



Translating Research Into Action

Involving older people in co-producing knowledge
about Age-Friendly neighbourhood interventions

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The research was carried out in partnership with a group of older people trained as co-researchers from the Whalley Range, Chorlton and Chorlton Park areas of Manchester, as well as local community organisations and stakeholders. The interviews carried out by the co-researchers targeted socially isolated older people, while the focus groups gathered views from a wide range of older people and stakeholders working with older people in the area. Ageing in an urban environment presents challenges to both residents and policy makers and a range of social and physical issues were identified. However, social and physical issues are linked and the issues should not be considered in isolation. The findings highlight physical environmental issues as a major concern. Transport was a very dominant overarching theme throughout all discussions.

Based on the knowledge gained from this research project, three types of interventions are proposed to develop age-friendly policies and practices. First, good communication and information is essential. Older people need to know what services and activities are available in their locality. Information needs to be up to date, and easy to access. Second, neighbourhoods need improved accessibility. This may mean better local transport or accessible pavements free from parked cars and other obstacles. Third, older people suggest a range of meeting opportunities should be available with regular social activities organised to appeal to a wide range of groups.

The findings in this report will be of interest to local and (inter)national organisations wishing to research and provide advocacy to older people; non-government organisations and government departments seeking to research older people's experiences of living in the city to further the development of ageing policies; urban planners interested in designing age-friendly environments; researchers wishing to learn more about the opportunities and challenges of involving older people as actors in research; researchers and students interested in the issue of developing age-friendly communities and older people and older people's organisations interested in the potential and challenges of being involved in research.

1 Executive Summary

Developing what has been termed 'age-friendly' cities has become a significant issue for public policy. To date, however, there is no evidence-based assessment of how older people can be involved in the co-production of age-friendly initiatives. The Translating Research into Action project aimed to work with an existing group of older co-researchers to examine the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood, and to translate research findings into practice and policy recommendations that can help improve the quality of life of older people in urban neighbourhoods.

The focus was on examining how older residents, especially those in disadvantaged positions, perceived their neighbourhood (both the physical-spatial and social characteristics of their area) and how the neighbourhood influences (promotes or obstructs) active ageing. Data from focus groups, interviews conducted by co-researchers, and feedback from a public dissemination event was synthesised to produce new knowledge about urban ageing. Subsequently, suggestions for change have been proposed that could improve the social and physical environment for older people in urban neighbourhoods.



2 Introduction

Developing what has been termed 'age-friendly' cities has become a significant issue for public policy. By 2030, two-thirds of the world's population will reside in cities, with (for urban areas in high income countries) at least one-quarter of their populations aged 60 and over. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 'Age-Friendly Cities'¹ project emphasises the theme of developing supportive urban environments for older citizens. Policies directed at this goal are seen to require interventions targeted at both the social and physical environment. Following this, the WHO (2010) established the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities (AFC) to assist implementation of policy recommendations arising from the project. Currently, the network has a membership of over 280 cities and communities across countries in the Global North and South.

The AFC model has been influential in raising awareness about the need to prioritise the role of older people in developing research and action plans to improve the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood. To date, however, there is no evidence-based assessment of how older people can be involved in the co-production of age-friendly initiatives.

There is also inadequate conceptualisation of models of co-production relevant to this area of work. The Translating Research into Action project directly addressed the co-production research gap and aimed to work with an existing group of older co-researchers, who were previously trained (by Tine Buffel) to examine the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood, and to translate research findings (data collected by the co-researchers) into practice and policy recommendations that can help improve the quality of life of older people in urban neighbourhoods.

The co-researchers were engaged and trained as part of the Researching Age-Friendly Communities study². The study provided a direct response to a need identified by the WHO, the UK network of age-friendly cities and Age Platform Europe to increase our understanding about the extent to which older adults can be genuinely involved in the planning, decision-making and implementation of age-friendly initiatives. The Translating Research into Practice project builds on the Researching Age-Friendly Communities study to develop, showcase and disseminate a model of coproduction with older people which prioritises the role of older people in all stages of a research project, including the planning, design and execution phases, and ultimately, the translation of research-based evidence into policy and practice.

