

The Impact of Camden Older People's Advisory Group



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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

Ageing Better in Camden (ABC) is a partnership of older people and Camden organisations, working together to tackle social isolation and loneliness among older people in the borough. It is one of fourteen **National Lottery Community Fund Ageing Better programmes** across England. Ageing Better in Camden is a part of **Age UK Camden**.

The Ageing Better in Camden **Older People’s Advisory Group (OPAG)** meets monthly to help shape the ABC partnership. It is an open group for anyone living in Camden who is over 60. On average, 20 people attend the meeting monthly.

The group discusses issues relating to older people in the borough, and speakers regularly attend the meetings to inform and consult with the group. 34 organisations have consulted with OPAG since 2016 (see Appendix 2).

Vocus, ‘Voices of Camden Seniors’, is a branch of OPAG. Ageing Better in Camden get many invitations for older people to have their say in consultations or focus groups. Members are sent invitations and choose to attend the ones that interest them.

The purpose of this report is to identify the impact of OPAG for the older people who attend the meetings, for the ABC programme, and for the organisations seeking views from OPAG, and for the wider community.

SECTION 2

VALUE OF OPAG FOR MEMBERS

Methodology

A paper survey was given out to 17 OPAG members in the December 2018 meeting. A further 25 surveys were posted to other members (some of whom are less regular attendees of the meetings.) 23 responses were collected.

“It is the only forum for older people which can give a voice to older people and is a focus for outside organisations to come and consult with us. It is not tokenistic.”

General feedback

- 100% of respondents said OPAG informed them on the issues that affect older people in Camden.
- 100% of respondents said OPAG gives them the opportunity always (71%) or sometimes (29%) to comment and inform organisations on policies that affect older people.
- 100% would recommend OPAG to older friends and neighbours.
- 100% found OPAG meetings very (83%) or mostly (17%) welcoming and friendly.
- 68% are on the mailing list for Vocus. 5 respondents not on the list asked to join.

“There is a need for such an organisation to give a voice to the older generation. There are so many changes in Care Services, Transport, etc. This group needs to have a voice to comment on changes.”- OPAG member

The value of the meetings to members

OPAG members said they feel that their views are listened to, and that they value hearing from professionals around Camden. Respondents enjoy listening to the views of a diverse group of older people. They noted in the surveys that they value receiving and giving feedback to ABC services, and being part of Vocus. The social element, and sharing knowledge of what is happening across the borough, was important to members. Members noted that the ABC staff are friendly, and that the meetings are well-organised. One member said “It works because people put effort into agendas, programme planning.”

“OPAG is a splendid and valuable asset for older people. It is exceptionally well-organised, inclusive and positive. Corinna Hyman, Corinna Gray and Harriet Young and the rest of the team do a wonderful job.”

Reasons for attending OPAG meetings

Members identified the following as reasons they attend the meetings – ‘to have a say on issues affecting my local area’ (45%); ‘to find out what’s going on in Camden for older people’ (36%); to spend time with others and be sociable (19%). Others added “to try and understand statutory services, who does what and who works with who”; “to listen to guest speakers and professionals”; “to inform the work of ABC” and “to ensure that our common voice is heard and requests promoted and met”. One person said “to find out what’s going on, what new issues are emerging, and what I can do!”

“I would be lost to know what is happening now and in the future in Camden. Also if there is anything I am worried about I can ask at the meeting and get to know. Always the meetings are very friendly and easily understood. It is something for me to go every month.”- OPAG member

Further comments on the value of OPAG by members;

- “It has proved its worth and must continue.”
- “Please, please continue the excellent work! No point in having a Minister for Loneliness if the organisations which help combat this are discontinued.”

- “A pool of talent and experience of potential value to all provides of NHS, social and voluntary services.”
- “It provides vital information for the well-being of the elderly, who may not realise both statutory and voluntary services are available. It can be used as a forum for new ideas and services.”
- “The issues it deals with won’t go away and will still be of concern to older people”

SECTION 3

VALUE OF OPAG FOR ORGANISATIONS WHO HAVE CONSULTED WITH THE GROUP

Methodology

In December 2018 we asked 12 organisations to respond by email to a short survey about their recent consultation with OPAG. We received 8 responses.

