Report into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the Older Generation.

Background

CACE is a Voluntary Organisation celebrating 25 years providing support services for Older People in the North Locality of North Lanarkshire, in particular Cumbernauld. CACE recognised very early on the importance of strong support networks for Older People, as social isolation contributes massively to ill mental and physical health. Over the past 25 years CACE has grown from a telephone signposting service to becoming one of the most respected Older Peoples organisations in Scotland, and is frequently referred to as a model of good practice by statutory and third sector services.

- Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings
- Impacts of social isolation, for instance loneliness, ill-health
- Best practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland, including examples of targeted support or initiatives (including housing, health, third sector)
- Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy
- Effective awareness-raising within communities

Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

The North Locality of North Lanarkshire is a diverse landscape with Cumbernauld being the main town, but with small satellite villages, some of which have a large population of older people. Because of the New Town demographics, Cumbernauld has high numbers of Older People, many of whom have no family living locally and the layout of the villages and types of housing and traffic system make social contact very difficult for some of these people. Other areas include Kilsyth, Twechar and other small mining villages which have struggled to recover from the miners strike, and have suffered from younger people migrating for work, high unemployment, social issues, and again, an aging population. Their location and infrequent public transport system can make getting out and about and attending community groups and events, difficult for Older People living there. As an organisation which provides social support for Older People, we have seen referrals rise significantly for all our services. We are constantly evaluating our service and consult regularly with Community groups and statutory bodies to ensure we reach as many isolated people as possible however we are very aware that many others fall through the net.
Impacts of social isolation, for instance loneliness, ill-health

Many of our referrals come through the Community Mental Health Team. People referred frequently suffer from low mood and/or or depression. Many of them have taken a long time to get a diagnosis and by the time they come to our service they are experiencing other physical symptoms and illnesses. We have seen a rise in Older People who are drinking more, and of course this can add to depression and isolation. We have a Reshaping Care officer based with us, and she is working very hard to try to build community capacity and ensure there are activities which help to prevent isolation and the subsequent ill health which can accompany it. We have a day support service delivered under a Local Authority Service level agreement, which provides support, advice, and care to very frail, older people, many of whom have a dementia diagnosis, and are very isolated. Depression is frequently seen as a side effect of dementia, the disease causes people to withdraw from society as symptoms take hold and fear and embarrassment can make them feel afraid to be in society in case they embarrass themselves in front of people. This can lead to stress, low mood and depression. Poor mental ill health is recognised by our partners and carers daily and referred to frequently as a symptom of poor physical health too. Many people who have mobility issues, or recently discharged from hospital after operations or falls, can develop depression, or low mood as a result of them being unable to get out and about. Sometimes by the time they get to us their mental health is so bad, they never recover fully and we have to refer them back to integrated services. Loneliness is a terrible situation for a lot of older people and definitely contributes to ill health both physical and mental.

Best practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland, including examples of targeted support or initiatives (including housing, health, third sector)

At CACE we provide a wide range of services and support which could easily be shared. We are experienced in delivering services for older people and have techniques and projects which meet their needs. We also make sure that we work closely to outcomes and expectations of not only the people and their families but that what we do fulfils local and national outcomes too. The reshaping care agenda has helped us develop our OPAL project, (Older People, Active Lives) we run taster classes for older people who have contacted us, or been referred through family and friends, GPs CPNS’s etc. These are the “fall through the net” category. Not frail enough for day support, not confident enough to just access things in their community. For example, we run a gentle exercise class for 6 weeks, which helps build confidence, lift low mood and provide an opportunity to make friends. During the six week period we take them to the local sports centre where they try out the seniors exercise programmes, and we help them get their access to leisure card, sign up for some classes, then we gently let them go. Other activities which have been extremely popular and successful are Digital Inclusion, again we run six week classes teaching people to use tablets, smartphones and digital cameras. We help them do the basics, using a work book to set up e mail, facebook pages, skype online shopping
etc, we then help them to attend IT classes for silver surfers at the local learning trust, or the library. This has been so successful its now fully booked until May.

Our Befriending project is the most successful in the whole of North Lanarkshire, we currently provide 38 people every week with a volunteer befriender. Because of the calibre of volunteer we have attracted, and the rigorous training we provide we have identified several people with statutory support needs, and we have helped secure these, through working with Social Work and Equals Advocacy.

We have recently set up a Men Shed which offers companionship and practical activities for older men who are retired, or widowed, and are in need of company and support. The shed currently has 14 attendees, and we are hoping to expand it, and secure a workshop for them to build membership and take on more challenging projects.

Our day support service is delivered under SLA for the Local Authority. Although the people who attend this are very frail and many of them have a dementia diagnosis, we try as far as possible to help them choose their activities and tailor them to suit. We try not to prescribe but encourage them to try new things and make their own decisions.

Men with a dementia diagnosis can access our 2 sporting memories projects. These groups provide support and reminiscence activities for older men with dementia. These projects have been so successful, that we have secured a further 3 years funding to extend the project.

We now have 4 minibuses, and we run a Community Transport project. Its in the early stages but we provide transport for sheltered housing complexes weekly to take people to shopping centres, and supermarkets. We provide transport for Social Work run lunch clubs because the Local Authority doesn’t provide transport for them. We provided transport and Volunteers for the “Not alone at Christmas” project, taking people to the Christmas day event and running them home again. Transport underpins everything, the best services can be out there, but if you can’t get to them, then they are no good.

We are always looking for new ways to deliver a service which meets the needs of our service users and helps them to achieve their personal outcomes, which are innovative, user led, and provide quality respite for carers.

**Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy**

The statutory sectors need to take organisations like CACE and the work we do more seriously. We are not just a fluffy charity which provides trips and tea dances. We are achieving real results and helping older people stay happy and healthy, and living in their own homes for longer. We actively promote their rights, we point out areas where they need more statutory support. We get things done, we are an asset to the area and to Social Work
and NHS, and they need to get on board treating us an equal partner. We are quite fortunate that we do have a good reputation within the area and a good relationship with our Locality Planning Group. But as a service provider who does achieve outcomes we should be involved more with planning care packages and seeing how we can support people more as part of the team. The reshaping care agenda has gone some way to addressing some of these issues, but there is more can be done. The integration of budgets should also help address some of the issues which affect older people and social isolation and loneliness are big problems when you are trying to keep someone well, confident and happy to stay at home. One of the things I think would work well is a statutory requirement for Social Workers to include information about our organisations at assessment stage.

**Effective awareness-raising within communities**

Awareness raising is an ongoing process which organisations dedicate a huge amount of time to. No matter how well you market yourself, and get your message out there, unless people actually need you, they won’t pay that much attention. We have development managers who are out in communities delivering talks and presentations to groups and organisations which can promote us and pass on information to people who they think may benefit. Word of mouth is the best process for advertising and our volunteers are very good at promoting our service. We also use social media and our website to report and promote the services, easy cheap and effective. It’s a constant process, a drip, drip effect, you just have to keep going out into the community, making good contacts who will promote you. Our staff treat it like a sales and marketing job the aim being that whenever people think of services for older people in the area, we are the first organisation that comes to mind. The issue of loneliness is something which can and should be reported on the news, as a national campaign, any medium which will allow loneliness to be highlighted on a larger stage. Age UK are currently running a social media campaign called “not by my selfie” which encourages people to take a selfie with an older person and post it on FB and Twitter. Its gathering momentum, and its simple campaigns like this and the ice bucket challenge which have the biggest impact.

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16 February 2015