Volunteer Centre Midlothian and looked up the contact details and address online for her. They then offered to email that info to her or print it out. She asked for a print out.

Line Dancing

She then asked about information on line dancing. She was signposted to the local leisure centre, or the one in Loanhead. They also made her a printout of the council's web page on local dance classes and gave her contact details for Vivien Wallace at Ageing Well. The council's web page had times on it which she felt was very useful.

¹ This is a pseudonym, as the research subject wished to remain anonymous.

Flower Arranging

The library searched online to look for groups and gave her information on the Scottish Women's Rural Institute. They also recommended their own Adult Craft Group who do various activities, one of which is flower arranging.

Community Centre

Fitness

For fitness information she went to the community centre next to the library where she found leaflets for various classes and the receptionist gave her their timetable for the next few months.

Other places she'd look

She would also look for information on the library's poster wall, at MVA and in the Midlothian Advertiser (which she felt didn't have enough information on the 2014 games events such as the baton relay).

Issues

Joanne felt she had no problems finding information on what groups were out there, but felt that many of the groups were not welcoming, as they could be very insular. There was also a feeling of resentment that she stayed in the "posh hooses" and hadn't lived in the area all of her life.

Another issue she highlighted was not being able to go to many activities as they clashed with the times she had to pick up her grandson from school. She felt organisations should be more understanding of grandparents' family roles and schedule groups around school times.

Another suggestion was a "club together" club. She thought it would be nice if she could partner with someone and go to groups neither had been too before, mitigating the cliquy/insular nature some groups have.

What could improve practice in Midlothian?

The case study highlighted a number of issues:

Older People's Groups

The issue of grandparents providing childcare was raised, and reflects the national trend of grandparents taking a greater role due to increased levels of families where both parents work. This has been raised in other areas of MVA's work, with older people noting that during the summer holidays they often take their grandchildren with them to their activities.

There needs to be a raised awareness by groups, the voluntary sector and statutory agencies of the increased 'grandparent' role of older people and take school times into consideration when planning the times for activities. There is potential to undertake more joint activities involving both older people and the children they care for, and it would be useful to link with local organisations such as Midlothian Association of Play.

Volunteer Midlothian aims to encourage isolated older people, including grandparents, to actively get involved in volunteering. They have noticed an increase in retired females who are

keen to become befrienders, or assist with groups, and will work this around commitments with grandchildren.

It is important to ensure that the needs of grandparents feed into the Older People's Strategy and planning processes.

Action: A short life working group meets to draft action points to support grandparents to remain active and engaged in spite of their childcare commitments.

Local Support Agencies

Lots of people have information about activities in different areas of Midlothian, some of which feeds into the wider arena, for example, websites, and some of which remains in people's heads. Word-of-mouth was identified as a key strategy for publicising activities, and local venues were key to gaining information about what activity was out there.

There is work taking place in Midlothian around coordination and mapping: the Joint Older People's Planning Group now has a sub-group examining Community Connections, and the Red Cross are undertaking a mapping exercise of existing activity. It was also noted that a number of national organisations also collect information, such as the Alliance. However, while the information is being collected by workers on the ground, there is no-one designated to coordinate it, pull it onto one platform, and publicise its existence to individuals and agencies who may make use of it (such as, for example, library staff). As information is being collected by different organisations and stored on different databases, there are a number of technological issues relating to ensuring that information can be collated.

The role of information in assisting older people to live independently needs resourcing, and needs to feed into the Single Midlothian Plan. There also has to be a culture of practitioners seeing information sharing as an explicit part of their role.

Action: More inter-organisation communication would be useful, focusing on getting information on older peoples' activities to people who support older people regularly, and developing and monitoring a practice of information-sharing.

Action: The collection, collation and promotion of information on older people's activities needs to feed into the technological action planning taking place in Midlothian.

Statutory Agencies

GPs. Although they have a high workload and small amounts of time per patient they would be best placed to get information to older people. This would initially take up more of their time but in the long run getting older people active will improve their health and mean spending less time at the doctor's. This could include older people's notice boards in surgery waiting areas.

Health and social care practitioners. Getting information on activities to home carers would be very effective as they are best placed to pass the information on – for some older people their only human contact is with carers.

Action: Health and social care practitioners need to be involved in the process of disseminating information to older people.