¹WHO (2007) Global Age Friendly Cities: a Guide. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organisation.

²Buffel T. (2015) Researching Age-Friendly Communities: Stories from older people as co-investigators. Manchester: The University of Manchester Library.



Aim

The project set out to work with an existing group of older co-researchers to examine the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood, and to translate research findings into practice and policy recommendations that can help improve the quality of life of older people in urban neighbourhoods.

The research was viewed as a pilot project in a wider partnership strategy for researching, engaging and working with older people in deprived inner-city neighbourhoods in Manchester to improve their experiences of living in the city. The focus was on examining how older residents, especially those in disadvantaged positions, perceived their neighbourhood (both the physical-spatial and social characteristics of their area) and how the neighbourhood influences (promotes or obstructs) active ageing. The word 'active' refers to continuing participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic affairs in later life, not just the ability to be physically active or to participate in the labour force (WHO, 2002). Older residents, local stakeholders, community organisations and researchers worked together not only to examine the opportunities and constraints of their neighbourhood, but also to identify actions and strategies to improve the physical and social environment. The specific objectives of the research project were to:

- Explore the 'place' dimension of older residents' experiences of social exclusion and inclusion in their neighbourhood.
- Understand how older people experience, use, negotiate and appropriate everyday urban space.
- Identify the issues older residents themselves view as important in developing the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood.
- Involve older people, not only as the research target group, but also as experts and actors in the planning, design, development and implementation of the study.
- Promote evidence-based policy-making and practice at the local level.



3 Methods

3.1 Focus groups

As part of the Researching Age-Friendly Communities study, 14 focus groups were carried out in Chorlton, Chorlton Park and Whalley Range between October 2013 and May 2014 to discuss the experiences of older people living in the area. These three neighbourhoods within Manchester illustrated contrasting social characteristics, patterns of deprivation and ethnic composition. The focus groups were coordinated with support from the Age-Friendly Steering Group, a lay advisory committee brought together to support the study. The first seven focus groups were with various community stakeholders, and the final seven focus groups were with groups of older people from the area. The aims of the focus groups were to:

1. To identify the issues older residents and community stakeholders themselves view as important in developing the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood.
2. To identify existing and potential opportunities, resources and barriers to developing the age-friendliness of the research areas.

3. To raise awareness about the purpose and objectives of the Researching Age-Friendly Communities study involving older co-researchers.

3.2 Collaboration with the co-researchers

A central aspect of the Researching Age-Friendly Communities study was the recruitment and training of 18 co-researchers. The co-researchers were all older people living in Chorlton, Chorlton Park, or Whalley Range. The co-researchers conducted 68 interviews across the three neighbourhoods with 'hard-to-reach' older people (e.g. those experiencing social exclusion, isolation, poverty, health problems, restricted mobility) about their needs to 'age well' in the community. Following the interviews the co-researchers were involved in a process of reflection and analysis of the data from their interviews.

For the Translating Research into Action project the co-researchers were engaged to ensure that the findings from the focus group analysis aligned with findings from the interviews. The co-researchers were also involved in planning and deciding on the best way to disseminate the findings.

3.3 Agreement on key themes, issues, and suggestions for change

Principles of narrative analysis were applied to identify common themes from the focus groups. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data collected from narratives, in this case focus groups³. A framework was developed to allow comparison of themes and participant attributes (including age, neighbourhood, role in community, years living in area, living arrangements). The data from the focus groups was managed using NVivo 10.

Themes from the analysis were discussed over two meetings with the Age-Friendly Steering Group, the co-researchers, and project team members from the University. These were graphically presented to aid interpretation and identify how they were connected. Issues were separated into the social and physical environment, and suggestions for change were identified across all themes.



3.4 Dissemination of findings and further discussion with the wider community

The final stage of the research involved holding a public event to disseminate and consult on the findings. After discussion with the Age-Friendly Steering Group, it was agreed to host an Age-Friendly Marquee at the annual Celebrate Festival. The 2016 Celebrate Festival was held on the July 16th in Manley Park, Whalley Range. Celebrate Festival has been held in Whalley Range since 1997. The festival aims to celebrate the talent, diversity and resources of Whalley Range; promote a positive image of the area and improve the quality of life; and encourage participation of the different communities within the area, working within an anti-discriminatory framework.

