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Visually Impaired Older People's Experiences of Two Manchester Neighbourhoods

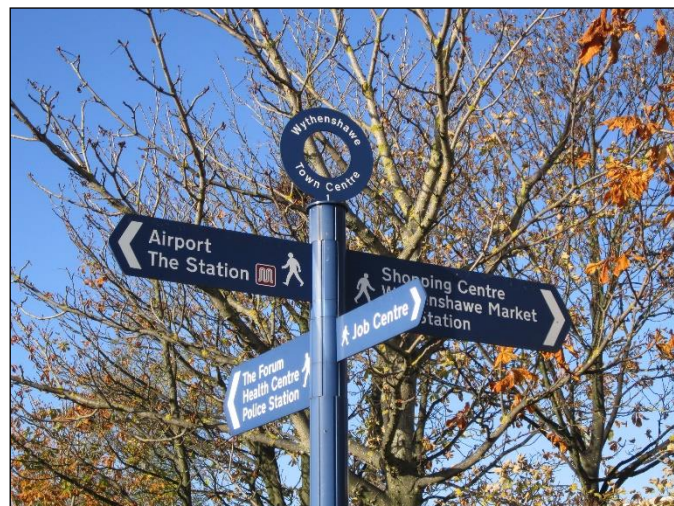
Ambition for Ageing “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

by Henshaws

Simpler summary report

This is an easier to read summary of the “Ageing Equally?” research report by Henshaws.

It contains some background to the research, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The Equalities Board team have written it to help people understand the research more easily, and to make it easier to use the findings to make places better for older people.



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Glossary

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) = a Greater Manchester programme that aims to make communities more age-friendly and improve older people's quality of life

Austerity = government policy to reduce a country's debt through big cuts to spending and / or tax increases

City region = administrative area e.g. Greater Manchester

Communities of identity or experience = a group of people who share a common identity or experience (e.g. Bangladeshi people, LGBT people, or people living with dementia)

Engagement = joining in with activities or projects

GMCVO = Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations, the organisation that is responsible for managing the Ambition for Ageing programme

Identity = your sense of your self

Impairment = when a part of the body doesn't work as it used to or as most people's does, for example visual impairment when a person's eyes don't see well

Infrastructure = the basic facilities and services needed for a place to work

Intersection / intersecting = when a person has more than one identity and they cross over, for example being Black and Visually Impaired

Interviewee = someone who is interviewed for a research project

Mainstream = catering for the majority, not specialised

Marginalised = the result of being pushed to the margins of society: excluded or ignored

Minority = a group of people who are different in some way from the majority of the population

Observation = watching people in an everyday situation

Participant = someone who takes part in a project

Proactive = making things happen, taking action without waiting for people to ask for something

VI – Visually Impaired = experiencing sight loss (see 'impairment' above)

1. Introduction and background

Henshaws

Henshaws Community Services helps people with sight loss to make choices about their future and live the lives they want to. They value people's independence and the importance of friendship in all their work.

Context

One in ten people aged over 65 live with sight loss, and half of people aged over 90. The number of people with sight loss in Greater Manchester is set to go up as the number of older people increases. Sight loss is higher in people from some BAME backgrounds, people living with other health conditions, and people living in poorer areas.

Visually impaired (VI) people have been affected more than others by cuts to social care. A Henshaws survey in 2015 found that around half of VI people over 50 did not get out as much as they would like, couldn't access local support groups, or felt that their days were long and boring.

A previous Henshaws programme had been popular in Wythenshawe

in South Manchester, but struggled to engage with people in Harpurhey in North Manchester. People in these areas face similar barriers because of poverty and health, so Henshaws were interested in finding out the reasons for the different levels of engagement.

Aims of the research

The research wanted to test the idea that VI people feel better about growing older in South Manchester than in North Manchester, and find out why.

Summary of findings

Wythenshawe was experienced as a better place to grow older with sight loss than Harpurhey. This was mainly because of a better sense of community, good tram links and good community information, and a central community hub.

Wythenshawe has a strong sense of community which means people who belong to more than one marginalised community get better support. It also helps communities to stay well when there are cuts in services.