Funders

A couple of frustrations with funders were raised:

Funding panels should have at least one member who has a broad knowledge of projects in the area – this is to avoid setting up new projects when something similar already exists.

There is also exasperation at the perceived constant demand for innovation from funders. It would be preferable if funding could be longer term and if a project was successful but not yet sustainable then it would be sensible to give them funding to continue through to sustainability instead of cutting them off and setting up a new project.

Action: Discuss with the Funders' Forum how the concerns of front-line staff can feed into funding practice.

Good practice in other areas

As part of Edinburgh's '[Reshaping Care for Older People – Change Fund](#)' Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council ran a unique [Participatory Budgeting \(PB\)](#) project where Older People themselves made decisions on small grants for work with, by and for older people.

This allowed older people's groups to apply for micro-grants (under £1000). A panel of older people in the community chose who the grants were awarded to.

These grants were awarded with no requirement for monitoring information to be passed back to EVOC.

Case Study 2: Premises and Other Pressures

Rationale

This case study examines the pressure points on the sustainability of informal older people's groups, looking at premises, governance, capacity, promotion and funding.

Many older people's groups operate relatively informally, without large amounts of external funding. While this means they are relatively self-sustaining, small changes in their circumstances can have a big impact on their ability to continue.

A Practitioner's Viewpoint

Eric Johnstone of Midlothian Community Care Forum felt that there is a lack of a next generation of older people's activists to replace key current activists as they got older and less able to participate. He thought that there needed to be awareness raising on the matter from statutory bodies to help find the next set of activists. People need to be aware of the purpose of older people's forums: they are fun, give people a purpose, help fight isolation and let people try new activities.

A further pressure is changes in older people's lifestyles. They are more mobile, are family-centric – often looking after grandchildren and feel their lives are full so don't see a need for older people's groups – they often don't think of themselves that way. Eric thought accommodating this is a real challenge.

Pressures in Practice

Bill Prentice (pictured right) is an older people's activist in his early 90s. He is actively involved in a number of older people's groups in Bonnyrigg, a market town of 14,500 people in Midlothian. One of the organisations he is active in is the Bonnyrigg Seniors' and Old Folks' Club. This organisation provides opportunities for older people to meet up to socialise, have tea, play music or board games and various other activities.

Bill's other organisation is the Bonnyrigg and Lasswade Seniors' Forum. The Seniors' Forum acted as a federation for other seniors' groups who were unconstituted.

These Bonnyrigg organisations illustrate a number of the pressure points facing small, informal groups.



Premises Pressures

Bonnyrigg Seniors' Forum leased Bonnyrigg Public Hall for around 40 years and during that time they fundraised and built a kitchen extension. After this they were verbally told they could use the hall free of charge in perpetuity, though this was never confirmed in writing.

In 2013 they were told that the hall was being closed and they would have to move to a new hall at the other end of the town. This wasn't suitable for them as it was further away, was too far

from the closest bus stop (~300 yards) and they had very little space to store their equipment. In the previous public hall they had their own cupboards and it had a feeling of “home” that the new hall didn’t have.

The social club now meets at the Ex-Servicemen’s Hall, where they have to pay a rent, and the shopping group uses the Pitcairn Hall in the Centre of the town. Midlothian Council has given them a grant to pay the first year’s rent and they are waiting to see if they receive more.

Funding Pressures

Part of the motivation for forming the Seniors’ Forum was due to the lack of confidence of the smaller groups in applying for grant funding. In addition the smaller groups did not meet funders’ requirements for constitutions and externally examined accounts. Therefore, the Forum applied for funding and then distributed it to the smaller groups to allow them to continue their activities. In more recent years funders have been reluctant to give grants to organisations for onward distribution.

Bill’s group reacted to this by starting to do their own direct fundraising and then distributing that money out, however this wasn’t as much. The affiliated, unconstituted groups were not held back by this. He said the these groups were mainly run by women who were very canny with money and they were able to find alternative sources of funding themselves so there was no danger of the groups not continuing.

Bill’s Senior Forum has costs of around £9000 per year. This is mostly to run a bus to bring seniors into Bonnyrigg to do their shopping and socialise.

They used to receive full funding for this from the council but it has now been cut to 50%. Bill was asked if this caused problems for his group regarding continuing to operate but he said no, they just applied for other funding. He felt that applying for funding was a good motivator and made them ‘get their finger out and do things’.

