

Developing Age-Friendly cities by supporting social eating: a pilot case-study

Manchester has played a leading role in the age-friendly city initiative and is now a pilot for the integration of health and social care budgets known as Devolution Manchester. Numerous age-friendly projects have happened within and around Manchester, including housing, employment and learning. Social eating has not been explored in depth in urban or rural areas, and this is the focus of our project. We aim to explore the reasons why older people eat socially, and why they may not.

Social eating, or commensality, is defined as eating with other people and sharing meals, and can have a positive impact on a person's health, including improved nutrition, a reduction in depression and loneliness, and increased well-being. Making connections with people through social eating can increase an older person's social networks. We aim to explore some of the barriers and facilitators for social eating for older people in urban and rural environments. The overall purpose is to prepare for a funding application that will examine how best to support social eating opportunities for older people. The project will use qualitative focus groups, and we are focusing initially on two areas in Manchester (urban) and Cheshire (rural). We will undertake focus groups with older people who eat socially and those who don't, as well as with staff and volunteers who work with older people. The project aims will enable us to work with older people to:

- Identify barriers and facilitators to age-friendly social eating spaces within a case-study urban and rural environment
- Refine our methodology to demonstrate feasibility for a larger study covering a wider geographical area.
- Develop and disseminate an action plan for supporting social eating spaces within the case-study urban / rural environment to demonstrate potential impact of larger research project.

The research findings will make a contribution to interdisciplinary understanding of why older people do and don't eat socially. The project is funded by Cheshire East local authority.

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