

Building your community

How to help everyone join in your community



Introduction

The aim of this document is to help you consider whether your community is doing all it can to ensure that vulnerable people, and those at risk of exclusion, have the opportunities they want or need to join in and access local activities, services or facilities. Evidence shows that all of us live happier and more fulfilled lives when we are valued and welcomed as part of a community, and every individual can offer valuable thoughts, experiences and expertise. Read on to find out more about who vulnerable people are, how you could help them, and how you could attract and encourage participation from all members of your community.

Who might you be thinking about?

People who are more at risk of exclusion, or who are most vulnerable, can include those who:

- are frail and/or elderly
- have learning difficulties
- have sensory & physical disabilities
- have mental health issues
- are homeless
- have alcohol, drug and other addictions
- are from a black or minority ethnic background
- people who care for others

Why do they need additional help?

Often vulnerable people face barriers in dealing with the practicalities of daily living, or have communication or health problems. If their voices go unheard, and their issues unrecognised, they can find themselves on the margins of society, and often remain there. This is unfortunate as feeling part of a community and being involved with local events provides great emotional, psychological and physical benefits for everyone.

How you can encourage participation

Even if people know that a lot is happening in their community they can still be unable or reluctant to take part. So how can you ensure that everyone feels welcome to become involved? The following are things you could consider:

- **Befrienders** – encourage volunteers to accompany those who are less confident to attend events and activities
- **Transport** – consider transportation needs for people who have physical and other difficulties
- **Timing** – provide opportunities for activities when people are most likely to be available
- **Support for carers** – find volunteers within your community to help give carers a break
- **Facilities** – ensure appropriate facilities are available in public buildings to keep people comfortable, thereby providing an environment suitable for all
- **Accessible venues** – try to offer events in venues that are easily accessible by all, including those with sensory impairments as well as people with physical impairments

- **Participation** – encourage individuals to contribute as well as enjoy and find out if any new activities are needed to attract more people to take part.

Despite your best efforts, not everyone will want to become involved but please do not be discouraged by this.

Local news and information

People often have preferences in how they receive information, while others may only be able to access it in certain ways, particularly if they have some sort of impairment. Therefore, it is vital to reach out to individuals in your community in as many ways as possible to ensure that they know what it is and what you have to offer. Consider different formats including:

- electronic and online materials, such as community websites and emails
- written information (in plain English, and other languages if necessary), such as newsletters, posters and advertising
- word of mouth – often people hear things through the grapevine
- public sites – community noticeboards, posters in pubs, shops, hairdressers, post offices, libraries and community centres get your message out to many different people.

Consultation, discussing or pursuing local issues

Make sure that any representative groups working on local issues are in touch with the views and ideas of people at risk of exclusion.

Since meetings are usually held around the table you may need to reach out in

other ways e.g. home visits, talking to local interest groups when and where they meet.

Sharing and doing

It is helpful to encourage people to think about the skills they can offer. This can be done by using a skills feedback form (sometimes it may be necessary to do this face to face) which invites volunteers to think about their strengths and how these can benefit the community as a whole.

Everyone has a skill to offer, no matter how frail or disabled they are. Sometimes they are skills that are specialised or no else has. Think about how you can draw upon the skills of these people in your community.

An example is to encourage people to 'swap' skills, e.g. an older person helping a child to read, and the child's family helping with the gardening.

Getting to know your community

Community-led planning (CLP) is an excellent way of identifying local issues and needs, and working out ways of tackling them by involving everyone in giving their views and ideas.

- Try to hold a special event to encourage as many people as possible in your community to come along and give their views, as this can help you understand what the major issues are that need tackling.
- If you are already doing a CLP, the National CLP Toolkit is available through Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC). This gives plenty of ideas as to how to involve everyone, and how to cover a wide range of interests, including those of people who may be vulnerable or at risk of exclusion.

- If you are not already doing a CLP, contact ORCC's Community Led Planning Team for further information about what is involved and how your community could benefit.
- Remember that minority views and needs should be given attention, as well as those issues raised by larger numbers of residents.
- It is important to involve vulnerable people themselves, or at least to ensure that some of your volunteers are passionate about or have knowledge of the needs of vulnerable adults or those at risk of exclusion.