Compliance

Bill’s main request for extra support revolved around financial bureaucracy – applying for funding and OSCR’s accounting requirements. Bill complained that the problem with applying for fundraising was that the bureaucracy behind it was incredibly time consuming. He suggested that the paperwork requirements for known groups applying for small amounts (i.e. under £1k) should be cut – they would rather get on and continue the work they do – work that has already proven to be effective, instead of lots of form filling.

He also felt that OSCR’s requirements for accounts were too onerous for groups with small incomes – they had to provide the same information as organisations with £100ks of income. Bill’s issue was with a ‘one size fits all’ approach – he recommended staggered reporting requirements dependant on income. A number of their volunteers had refused to continue to do the accounts, even those with financial services backgrounds. Bill’s groups now rely on Midlothian Voluntary Action to do their accounts for them.

What could improve practice in Midlothian?

Changing needs of 'older' people

The case study identified that the current generation of activists was ageing, without a new cohort of younger people coming through. This may be due to the changing needs and desires of the next generation. Practitioners contacted as part of the research identified a reluctance on the part of younger 'older' people to associate themselves with anything that was marketed specifically at older people; for example, people were more interested in the level at which a sporting activity was marketed (e.g. beginner, advanced) than in one for a specific age group. However, statutory agencies are keen to be seen to be targeting opportunities to older people. There is a discussion, therefore, to be had about branding, and the monitoring of take-up of opportunities.

Action: Further research should be undertaken regarding how best to market activities to people aged 50+.

Statutory Agencies

Increased awareness raising regarding older people's groups from statutory bodies to help find the next activists is required. People need to be aware of the purpose of older people's forums: they are fun, give people a purpose, help fight isolation and let people try new activities.

Action: A newly established community sub-group of the Joint Older People's Planning Group will meet four times annually, supporting and developing community activists, and facilitating excellent up-to-date information available across a whole range of community activities. Their action plan is called 'Full of Life'.

OSCR's accounting requirements and compliance regime is a burden for informal groups with small turnovers.

Action: The views of older people's groups regarding OSCR requirements to be fed back to OSCR.

Funders.

Small groups can find the process of applying for funding confusing and stressful. Informal groups often do not have an appropriate constitution, or externally examined accounts. While Midlothian Voluntary Action can support them with governance issues, there is not a free source of support on accounts. There are very few micro-grant providers at present.

Action: Discuss with the Funders' Forum the potential gap in the market for micro-grants.

Good practice in other areas

The Charity Commission (OSCR's equivalent in England and Wales) do not require charities with an annual income of less than £5000 to register with them. They state:

'We don't register charities whose income is less than £5,000. This helps to avoid unnecessary administrative costs and effort for smaller charities and for us. Small charities don't need to register to prove that they are charities or benefit from charitable status.'

Case Study 3: 'All age' groups – Penicuik Silver Band

Rationale

This case study looks at the opportunities for supporting older people in activities which are not targeted by age, and focuses on the experiences of a brass band with a number of older members.

As individuals grow older they are often keen to continue with hobbies they have had for many years, but may be less able to participate. Music is an important part of many people's social life, and skills learned as a young person can remain even if an older person's short-term memory starts to fail.

This case study seeks to identify what issues, if any, having older members causes for the band, and if relevant, what support they would welcome.

'Brass bands are very egalitarian; coming from industrial areas they are open to anyone.'

*Alasdair Mathers,
Penicuik Silver Band*

Supporting Older People in Mainstream Groups in Practice

Midlothian has a proud mining heritage, and brass bands are an important legacy of this. Penicuik Silver Band (PSB) was formed in 1835. It has members aged from 8 to 90 and is inclusive in regards to musical talent.