The research findings were displayed in the Age-Friendly Marquee at the festival. The aims of disseminating the findings at the Celebrate Festival were to:

1. **Raise awareness of the age-friendly research.**
2. **Engage community members in the research by seeking feedback on the identified social and environmental issues for older people living in the area.**

3. Encourage community members to make their own suggestions for change

An interactive environment was created in the Age-Friendly Marquee to facilitate engagement of community members attending the festival. The themes from the research were presented on four large display panels. Co-researchers and the project team were present to talk to community members about the research, and seek their feedback. A local artist was engaged to create an 'Opinion Tree'. Community members were invited to 'leaf their opinion' on the tree with their suggestions for change. Also in the Age-Friendly Marquee were refreshments, information from local groups, and a craft table.

3.5 Co-production of key messages and recommendations

The final key messages and recommendations of the Translating Research into Action project were produced through the synthesis of the thematic analysis, knowledge from the co-researchers, and feedback from the Celebrate Festival.

³Braun V, Clarke V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*; 3(2):77-101.

4 Focus Groups Findings

4.1 Focus Groups

A total of 123 participants took part in the 14 focus groups.

Demographic information was collected from most participants (Table 1). Most of the residents who took part in the focus groups were over 60 years old, and about a third were over 70. Many of the residents had lived in the area for over 50 years. The majority of participants came from Chorlton. Ethnicity was self-selecting; most participants identified as British or White British.

		Resident	Stakeholder	Total
Gender	Male	26 (40.6)	8 (28.6)	34 (37.0)
	Female	38 (59.4)	20 (71.4)	58 (63.0)
Age	<50	0	8 (28.6)	8 (8.7)
	51-60	6 (9.4)	10 (35.7)	16 (17.4)
	61-70	23 (35.9)	3 (10.7)	26 (28.3)
	71-80	13 (20.3)	0	13 (14.1)
	80+	12 (18.8)	0	12 (13.0)
	Unknown	10 (15.6)	7 (25.0)	17 (18.5)
Ethnicity	British	14 (21.9)	0	14 (15.2)
	White British	19 (29.7)	13 (46.4)	32 (34.8)
	White Irish	5 (7.8)	2 (7.1)	7 (7.6)
	Other	4 (6.3)	1 (3.6)	5 (5.4)
	Unknown	22 (34.4)	12 (42.9)	34 (37.0)
Years in area	<10	5 (7.8)	0	6 (6.5)
	11-20	2 (3.1)	0	3 (3.3)
	21-30	4 (6.3)	0	5 (5.4)
	31-40	4 (6.3)	0	4 (4.3)
	41-50	6 (9.4)	0	6 (6.5)
	50+	18 (28.1)	0	19 (20.7)
	Unknown	25 (39.1)	28 (100.0)	49 (53.3)
Neighbourhood	Chorlton	35 (54.7)	3 (10.7)	38 (41.3)
	Whalley Range	8 (12.5)	2 (7.1)	10 (10.9)
	Chorlton Park	3 (4.7)	0	3 (3.3)
	Stretford	8 (12.5)	0	8 (8.7)
	Other	5 (7.8)	4 (14.3)	9 (9.8)
	Unknown	5 (7.8)	19 (67.9)	24 (26.1)

Table 1: Demographic attributes of focus group participants, n (%). Note: not all focus group participants provided their information. Missing information mainly relates to stakeholders.

Detailed discussions about the local area, how it has changed, and the experience of growing old in an urban environment were recorded. There was repeated acknowledgement that many of the social and cultural changes experienced (e.g. increased diversity of neighbourhood, changes in local shops), were national, or even global changes. However, the participants discussed some of the specific physical and social environmental issues they faced in their daily lives, and made positive suggestions for change.