In the course of your CLP:

- If you are going to circulate a questionnaire, try it out on a range of people first to ensure that it is easily understood.
- Liaise with other partners such as the NHS, health centres, care homes, etc, to see what people's main issues and concerns are.
- Use any opportunity available to gain feedback on what sort of help people might need and how this can change throughout the year (e.g. keeping warm in the winter and cooler in the summer and dealing with adverse weather conditions).
- Look at ways of supporting individuals who care for people to ensure they are given respite from their responsibilities.
- Ask people within your community (or their carers) what needs they have, in terms of access to care, health services, etc.
- Speak to health and social services providers on the issues faced by their clients.

- Focus on the positive. An active and happy mind helps people stay healthier for longer. What activities and hobbies could be offered to encourage people to become involved in their community?

Examples of what other communities have done

It may be helpful to share a few examples of schemes that have helped parishes and other groups work positively with everyone in their community. Others do exist – and you may know of some that you can draw on to help with your own planning.

Good Neighbour Schemes

Good Neighbour Schemes are local groups that support people in their community who may need extra help, such as older people, disabled people, single parents, young mothers, those in need through temporary illness or anyone experiencing isolation in the community. A team of volunteers works together to help involve and engage people in their community, which in turn stimulates well-being and cohesion both at a society level and at an individual level.

Some services that Good Neighbour Schemes can offer are:

- Transport for appointments, hospital visits or to Day Centres
- Errands, shopping or collecting prescriptions
- Minor household tasks, repairs or gardening
- Visiting or befriending
- Letter writing or simple form-filling

- Reading to blind or partially sighted people
- Signposting to information, agencies and services
- Arranging events and activities such as coffee mornings, lunches and outings.

Setting up a Good Neighbour Scheme:

To find out more about setting up a Good Neighbour Scheme, contact Oxfordshire County Council's Strategic Commissioning Team.

Circles of Support

Circles of Support are groups that aim to enable older people to rediscover and reconnect with ordinary life, and, crucially, to engage in mainstream social activities. Normally older people are referred to Social and Community Day Centres when they have reached a point of crisis in their lives, i.e. through bereavement, poor health, etc. They are often referred to as being socially isolated and in need of support.

The aims of the groups:

The Circles of Support aim to provide a way of working with older people and to have conversations about:

- what people would like to do or have in their lives that complements, or is an alternative, to day centres
- how they can achieve this
- trying more mainstream activities
- transportation difficulties that hinder their participation in daily life
- the cost of activities versus their personal budget

- lack of confidence in attending events on their own
- issues surrounding accessibility.

Setting up a Circle of Support

To find out more about setting up a Circle of Support, contact Oxfordshire County Council's Strategic Commissioning Team.

TimeBanks

TimeBanks are a little different to the previous two models in that they are a form of “community currency”. This means that when a person gives an hour of their time to help, they are paid back an hour – and can “cash this in” on the system when they need it. What is so positive about them is that everyone's time is valued equally, no matter what skill or ability they can offer. TimeBanks often work alongside mainstream agencies like Health and Social Services, or local authorities.

The aims of TimeBanks

- To foster and develop community networks and knowledge
- To help individuals get things done that might not otherwise – for example, because of financial costs or isolation
- To encourage anyone in the community to get involved
- To help people feel valued for whatever skill or talent they can offer – which might be a rare or unusual one that is in high demand
- To promote personal interaction within the community so that people from different backgrounds and various ages mingle with one another.

Setting up a TimeBank

To find out more about setting up a TimeBank, contact Oxfordshire County Council's Strategic Commissioning Team.

Drop-in activities

It is helpful to provide people with an opportunity to "drop in" somewhere to meet others on an informal basis without having to consciously join a club or organisation. A number of communities now open a community venue once a week as an "open-house" coffee shop or café for lunch. Contact ORCC for some local examples.

Village showcases

It is surprising how many people are unaware of what activities, services and facilities are available and running in their community, let alone in the surrounding area. An idea is to organise an event at which local organisations and service providers are invited to man displays about what they are doing and what they have to offer. Contact ORCC for details and a toolkit.

Nothing takes your fancy?

If none of these ideas feel right for your community, or you just want to set up something quite different, there is advice and support available from the following organisations:

Useful contacts for further information and support

Oxfordshire County Council Strategic Commissioning Team

Tel: 01865 323617

Email: Strategiccommissioning@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Website: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC)

Tel: 01865 883488

Email: orcc@oxonrcc.org.uk

Website: www.oxonrcc.org.uk

Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA)

Tel: 01865 251946

Email: info@ocva.org.uk

Website: www.oxnet.org.uk

Age UK

Tel: 01235 849400

Email: admin@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk

Website: www.ageukoxfordshire.org.uk

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