Older members:

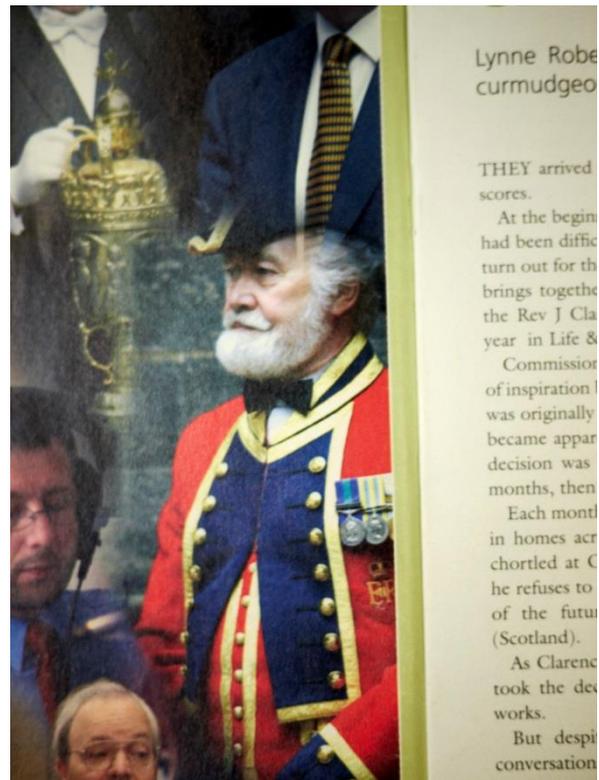
PSB supports a number of older members, who bring a great deal to the band:

One of the oldest members is Rinty, 81, who plays cornet. He signed up as an army regular at the age of 15 and became Her Majesty's State Trumpeter, which involved (amongst other things) playing a fanfare for high court judges sitting down. He also worked as a precision engineer and still has his own workshop. The band rely on him for instrument repair and construction of stands etc. He says that he feels really good about being able to help out the band in this way.



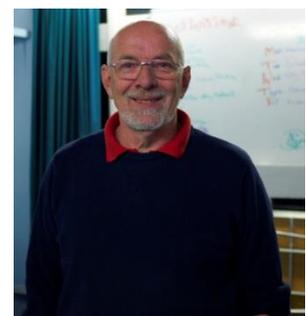
Rinty

(Right) Rinty in his Her Majesty's State Trumpeter uniform



Next there is Dougie, 77 who is a trombonist. Outside of the band Dougie has been the president and secretary of Beeslack Leisure Pursuits – a group who provide activities such as walks, speakers, bowling, art and crafts etc for older people. He is also a member of the Edinburgh Philatelic Society. Dougie likes to stay active. Of all of these activities the band is the biggest commitment time-wise.

Another older member is Sandy (66), a retired teacher who is the band secretary. This is possibly the most important position in the band, a 'key role'. The secretary deals with lots of the band administration – arranging concerts, practices, transport etc.



The youngest of the people at the band our researcher spoke to is Jim, 64 who plays double bass or tuba. He has been a member of the band since he was 9 and his father played in the band before him. Outside of the band he enjoys going for walks and drinking in the pub with his friends.

A further longstanding elderly Silver Band member is in his nineties. He is now frail and has chronic skin cancer. He comes to rehearsals twice a week. They have started to arrange lifts for him as there were concerns over his driving. Young people (aged 12-13) sit with him during practices. They help him get up and down from the stage, set up his instrument stand and assist him when required. This support evolved naturally – there was no formal assessment of his needs, the young people just help him out. We asked each person two questions:

1. *Do you worry about your ability to participate in the band as you get older?*
Universally each person answered that they didn't feel like 'old people' but realised that they were less capable than they were when they were younger. They all hoped not to be a burden on the band and to let it down and that the band would tell them if they were. A couple of the guys said they'd like to help out with other non-musical activities such as fund-raising or in Rinty's case, still repairing the instruments and stands.
2. *If you were worried about an older member of the band's declining health, would you know what to do or who to speak to?*
Almost everyone said 'not really'. Some of them mentioned the police or a couple of charities such as the Broomhill Centre, but there was no mention of the council or NHS.

Some of the members mentioned that they did have concerns about friends or other people they knew but were at a loss about what to do next.

A Practitioner's Viewpoint:

Eric Johnstone of the Midlothian Community Care Forum felt there needed to be more inter-generational work so that people of all ages got used to working together. Community projects offer a good opportunity for this.

He also suggested that the question should be looked at another way, "How can older people help mainstream groups?" An example of this is Gorebridge Community Café, which was set up by older people to address a perceived need for a social setting for older people. Since then the café has grown from those origins to a resource for the whole community – people of all ages now visit it and socialise there. In this case the older people are an asset to the community and not people who just use up resources.