Physical environmental issues

Transport was the most talked about physical environment issue. Bus and Metro services were used extensively by participants. Although the Metro link in Chorlton has been positively received, cuts to the bus service was a cause of concern, with fears of social isolation. One participant, who had lived in the Chorlton neighbourhood for this entire life, said 'the introduction of the Metro line to Chorlton is a huge, huge benefit and you can now get around Manchester a lot – a lot, lot better than you could by bus' (Male, 50-59, Chorlton Park). The increase in the number of cars, and the resulting congestion and parking issues, created barriers when walking in the neighbourhood. It was suggested that cars parked on pavements created problems, made worse by road works and poorly-maintained pavements. As one participant put it: there are a 'number of people who get put off [walking] because of the unevenness here of the pavements, especially around the main shopping areas, is really very off-putting for people' (Female stakeholder).

Chorlton was described as a village within a city, with a distinct town centre, used by participants from all three neighbourhoods. However, the changes in the services and shops in the town centre have been dramatic. 'Too many bars' and 'we haven't got real shops, like a shoe shop' were commonly expressed concerns. While there was some appreciation of the variety of food outlets and cafes available, many participants thought that the current range of shops was aimed primarily at younger residents. A major change in the centre of Chorlton was the removal of all public toilets. One participant said,

'Something as simple as a toilet in Chorlton would mean so much to hundreds of people. And I've worked in sheltered accommodations and 20%, at least, would not go shopping because of that problem. There wasn't a toilet' (Female, 61-70, Chorlton). While some bars and cafes may offer the use of their toilet, this is not a facility that all participants felt comfortable with using.

Social environmental issues

Most participants described their neighbourhood as a friendly area: 'I think it's the friendliest place I've ever lived in'. However, where in the past participants had close ties to neighbours, the current strongest social networks were links to family, long-established friends, and community organisations (such as Chorlton Good Neighbours or one of the churches). However, some participants mentioned Neighbourhood Watch schemes, and street parties, as ways in which they had become more involved with neighbours.

There are a lot of activities happening in the area, many of which appeal to older people. However, knowing about the activities, having access (e.g. transport), and the confidence to attend are all barriers to social participation. Chorlton Good Neighbours is highly valued and for many, it would seem, the main outlet for social contact, 'I lived a solitary life for years and years until I plucked enough courage to walk into this place ... and if there were more places like this so people will feel confident to go in and talk to us, I have made many friends since I started coming here' (Female, 61-70, Whalley Range).

Suggestions for change

Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the suggestions for change focussed around improvements to facilities and services. Suggestions included: maintaining/improving bus services, bringing back public toilets, sorting out traffic problems, and related pavement issues, and generally cleaning up neighbourhoods and clearing litter. Relating to social support needs, many participants voiced support for more opportunities for older people to meet: 'Luncheon Clubs for like over sixties for example ... We're trying to beat isolation, so the ideas

of groups of people that would feel like, meet for lunch, certain age groups, but not barring any age groups either because we're too fond of putting elderly people into groups' (Female, 61-70, Stretford). It was acknowledged that much is already happening for older people, but good and appropriate communication is vital to making services accessible: 'Lots of people doing lots of things in different bits of Whalley Range and it's knowing what's going on and share with them and perhaps getting together to – and whether you do that through the forum or how you do it, but I think it's quite an important thing that the groups know what's going on and know what they can help each other with.' (Male, 51-60, Whalley Range).

4.2 Discussion of themes with co-researchers

The themes and suggestions for change from the focus groups were presented to the co-researchers. A diagram was created to show how the issues and themes relating to the physical and social environments are related and linked (Figure 1). After discussion of the focus group findings with the co-researchers, agreement was reached on the themes and suggestions for change.



Figure 1: Summary of themes from focus groups adjusted after discussion with co-researchers. Large circles contain overarching themes relating to the physical and social environment. Smaller circles contain more detailed themes; green is positive and red is negative.



5 Dissemination: Celebrate Festival

In partnership with Whalley Range Community Forum, the Age-Friendly Steering Group, and the co-researchers, a range of activities and information stands were available in the Age-Friendly Marquee. The marquee attracted many people drawn from a variety of age groups. The findings were presented on four large, easy to read panels inside the marquee; taken together the panels formed the findings wall. People visiting the marquee were invited to discuss the research and add their thoughts; 29 comments were added to the findings wall. The most commented on theme was transport; neighbourhoods were also greatly discussed with people agreeing that it was a friendly area but expressing concern about isolation and safety.