General feedback

- 100% of organisations said that they would consider attending another OPAG meeting in the future
- 63% said they had ‘entirely’ achieved their objectives, 38% said they had ‘mostly’ achieved their objectives.
 - Those who ‘mostly’ achieved their objectives communicated with OPAG with follow-up information or answers to questions the group had
- 63% said OPAG feedback informed the direction of their work, 25% said it informed policy around their work, 25% said it informed strategy of their work, 25% said none of the above and stated that their session was more about sharing information with OPAG.

Sean Shields, Social Work Project Manager on 3 Conversations Project at Camden Council told us that feedback obtained from OPAG informed the direction of this work.

“It was very helpful to hear from members of OPAG about how they saw [the project]. They raised some interesting questions about how the 3 Conversations approach would be used in specific ‘real-life’ scenarios, which hopefully the social workers were

able to answer, and it helped us to have a better understanding of how Camden residents perceive 3 Conversations and what this will mean for them. It was also encouraging that people generally seemed to feel that 3 Conversations/strengths-based approaches represent a positive move for Camden and it's residents."

Moira Ugoji , Camden Council, Community Liaison Manager (HS2)

"It was helpful to get a better collective understanding of older people's perceptions of the HS2 scheme, how they felt it would affect them and issues for the Council to consider and feedback to HS2 Ltd"

Ana Ventura, Camden Council visited OPAG to raise awareness and get feedback for the future Clean Air Action Plan. She said the visit informed the direction of the work, policy and strategy.

"My engagement with the OPAG ensured that we captured feedback from the elderly community. For example, the group was supportive of actions to reduce air pollution but highlighted concerns with measures that may impact them such as increasing the number of cyclists on the road. They highlighted that this action although supported needed to ensure cyclists obeyed the rules of the road and did not cause a danger to others. This was fed back to our Transport Strategy team who were also consulting on their Transport Strategy document which covered safety and cycling. It was also a great opportunity to speak to the group about other sources of pollution (ie: fireplaces, gas cookers, etc.) and what they could do to reduce their own impact and exposure."

SECTION 4

VALUE OF OPAG TO ABC

Programme Managers Corinna Hyman and Annabel Collins share their views on the value of OPAG on the wider Ageing Better in Camden programme. Age UK Camden is very positive about the impact of OPAG and would like to see it stay a part of Age UK Camden.

The value of OPAG to the ABC programme

The group had a big impact on our work with pharmacies, changed the way our intergenerational work looked, and helped develop the idea for the Warm Welcome work, because everyone had had an experience of 'cliquey' community groups.

OPAG were involved with training pharmacists, they did role play with theatre practitioners and they absolutely loved it! They were acting with gusto!

The group have continually asked the question, “How do you find the somebody that nobody knows?”, and that really informed our Outreach work. Thinking and discussions with OPAG provide such moments of clarity around our programming.

OPAG as a model

We are looking to model to the rest of the programme what we want older people’s involvement to be. The group is for everyone, and everyone has something to contribute in whatever format, and with the support they need. The Chair is open to everyone, it’s about taking away some of those power differentials that have existed between groups and saying – “when you come here, everyone has a chance to be a Chair, ask a question, suggest a topic.” That’s a very important part of it.

A space to express views

A space is created where people feel really safe and able to express their views and challenge our speakers. The high quality of the meeting also means they demand a high quality of the speakers!

I find myself quite embarrassed sometimes in those situations, it can be awkward! But I also feel desperately proud when someone asks a brilliant question that none of us had thought of and when they hold people to account. That accountability function is there, even when it is me being held to account! It’s great to see older people in public meetings and engaged, because they found out about it because of OPAG and Vocus.

OPAG beyond ABC

OPAG should continue beyond ABC to maintain a strong space for the older voice, a space where people can come to consult with a diverse mix of older people. Age UK Camden are very positive about the impact of OPAG and would like to see it stay a part of the organisation, with an investment in further development to maximise opportunity and influence change.

OPAG is not only for consultation but also for information sharing, and the social benefit. It’s not just about saying – “we want this from you”, it’s about recognising that OPAG meeting once a month is of benefit to people, and that if people want to take something out of that group, they also need to put something into it. It stops it from being tokenistic.

OPAG does have costs involved. It does need someone to organise and facilitate it, there are costs related to travel, meeting rooms, refreshments and printing.

SECTION 5

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES FROM OPAG MEMBERS

Methodology

Between November 2018 and January 2019, Lydia Shellien-Walker met with, interviewed and photographed OPAG members, asking in more depth about the value of the group for them. 8 members took part.

BARBARA HUGHES, 87

Barbara was a Councillor in Camden for many years, and was elected Mayor of Camden three times running. She is a Justice of the Peace, and served on the Children's Panel in neighbouring boroughs while working first for the Post Office and then for British Telecoms as a telephonist and union officer.



“Well, I was a trustee at Age UK Camden when they were going for the Big Lottery money. Now, in the group, there is a good mixture of people from the community in Camden, I feel.

I find these meetings extremely interesting and there are many offshoots that come from them which I have also found very interesting. One of these was going to visit older people from other boroughs to discuss transport issues. That was after Transport for London came to speak at one of our meetings. I would like to do more of that, particularly meeting older people from other London boroughs and hearing about the issues they face. A lot of sensible things come out of those discussions.

There are older-older people and younger-older people in the group, that’s an interesting aspect of the group and I will often think – how can we work with that? There are people of my son’s generation and we probably have different experiences and views.

I would like to see these meetings go on.”

BASIL KEENS-DOUGLAS, 75

Basil came to the UK from Grenada and worked for British Telecoms (BT) for many years. Basil is a guitarist and played in bands across London, and toured around the country. He has a massive record collection.



“I lived on the ground floor and someone rung the buzzer and said, can you let me in? He had come to see someone in the building. Then he knocked on my door. His name was Chris. So Chris came and he listened to my story, and he pointed me in the direction of Tavis House. I came down.

They listened to me.

I was introduced to some people who came and visited me. They helped me with my housing. I started to attend the IT class then joined Ageing Better.

I was concerned about... there's a lot of people who have no one. I know how it feels. You can imagine, some people alone in the house. I have met new friends in the coffee morning, and have started to visit them. I do a bit of good for them. All of that drew me to Ageing Better in Camden. You hear about suicide rates and all that. I want to help other people.

If I hadn't answered the doorbell that evening I wouldn't have known of Age UK.

I no longer take life for granted.”

COSTAS, 78

Costas contributes a lot of time to supporting other people, including young people with autism and bipolar, unemployed young people and offenders, and Age UK Camden's Dementia Befriending team. He speaks Greek, Arabic, French, English, German and some Polish and Italian and has used his skills to support destitute asylum seekers. Since he was younger, he has been a carer for his sons, and is on the board of Camden Carers.



“Joining a group like OPAG is the best way for people my age to get together. It helps me to reconnect with people I know within the community. My advice to people my age is to join our group and to enjoy an informative meeting over a cup of tea or coffee with friends and like-minded people.

Without this group, we won't have a way of being inclusive, of getting together, and this is one of the biggest problems we face now, being lonely.

I believe that elderly people with their accumulated knowledge can contribute and make a difference and improve the life of other elderly people by helping them cope with loneliness, depression. And by joining a group like Ageing Better in Camden, it's a great opportunity to share this accumulated knowledge and experience, to make friends, and become better informed.

People read books and learn a lot and they take it to their graves. And nobody benefits from it. It's about time people join groups like ABC and can share and contribute, and this is the beauty of it. So I would like to say to people that they are most welcome to have tea and coffee with us, and to exchange ideas and share their experience with us.”

ELIZABETH-ANN COLVILLE, 87

Elizabeth Ann became a photojournalist at aged 14 when her mother, who worked on Fleet Street, sent her out with the photographers. Since then she has been a photographer, journalist, and public relations professional.

“In the holidays, she would send me out with the photographers just to get rid of me, you know. And the photographers didn’t like it, because they had this little girl with them. So they bullied me, hoping I would go home.

But, they were bullying in a very helpful way. And they would say, “Can’t you see that if we’re using this kind of a lens that that piece of paper would be in focus”, “Can’t you see that there’s a shadow there?” “Do something about it!” And the more they did it, the more I was being trained, the more I liked it!”

“My parents were divorced before I was born, but stayed very friendly, so my time was split between the two and it was always in a different country when I went to my father.



Therefore, I travelled on trips which took about 6 weeks to get to South Africa or New Zealand or all the different places. And I had two suitcases always, one had on it a snow scene, and one had on it a tropical scene, so I knew where my winter clothes were and where my summer clothes were.

So I’ve always been very independent. But now, in the last few years as I get older and get arthritis, and I’ve got dementia, I’m not so independent. But Age UK Camden is sort of my... guide. It’s something that takes the worry off and I can rely on it.

And also, the other thing that I like very much about it is that by being consulted on things, like Ageing Better, I feel, even though I’m not working anymore I’m not useless.

The thing I enjoy most are the people that come... we have had things from dentists to transport. Those are very useful and I hate missing those meetings!

FRANCES ELEY, 91

Frances is very involved in community organisations around our borough, including Kilburn Older Voices Exchange (KOVE) and St. Pancras Community Association. She is a long-standing member of the Camden Intergenerational Network and was part of the panel that appointed Age UK Camden to take the lead on Ageing Better in Camden. Frances is currently writing her life story.



“I was on the panel that appointed Age UK Camden to be the leader of Ageing Better in Camden; I was on the board of St. Pancras Community Association and KOVE at the time.

I am involved because you get to know about what other areas are doing, and it's nice to meet people of our own age who are in the same boat. Some people are quite lonely, quite alone, and this is the only platform they have to get their voice heard. And that is the idea – that everyone has a say.

Before this group, a lot of older people had ideas that they couldn't express. There are a lot of lonely people, there still are. We've all learnt a lot of new things. It would be a great pity if the group didn't continue and a lot of people would be lost without

it. We learn about things going on and get co-opted into other groups and meetings. Lots of other things I wouldn't have been involved in without this group."

PHYLLIS YOUNG

Phyllis spends as much time singing as speaking. Phyllis has always been creative, drawing, singing and travelling. She's was born and raised in North London, and has lived in Camden since the 1950s. During the war when her family were evacuated to Scotland, Phyllis stayed as a teenager in London and kept on at school. She's travelled the world with various choirs, including singing in Romania just after the fall of communism and in New York on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11. She has taken a boat to Russia and explored from Hong Kong to Bali.



She's very involved with Kilburn Older Voices exchange and helped create a book of bench-to-bench walks, and made films about the local area, and campaigned to get more benches, toilets and improved crossings in the area.

For Phyllis, OPAG is a beautiful stew, a mix of different people and groups all coming together to share information and learn from one another.

"To me it's like a stew... here's carrots, here's onions, so that's how I sort of see it... but it all comes together and it makes something very nice.

She explains why the group is important for her and for KOVE. “Well, I think it’s spreading the word, because it’s a mixed bunch, and we’re from all different groups so we’re all passing information on, which is useful, and all expressing a range of opinions. That’s how talking shops work, and we get things done.”

SHAHANA

Shahana worked as a GP until her retirement, when she moved to Camden. She did not know the area well. She attended the computer drop-ins at Age UK Camden and was invited by Andrew, an OPAG member, to join OPAG. “I was very happy that there was a familiar face. I had lost a bit of confidence with going out.”

Shahana has since gone on to become very involved with ABC, volunteering, attending consultations and focus groups, and getting involved in cultural events in the borough.

“Elizabeth Ann and I went to an exhibition at the British Museum about Islamic Art with tickets from OPAG. We met at the bus stop and went together. We really enjoyed it.”



A selfie of Shahana and Elizabeth Ann at the British Museum

She volunteered with the Outreach Team at a pop-up in a sheltered housing block where she met other older people and was able to offer advice. “I advised one woman about hospital transport. She was very happy and I gave her the number. She is now able to get to her appointments.”

With Vocus, Shahana has attended CCG meetings, visited the new Greenwood site, Henderson Court, and offered professional insights at a focus group on the Health and Social Care Green paper. “That was very interesting for me, that’s the type of thing I would like to get involved in more.”

“What I wanted is, I should be active, to participate. I also want to help other people.”

STAN FREED, 89

Since joining Age UK Camden as a service user, Stan has been a champion of Age UK Camden, supporting older people in the borough for many years, on issues such as fuel poverty. Both Stan and his wife Stella have received multiple awards for services to their community.

Stan has lived in and around Camden for his whole life, apart from as a child when he was evacuated, twice, during the war.

He is an avid classical music lover and in his retirement started to lecture at the University of the Third Age, passing on his vast knowledge and passion for music.

For Stan, OPAG is a way of staying connected with what’s happening in the area.

“You have to do things. You can’t just sit around like a lemon. Even though your days could be filled with sadness, you have to find a way to go on, to go out and do things.”

He also met his good friend Basil here at Age UK Camden. They meet every Tuesday together at Stan’s home to listen to music together and then it’s out for a good meal before they part company.



APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF ORGANISATIONS WHO HAVE CONSULTED WITH OPAG

- Cllr Gould, Camden Council, Sustainability and Transformation Plan and changes in Adult Social Care in Camden
- Asif Iqbal and Sylvie Mackie, Camden Council, supporting residents with sensory needs
- Jacqueline Saunders, Camden Council, Principal Transport Planning Officer
- Phillip Vaughan, Camden Council, Adult Social Care
- Rachel Bailey, Camden Refuse & Recycling Service
- Cllr Adam Harrison, Camden Council, Environment and Transport
- Ana Ventura, Camden Council, Senior Sustainability Officer (Air Quality)
- Richard Bradbury, Camden Council, local environmental quality, recycling and waste, and proposals for public toilets
- Amy Edgar, Transport for London
- Helen Chatterjee, British Museum and UCL
- Ben Monks, Central St Martins on the 'Improv for Elders' Project
- Camden Community Connectors consultation
- Natalie Turner, The Centre for Ageing Better
- Ashraf Choudhury and Aleksandra Michalska, Independent Age
- Gary Jones, CEO, Age UK Camden
- Dr Jo Hornby, UCL
- Christopher Rumble and George Marcar, Transport for London – buses and bus stops
- Moira Ugoji, Community Liaison Manager, Camden Council, HS2
- Jo Stapleton, ABC Outreach Manager
- Sean Shields, Project Manager (Three Conversations), Camden Council
- Harriet Gridley, KOMP, No Isolation (Norwegian Start-up Company)
- Georgia Kurowska-Kyffin, Camden Community Connectors manager
- Vivien de Tush-Lec, Read Aloud
- Maria Alicia Vicencio-Silva, Counselling Service, Age UK Camden
- Recommend Me
- Age UK Camden's Online Directory
- My Living Will
- Novus Home Care
- Compassion in Dying, Jennifer Noel
- Ageing Better in Camden Strategic Board
- Kings Cross Story Palace
- North London Cares
- Bengali Workers Association

- The Third Age Project

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF ORGANISATIONS WHO RESPONDED TO SURVEY ON EXPERIENCES WITH OPAG

- Sean Shields, Camden Council, Social Work, Project Manager – 3 Conversation Project
- Moira Ugoji , Camden Council, Community Liaison Manager (HS2)
- Ana Ventura, Camden Council (Clean Air Action Plan)
- Dr. Hornby, UCL
- Harriet Gridley, KOMP
- Maria Alicia Vicencio-Silva, Counselling Manager at Age UK Camden
- Joanne Stapleton, Outreach Manager, Ageing Better in Camden
- Georgia Kurowska Kyffin, Community Connectors Manager