What could improve practice in Midlothian?

Information

Individuals may have a lifelong hobby, such as music, that they wish to continue as they grow older. However, they may require support to participate, and other members of their hobby organisation may be unsure how to provide this support. Financial costs may also be a barrier to older people's participation, and groups need to be sensitive to this.

Action: Community hobby and recreation groups would benefit from a leaflet with information about how to support older group members, and who to contact if they have concerns about the well-being of an older member.

Transport

Transport was raised both by the case study and the practitioners. As people age they may become too infirm to drive themselves, and rely on the goodwill of other group members to give them lifts. There may be other options that could be explored such a buddying system or car sharing, and organisations may benefit from additional information about insurance and other issues related to this.

Action: Groups need support to resource transport issues, think through the options and engage with local providers of community transport. A first meeting of a Transport Working Group has been scheduled.

Trigger points

The inability to continue with a lifelong hobby due to declining health, or due to becoming a carer, can be a starting point for older people becoming isolated. However, for many people there are alternative ways of continuing their interest such as an appropriately matched befriender, or inter-generational skills swap.

Action: Practitioners need to give further thought to how we support older people to make the transition from long-term attendance at a hobby activity to other ways of keeping connected.

Good practice in other areas

Shared Care Scotland's Short Breaks Fund makes grants to third sector organisations to develop the choice and availability of short breaks so that carers and the people they care for feel better supported, less isolated, and have some quality time away from their caring routines.

Microgrants are available for carers and can include leisure opportunities for carers and those they care for, either together or apart.

Key Learning Points

This section looks at the key learning points identified against the 'A Stitch in Time?' objectives.

What part can the third sector play in preventing avoidable future use of health and social care services and optimising the independence and well-being for older people?

The case studies identified that community groups provide a huge source of support to older people in assisting them to stay physically and mentally active. This can be through organisations which are specifically led by older people either to provide them with a service, such as the Bonnyrigg Older People's Forum shopping service, or to provide them with social activities, such as the Bonnyrigg Social Club. However, many mainstream organisations, such as Penicuik Silver Band, also support older members, providing them with social interaction and links to their own community. They do this as an everyday part of their activity, and value the experience of older people.

How can they best evidence this?

Third Sector organisations tend to only look for evidence in relation to funding; if small community organisations are not actively seeking funding, they will not be actively seeking to identify their impact. Therefore the questions are should anyone else be attempting to do this, and if so, who?

There is easily accessible quantitative information about the numbers of older people attending older peoples' groups, although the information about older members in mainstream groups would be more difficult to collect.

Logic models for third sector involvement need to consider the assumptions that underpin the outcome of preventing avoidable future use of health and social care service and optimising the independence and well-being for older people. It is a reasonable assumption that continuing to attend the silver band you have attended all your life will help you to remain healthy and connected to your local community.

How can we continue to learn 'what works best'?

Third Sector Interfaces support grass roots older people's organisations to deal with the everyday issues of running their organisations, such as gaining funding, troubleshooting premises etc and are well placed to provide information on what is working at a community level. Similarly, the move toward local area coordination is also providing a rich source of information.

How can we ensure evidence and learning is used to inform policy, planning and practice?

Funders and organisations such as the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator need mechanisms for feedback from groups who do not apply for funding or registration as well as those who do.

Appendix: Staff Team

Dr Lesley Kelly BA, MA, PhD

Lesley has worked for MVA since 2003 supporting third sector to access funding. Prior to joining MVA she worked for Universities Scotland, Midlothian Council, and PEP Ltd (a housing social enterprise). She has a PhD in monitoring and evaluation, and recently completed an accountancy qualification.

Margaret Wilson

During seven years working in a local CVS Margaret worked with many small groups on issues ranging across governance, funding and marketing.

While working at SCVO Margaret worked primarily with CVS across Scotland in a support role. This involved helping them to devise ways of reaching the small groups in their area. Part of the work was maintaining information about each CVS, its structure and services. She also worked on a database of national intermediary organisations, many of which are small.

Craig Turner

Craig has worked in the voluntary sector for a number of years, supporting volunteers and promoting social media. He is a psychology graduate with good research skills. He recently worked with older people's groups across Midlothian to assist them to prepare for the change to 4G mobile phone technology (which was causing interference to their Freeview!)