A local artist was engaged to create an opinion tree on which leaves were attached with suggestions for change. A total of 75 opinions and suggestions for change were 'leafed' onto the opinion tree by people visiting the Age-Friendly Marquee. Suggestions covered the themes of accessibility, physical environment, roads, shops and services, and social support (Table 2). The suggestions for change put forward by the people visiting the Age-Friendly Marquee were in-line with the previous findings from the focus groups and discussions with the co-researchers. There were a high proportion of comments focussed on physical and environmental issues (roads, rubbish, drains etc.), perhaps reflecting the

wider age range of the participants in the Age-Friendly Marquee and more general concerns. However, receiving comments from people of a range of ages that are similar to those of older people suggests that some issues are not age-specific, and creating an age-friendly neighbourhood may involve addressing issues that affect people of all ages.

The Age-Friendly marquee was delivered in partnership, and would not have been possible without the support of Whalley Range Community Forum. The following feedback was received from the Forum: 'In terms of the way the team from the University demonstrated the research findings - people commented on how easy it was to understand, how good it was to be able to actually talk face to face with researchers about their priorities, and people were happy that if their own opinion wasn't represented they could write a comment/ suggestion on the tree. An older resident commented that he often feels put on the spot if people approach him with a clipboard for his thoughts: the easy to understand displays meant he could see what was being addressed – and then he took two leaves and wrote his own priorities down – in his own time and with no pressure' (Chris Ricard, Whalley Range Community Forum).⁴

ACCESSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better transport links Shuttle bus to Metro station Toilet facilities for older people People need help to get to groups or activities. They're scared to go alone.
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unblock the drains – grids overflow and flood the roads More light, trim some trees please Rubbish, very messy near shops
SHOPS AND SERVICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wider access of use of toilets by public in shops More shops selling useful things – basic food stuff etc More cafe and restaurants on Withington Road – open them up for specific events e.g. dementia friendly café
ROADS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the footpaths. Stop parking on footpath. Enforce 20mph speed limits I would like to see walking and cycling made easier and safer by reducing traffic speed and volume Traffic calming measures
SOCIAL SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community pub/hub We need IT friendly training in Whalley Range for older people Inter-age friendships, partnering up with young people with older generations Slipper football. Men in sheds.

Table 2: A sample of suggestions for change from the Opinion Tree

⁴For the full report from Whalley Range Community Forum see: <http://www.whalleyrange.org/agefriendly/celebrate-festival-update-age-friendly-marquee-report/>



6 Discussion and Recommendations

The Translating Research into Action project aimed to bring together knowledge collected by co-researchers, findings from focus groups analysis, and feedback from a public consultation event, to summarise suggestions for change that would improve the age-friendliness of urban neighbourhoods. Ageing in an urban environment presents challenges to both residents and policy makers and a variety of social and physical issues were identified. However, the concerns raised were linked and should not be considered in isolation from each other.

The involvement of the co-researchers in the co-production of the findings was invaluable. Through their experience as both residents and researchers in the local area they have built a wealth of knowledge about the issues relating to ageing in an urban environment. The interviews conducted by the co-researchers tapped into the views of a much broader range of participants than the focus groups. The research focussed on residents of three neighbourhoods: Whalley Range, Chorlton, and Chorlton Park. However, the majority of the resident participants in the focus groups came from Chorlton.

The interviews carried out by the co-researchers purposely selected 'hard-to-reach' older people from across all three neighbourhoods. Therefore, discussing and agreeing on the main themes with the co-researchers has strengthened the project findings. Dissemination of the findings at the Celebrate Festival provided further verification of the project findings. Chris Ricard, from Whalley Range Community Forum, commented that 'a lot of the time people are asked for their views and that's the last they hear of it. I feel the Age-Friendly Marquee demonstrated to people that the opinions of residents around ageing and priorities are taken seriously and used to influence change'.