2. Method: How Henshaws did their research

The researchers used a variety of methods. They did desk based research to provide the context for the research and to map available services. They held three focus groups with a total of 24 participants (one group each in Wythenshawe and Harpurhey and one shared group). Three VI people kept audio diaries or shared diaries by email. Researchers carried out two observation visits to community spaces in Wythenshawe and Harpurhey that are used to provide services to people with VI. There were 20 surveys with professionals from 13 organisation that provide services to VI and older people. There was one longer interview with the manager of the previous Henshaws project in Harpurhey and Wythenshawe.

3. Findings: What Henshaws found out

a) A sense of community

The researchers found that, as they predicted, VI people in Wythenshawe felt a stronger sense of community than those in Harpurhey. Wythenshawe is a more settled community with fewer changes in population. The Forum in the centre provides a focal point for services. There have been more changes in in Harpurhey, and the shopping area doesn't have a central community hub. The new AgeUK shop with a meeting room might change this for older people.

More people in Wythenshawe live in social housing which makes it easier to get community information out through housing providers.

It is especially important for VI people to be known and accepted in their communities as they may rely on other people to greet them first. VI people in Harpurhey had to work harder to keep up links with their neighbours.

Some VI people reported that their sense of community came from elsewhere, for example through a shared hobby with others. VI people were keen to be included in mainstream activities as well as in those for VI people.

b) Getting around in communities

For VI people, it is very important to be close to public transport: living just one street further away can make a big difference. Transport varied a lot between local areas within the two neighbourhoods. The Wythenshawe tram line has improved travel a lot for people there. Bus services in North Manchester were

difficult for some because they needed to change buses to complete a journey. Having confidence and support to use transport was a major factor.

VI people need streets to be clear and uncluttered so they can access local neighbourhoods independently. Uneven pavements, wheelie bins and pavement parking were obstacles in both Wythenshawe and Harpurhey.

c) Government policy

Changes in government policy also affected the lives of VI people. People reported feeling the impact of austerity in many different ways - from hazardous slippery pavements to advice services closing. Funding cuts meant community spaces increased room hire charges for groups and raising the retirement age made it more difficult to find volunteers to run groups. These effects seemed to be stronger in Harpurhey. Wythenshawe residents spoke more about how they supported each other when services changed.

d) Individual factors

Emotional resilience and mental wellbeing were crucial for people to make the most of where they live. Sight loss in later life can make people less confident and less independent which can make them more isolated. It is harder to enjoy community life when sight loss intersects with other health conditions or impairments. This was especially true for people who had to battle for support services or who lived alone. Although individual factors were the same in both communities it seemed to be easier to live with more complex health needs in Wythenshawe where the sense of community was stronger.

Henshaw's recommendations

- Make sure there are accessible places in the centres of communities with good transport links so VI people can meet.
- Develop targeted, proactive services that meet the specific needs of people in different localities.
- Services should work together more.
- Plan across the whole Greater Manchester region especially for travel.
- Carry out more Visual Impairment Awareness Training for council staff, councillors and local organisations to increase their understanding of living with sight loss.

4. What can we learn from this research about what makes a good place to grow older for people in minority communities?

- A strong sense of community depends on a range of social and physical infrastructure and is important for people to age well in communities.
- People in some marginalised communities need accessible central meeting places.
- A person's sense of community can come from their neighbourhood, their identity, or their interests and these all need supporting in communities.
- Decisions made at city region and national levels have impacts on marginalised individuals and the organisations that support them. So they must be represented at all levels of strategic decisionmaking.

About the “Ageing Equally?” Research Programme

Depending on their backgrounds, culture and life circumstances, different people need different things to feel socially connected and supported in their daily lives. Ambition for Ageing funded the ‘Ageing Equally?’ research programme to find out more about this by asking: “What makes a good place to grow older for people who belong to minority communities?”

More information

This is a simpler summary of the full report, which contains a lot more information about the background of the research, and details of Henshaw's findings. You can read and download this summary, the full report, and all the ‘Ageing Equally?’ project reports and summaries from the Ambition for Ageing website here: <https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally>

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