

Age Friendly Hastings One Year On

It is now almost a year since we passed a motion at Full Council committing the council to joining the Age Friendly Cities network, so time to look back over at what we have achieved so far.

As Older Persons' Champion, I've been working together with Debby Anderson from HVA to make this project a success, and with the support we have received from the Centre for Ageing Better, we both feel we are off to a good start, although so much work is still to be done. We have received a lot of support and interest, both from individuals and from other organisations involved in similar work. Most recently the University of Sussex has expressed an interest in working with us.

Kay Muir (Sussex NHS Commissioners) has flagged up the work of the Age Friendly Communities project with the University of Sussex and they are keen to link our work to Researchers and Social Scientists working in the domains covered by the project. This could lead to a commission of research by the University which would provide us with valuable research and data for our Age Friendly Hastings report later in the project.

Debby has secured a further 2 years of funding for the project, giving us time to make a proper baseline assessment of the needs of older people by reaching out to the community using Debby's extensive network of contacts. We are now giving ourselves a year to complete this initial stage, by means of a questionnaire, available either online or as hard copy, with the aim of getting people engaged, capturing the information they give us, then approaching service providers to give them a true picture of the needs of older people.

We started off rather hesitantly by designing this questionnaire asking people's opinions about their current experiences in eight areas of everyday life (referred to as "domains") Outdoor Spaces, Transportation, Housing, Social Participation, Respect, Civic Participation, Communication, and Health. We didn't get very far however before Covid put a stop to our efforts at reaching out to the community, and things had to be put on hold.

The questionnaire was put on the HVA website <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/agefriendlyhastings> and received a good response. Debby and I met regularly to discuss our plans, and Debby built up some excellent contacts with service providers, explaining the project to them and how they could get involved.

Older People's Day at the beginning of October gave us the perfect opportunity for a re-launch following the Covid crisis, and many older people responded to our invitation to an event at the White Rock Theatre on 30 September, so many in fact that although we had space for 50 we still had to turn people away. The event was very successful, with good feedback about how much people enjoyed getting out again and seeing their friends, with the added bonus of free tea and cakes (provided by Tesco and by East Sussex College), and musical entertainment. For us it provided a golden opportunity to promote Age Friendly Hastings and we invited a speaker from the Centre for Ageing Better to tell them what it was all about. I also

spoke to explain what it meant locally and invite people to get involved. We then dished out flipchart paper and got each table to pool ideas on one of the domains mentioned above – this seemed more appropriate to the event than asking them to fill out individual questionnaires.

For those that could not attend the event due to venue capacity or other commitments we held a general Age Friendly Communities coffee morning on 15th Oct at Central Hall. We talked a lot about people wanting to improve their physical health after Covid and improve their eating habits too. People said there weren't many face to face support sessions taking place currently which they were disappointed about. They understood the restrictions posed by Covid but many saw sessions like this not only as supporting their physical health but also their mental health by allowing them to access 'in person' activities albeit in a smaller group. Since then Debby has met with Active Hastings who are willing to look at providing some 'return to health' type activity sessions for the Age Friendly Communities attendees and also to Isabelle from Rainbow Kitchen Magic about offering some interlinked nutrition/healthy eating guidance with cookery sessions. Debby also met with Active Sussex whose new strategy features older people and those with long term health conditions and they are encouraging the submission of a joint bid under their Tackling Health Equalities Fund to develop some of this work.

This initial success will now be followed up by regular coffee mornings at Central Hall, each one dealing with a different "domain", and designed to inform as well as seek out people's opinions. The first one was held on 12th November, attended by representatives from Healhtwatch, the CCG, HEART and Active Hastings. Next month, the focus will be on transport, and Debby has already line up Hastings Community Transport, Stagecoach, Southern Rail, and HEART (with an emphasis on patient transport). In January, the emphasis will be on Social Participation.

Our first themed coffee morning which focussed on Health was well attended and promoted some great conversations amongst stakeholders and members of the public. It has also paved the way for future work to be done with Hastings and Rother CCG around targeted raising awareness of health campaigns and services in the community and empowering people to 'have their say' through PPG Forums and Community Ambassador networks.

We have established a relationship with Social Housing Provider Optivo and are starting to deliver Age Friendly Communities sessions across Hastings and St Leonards in Optivo venues. This means we are not only reaching out and engaging with people from all areas of the town but at the same time building a relationship with a stakeholder from the Housing domain with whom we hope to be able to work directly and use the feedback we receive from local people and to look at implementing improvements. Later this week, we will be visiting Optivo run sheltered accommodation at Torfield Close, to talk with residents and explain the project to them.

Out of these meetings, we are hoping to identify a few people who are keen to become part of a focus group for each domain. We already have three people who volunteered at the event in September, so we are confident that older people will take this opportunity to have more input into the decision making processes that so

profoundly affect their lives. This will help with information gathering as well as forming part of a support network that will help older people tackle the “big issues” that can seem so overwhelming when you feel no-one is listening. The first focus group meeting (on health) will take place on 26th November.

We continue to work behind the scenes with the Centre for Ageing Better in London who are supporting the Age Friendly Communities programme nationally. A huge amount of learning has taken place at networking sessions and now monthly support sessions from the Centre’s team too. We are also representing Hastings journey at the Age Friendly Conference in Birmingham in 2022.

Nothing about us without us!!

Ruby Cox & Debby Anderson
15 November 2021