The findings highlight physical and environmental issues as a major concern. Transport was a very dominant overarching theme throughout all discussions. The discussion points in relation to transport can be split into two areas of concern. First, transport issues relating to cars: car speed, car parking, and pavement obstruction. These points are predominately made from the non-driver perspective, and relate to further themes of walking, accessibility and safety. Second, the theme of transport relates to the ease of getting to places. Reduction in bus services, friendliness of taxi services, and the need for tailored community transport were all frequently raised issues. Although physical environmental issues regarding transport were explicitly raised, implicit in these concerns is the knock-on effect on the social environment. If people are unable to walk down the road because of obscured footpaths, or fears of speeding cars, likewise if they are unable to get where they need to go because of a lack of accessible transport, then the physical environment is acting as a barrier to social participation.

Meeting places and opportunities were strong themes relating to social participation. However, a wide range of activities and venues appeal to older people. Some people mentioned regular luncheon clubs, others dancing or dominos. While some people thought that places of worship could be used more as meeting places, others suggested looking for central, non-religious venues. It was agreed that in fact there is currently a wide range of activities being organised for older people, however the communication about activities, and their accessibility, could be improved.

6.1 Suggestions for change

Based on the knowledge gained from this research project, the following suggestions for age-friendly policy and practice are put forward. Three stages of interventions are proposed which are interlinked and should be seen as a circular process.

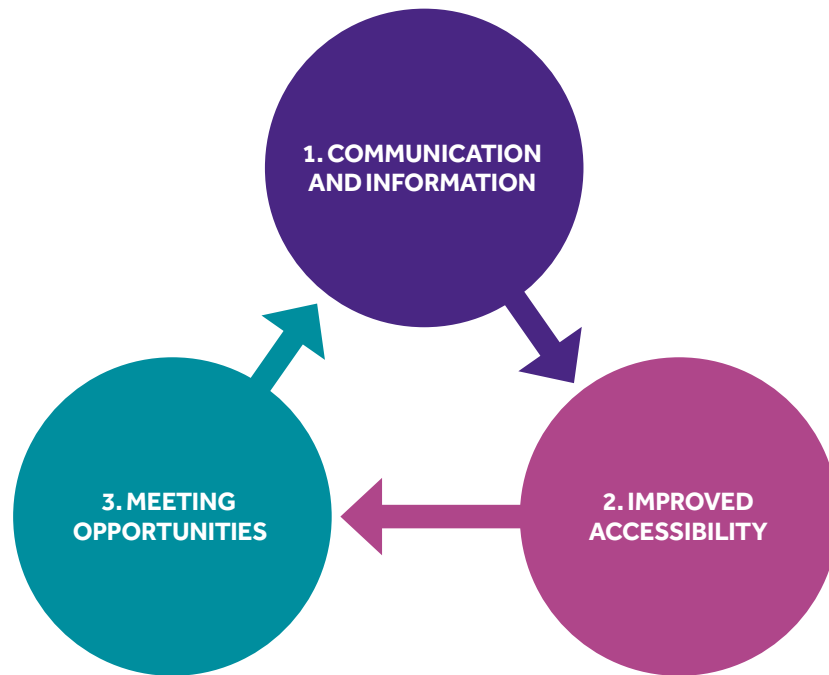


Figure 2. Intervention process based on suggestions for change

1. Communication and information

Older people need to know what services and activities are available in their neighbourhood, and need to know how to access them. Information needs to be clear, up to date, and easily available. Mechanisms to deliver effective communication and information include:

- Local Age-Friendly Boards/Groups
- Age-Friendly Charter
- Information on- and off-line
- Multi-agency working



2. Improved accessibility

Older people need to be able to access their neighbourhood. This may mean:

- Improved local transport, e.g. buses
- Tailored services such as door to door services
- Accessible pavements free from parked cars and other obstacles
- Benches and places to rest
- Safe streets

3. Meeting opportunities

To reduce social isolation, a variety of regular social activities are needed to appeal to different groups of older people. The following points should be taken into consideration:

- Regular daytime activities that are easy to access e.g. luncheon clubs
- Providing a variety of venues
- Supporting existing services to reach more people
- Effective communication about services and activities (closing the circle back to point 1.)

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