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Skills and Assets of Older Polish People in Greater Manchester : Equalities Board “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

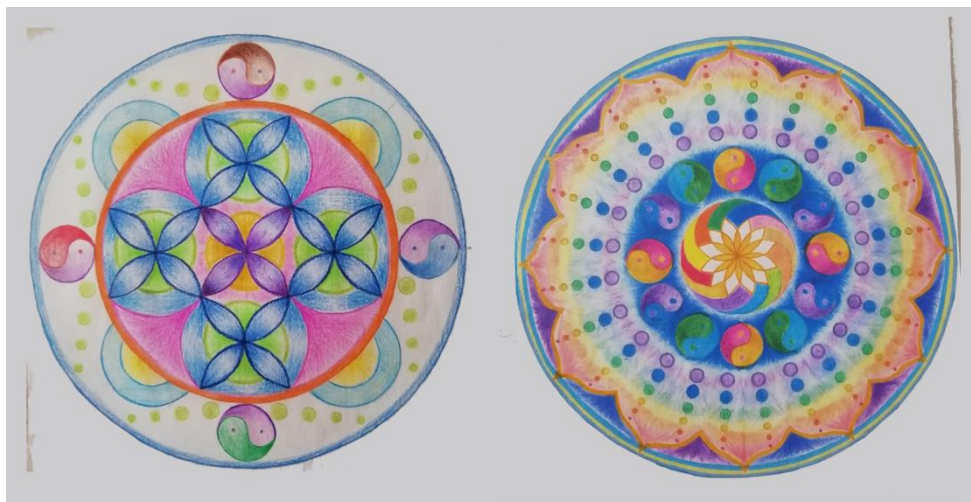
by **Europia**

Summary report

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

It contains some background to the research, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

We have written it to help people understand the research more easily, and to make it easier to use the research 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

Assets = things that are valuable or useful, can include personal assets such as knowledge or abilities

Asylum = when someone goes to another country for safety to escape from danger at home, and the government allows them to stay

Average = then result you get when you add a group of numbers together and divide the total by the number of numbers added together

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)

Data = information

Discrimination = treating someone differently because of the social group they belong to

Equalities Board (EB) = the group responsible for making AfA inclusive and accessible for everyone

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

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

Resilience = being able to adapt easily to changes or recover easily

1. Introduction & Background

Europia

Europia is a Manchester-based charity that supports Europeans living in Greater Manchester to empower themselves, to access their rights, and to integrate

Polish history and culture

There are many Polish people living in areas around Greater Manchester, but they are a minority overall and most non-Polish people do not understand their histories and concerns. The history of Poland has been turbulent. After the second world war the country was occupied by the Soviet Union. In the 1970s and 1980s there were strikes, demonstrations, civil unrest, and food shortages. Many older Polish people in the UK lived through these times. Some had traumatic experiences of imprisonment, families splitting up to seek asylum, and social and political turmoil. These experiences of hardship and uncertainty may have made people more resilient.

International research in 2018 found that people in Poland worked the second largest number of hours per week of any country in Europe. Research in Poland has shown that

Polish culture values having a good education and working hard very highly. Many older Polish people have found that when they moved to the UK their qualifications were not recognised and they had to study again or find different kinds of work.

Aims of the research

- Identify and showcase the strengths of Polish people over 50 in Greater Manchester.
- Investigate the social connections of older Polish people in Greater Manchester.
- Give a voice to the older Polish community in Greater Manchester.

Summary of findings

Interviewees had a wide range of jobs, hobbies and interests, but shared a respect for education. All wanted to learn English, work, and be seen as hardworking. The interviewees showed they had resilience to face big life changes. It was not clear whether they had different attitudes to family relationships, although Polish culture values the family highly.

2. Method: How Europaia did their research

The researchers interviewed 13 Polish people, including two living in Merseyside. Eleven interviews were face to face and two were by phone. Most interviews were in Polish, one was in English. Six interviewees were women and seven were men. The average age of women was 53.8, for men it was 57. The average age the interviewees came to the UK 45.5.

The interviewers used a questionnaire designed in English and translated into Polish. Answers were later translated back into English. They asked questions about personal data; hobbies and interests; awareness and feelings about their neighbourhood; involvement and interest in local communities or Polish organisations; demographic information.

3. Findings: What Europaia found out

a) Work, education and hobbies

The interviewees had a wide variety of jobs, most were working full time. Many had changed their work or studied for new qualifications when they came to the UK. A few were unhappy about this. Most had been educated through secondary school or technical college. Three had university degrees. They had a wide variety of hobbies and interests and cared about many different issues, including feeling like a second class citizen, wanting to be healthy, wanting a good job and income, and wanting their family to do well. Some of the people interviewed also enjoyed mixed-age, multi-cultural groups as well as Polish-led clubs and activities. Some even preferred mixed groups and activities. As a whole the interviewees were interested in a very wide variety of things, including arts, sports, sightseeing and volunteering for animal charities.

b) Language

The researchers found that difficulties with English were a barrier to joining groups for many people. Many of the interviewees struggled to speak and understand English. Half of them said their English language skills were 'average' and nearly half said that they were not confident speaking English. Some said they wanted to study English but poor health, odd working hours, and lack of free time made it difficult.

c) Social connections and culture

Most interviewees identified as Roman Catholic Christians, but said they only go to church on special festivals. Two lived alone, the others lived with family or partners. Half said they liked their "friendly neighbours", but most said they do not go out to meet people in local pubs, parks, cafes or shops. Most did not

get support from other Polish people in their neighbourhood, and did not know about local support groups or organisations.

Ten out of 13 interviewees said they wanted to join a group, if they had better health, or could speak English better. Some were not interested in joining a Polish group - because they were happy to socialise with English people, or because they had previous bad experiences.

d) Learning about how to do research

Interviews took longer than expected because people wanted to tell their life stories, or because of how long it took to translate questions and answers into Polish and English.

They would need a larger number of interviewees to be able to draw conclusions about the differences between the men's and women's attitudes and experiences.

The researchers felt they should have asked people more direct questions about family and friends in the UK, to learn more about their social relationships.

Discussion

The Europaia researchers concluded that the older Polish people they met have many hidden skills and assets. They have shown themselves to be adaptable, resilient and resourceful in the way they have coped with the challenges of changing jobs and making new lives in the UK, even though they have had to start afresh and faced a language barrier. The researchers feel it is unacceptable that these people are still isolated and disconnected from mainstream society.

Europaia's recommendations

- The government should speak out more strongly against hate crime and in support of European migrants.
- The government should provide free age-friendly ESOL classes.
- Polish community organisations must provide support for older Polish people to keep learning, meet each other, and connect with their culture.
- Polish organisations need to raise awareness of older Polish people's skills and strengths.

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

- Members of a minority community that does not have many community centres need both targeted appropriate social support, and better access to mainstream activities.
- English language learning must be available and relevant to people of all ages to reduce social isolation in older age.



More information

The full report contains a lot more information about the background of the research, and details of Ethnic Health Forum's findings. You can read and download this summary, the full report, and all the Ageing Equally? shorter project reports and summaries from the Equalities Board website here:

<https://lgbt.foundation/ambition-for-ageing/publications>

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?” You can find out more about the Ageing Equally? research programme here:

<https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally>