Key learning on how to make age-friendly neighbourhoods inclusive

- **Knowledge needed for inclusive age-friendliness:** It is necessary to have a good understanding of communities themselves, and of the wider world, to ensure that equalities-driven work to reduce social isolation has the best chance of being effective.

- **Ways of working that deepen inclusion:** To fully include marginalised groups, we need to make sure that we design genuinely inclusive opportunities that are open to all, as well delivering targeted approaches.

- **Working with an equalities mindset:** When equalities working is seen as more than meeting obligations under the Equalities Act 2010, then community work to reduce social isolation is more effective.

Introduction

Equality, diversity and inclusivity are core to understanding and reducing social isolation. They are not add-ons to the main objectives of a project, but rather are essential qualities in creative and effective work to ensure that a programme reaches people from marginalised and minority communities.

This briefing document highlights what knowledge is needed to design effective and truly inclusive work, key ways of working to reach more people in minority or marginalised communities, and the importance of both embedding an equalities approach and working from a deeper understanding of inclusion and intersectionality.

This briefing is the product of research and reflection by the Ambition for Ageing Equalities Board, following its 2018 review of the programme from an equalities perspective.

Ambition for Ageing is a Greater Manchester level programme aimed at creating more age-friendly places and empowering people to live fulfilling lives as they age. We do this by providing small investments to help develop more age-friendly neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester in addition to funding larger scale work across the city-region. As a research project, we are committed to sharing the learning we gain from the programme to help influence local, regional and national policy. Ambition for Ageing is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

Knowledge needed for inclusive age-friendliness

It is necessary to have a good understanding of communities themselves, and of the wider world, to ensure that equalities-driven work to reduce social isolation has the best chance of being effective.

What is 'age-friendly' for minorities?
To create age-friendly communities that reach and include marginalised people, more knowledge is needed about what makes a neighbourhood age-friendly for people belonging to specific minority communities. This ensures that both targeted work and inclusive practice at a local level are better informed. This knowledge is particularly useful in relation to smaller, dispersed minority communities, whose members may tend to identify less with their local neighbourhood than with others who share their identity or experience. The Ambition for Ageing 'Ageing Equally?' research programme aims to produce new knowledge in this area*.

Working locally vs. dispersed communities: The local focus of asset-based community development approaches can contribute to existing inequalities, as we noted in our briefing Asset Based Approaches and Inequalities*. A small minority population, spread across local boundaries, may have few or no local assets or base; more knowledge is needed on how to work with marginalised communities where this is the case. Those working at a hyper-local level or with a ward-based approach, may need support and guidance on working flexibly with groups that are based outside designated project boundaries but cater for communities within the ward, or which are based within the ward but accessed by community members from elsewhere.

> " In Bolton a flexible, mixed approach to local decision making means that groups can access project funds in the way that is most appropriate for them – as well as a cross–ward advisory panel, they have also been trialling participatory budgeting events at ward level. "

Diverse approaches impact on inequalities: A diversity of approaches is important and will arise naturally in locally-focused and co-produced working. There is a need to understand how different structures and decision making processes, developed to be locally appropriate, may impact on equalities work, this may in turn affect the programme's reach to those more at risk of isolation.

Consider the wider context too: Context is crucial to understanding, working with, and reducing inequalities. There is a need to understand the economic, historical, geographic and social context at each local level, and to look beyond local boundaries. Spatial issues can have a general impact on the isolation of older people, and this can be exacerbated by cuts to, or restructuring of, local services, changes to housing policy and social security, and the loss of local amenities.

Good data collection is important: Good quantitative and qualitative data is important to support the capacity to review and adjust ways of working. The collection of data in equalities work is as much about learning and comparison over time, as about measurement against external standards. This allows a programme to test and learn from diverse methodologies appropriate to different contexts and communities. Data collection processes need to be appropriate and make sense to project participants, in order to be successful.

Terms we use

Equalities

An approach that is focused on ensuring the rights of all people to be equal is fulfilled. 'Equality' is not the same as 'equity': people may need to be treated differently in order to ensure they have equal opportunities.

Diversity

A way of describing difference – in culture, needs, preferences, and identity - within any geographical community, neighbourhood, or community of identity or experience.

Accessibility

Able to be reached, entered into or engaged with by different people with different physical, cultural and social needs or expectations. Accessibility is not only about material access, e.g. entering a building, but also how easily a person can get involved in a project or event.

Inclusion

A way of working that includes everyone, by making sure that different people's needs are addressed. This term originally referred only to inclusion of disabled people but its use has expanded.

Intersectionality

The way that a person's different marginalised identities may connect and overlap, resulting in specific forms of discrimination. This term was coined to refer to the intersecting discrimination experienced by black women, but is now used more widely.

Ways of working that deepen inclusion

These two complementary ways of working can make such a difference to the effectiveness of an equalities approach that they are worth highlighting. Without attention, there is a risk they may be overlooked or avoided because they may seem to require a heavy up-front investment of time or resources.

Targeting is important: Targeted investments, and continued commitment to targeted work, are an effective way to reach particular groups of older people most at risk of isolation. Sometimes organisations avoid targeted work out of a concern about appearing to be singling out individuals. It is most effective when done sensitively from the understanding that the aim of targeting is to tackle structural barriers faced by certain social groups. When working this way, organisations need to identify target groups clearly, and put appropriately supported strategies in place to reach them.

Continued commitment is required as this work may take longer and require more capacity than at first anticipated.

Universal design, not one-size-fits-all: An inclusive approach is effective for organisations as well as individuals, spreading benefits more widely across the community. For example, adaptations to the local environment for older people can also benefit disabled people of all ages, and poorer people who are less likely to travel to more distant shops and amenities.

Thinking in terms of universal design is not only about considering material accessibility. For example, an event that includes hot food is more inclusive to a wider range of older people, including people living alone, and those on low incomes.

Case Study: Setting up and running an Equalities Board

The Equalities Board advises Ambition for Ageing on equalities and inclusion best practice through research, participation in governance structures, learning together and members sharing knowledge with each other. It was formed through staff at LGBT Foundation working together with older people and equalities organisations. As well as providing practical support to the development of Ambition for Ageing, the board offers a model for capacity building with older people, and amplifying voice in ongoing programme design and development. Through co-production processes and inclusive practice, such as taking part in equalities reviews, Equalities Board members deepen discussions and raise issues from the perspective of lived experience and grassroots expertise.

We hope the board can serve as an example of how to amplify marginalised voices in other contexts, such as local and regional policy making.

Working with an equalities mindset

When equalities working is seen as more than meeting obligations under the Equalities Act 2010, then community work to reduce social isolation is more effective. The key to this is moving from thinking about equalities, to working with an equalities mindset.

Develop broader and deeper understanding of equalities, inclusion and intersectionality: A commitment to developing equalities understanding and practice more deeply and more broadly, by staff and volunteers, ensures that all aspects of community work with older people is inclusive. There are three elements to this: appreciating the role of power relations in inequality, increasing understanding of diversity within minority communities, and building awareness of intersectionality and how people who face additional and unique discrimination can be reached and supported. Awareness of the social model of disability can help, with its clear explanation of structural barriers.

Continue learning to sustain changes and inclusive practice: All involved must continue to share good practice on equalities and build their own and others' capacity to support increased awareness, knowledge and skills for effective equalities work in the longer term. This will contribute to embedding equalities approaches, developing informal communities of learning, and ensuring progress on equalities spreads more widely and can be sustained once a programme ends. The aim is to create a legacy on which future community development work can build.

*Guidance and further reading

To download a digital copy of this briefing or access links to the documents references in this briefing, visit www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/inclusiveneighbourhoods

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