

Researching Age-friendly Neighbourhoods

Co-producing policy within the age-friendly city of Manchester



The challenge

By 2030, sixty percent of the global population will be living in cities, with at least a quarter of city dwellers aged sixty or over. The needs and requirements of this age group will become an increasingly significant aspect of social and public policy, both in terms of design and delivery. Whilst progress has been made in identifying key age-friendly interventions, older people have rarely been central to their development.

The impact

Research on age-friendly cities, undertaken at the *Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing* (MICRA), is committed to engaging directly with the views and concerns of older residents.

The Manchester Ageing Study is a research project working with older people in inner-city neighbourhoods to improve their experience of living in the city. The project focuses on the role of neighbourhoods in contributing to what the World Health Organisation (WHO) terms 'active ageing', defined as continued participation in all aspects of social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic life.

Working with targeted groups in three South Manchester neighbourhoods, three key features shape this research:

- **Participation:** Older residents act as co-investigators at all stages of the process, including planning, design and implementation.
- **Collaboration:** A range of partners – local government, third sector, NGOs – act as advisors, contributing via focus groups, interviews and ongoing partnership work.
- **Action:** Recommendations have been generated for urban design, regeneration, community engagement and policy implementation. This has resulted in insights from the work being fed directly into social programmes and initiatives, within Manchester and beyond.

As a result of the research, important principles have been established in terms of promoting age-friendly neighbourhoods:

- First, they must provide a mechanism for empowering older people and ensuring broad social participation.
- Second, they are a reminder of the importance of 'citizen rights' in terms of ensuring full and active use of a city's resources and services.
- Third, they affirm the importance of recognising the multi-layered nature of the urban environment, where social and physical constraints affect the lives of older people in a variety of ways.

The project has received various accolades, including winning the '*Outstanding Local Community Collaboration Award*' at the 2015 University of Manchester Social Responsibility Awards. The work has attracted interest from the World Health Organization (WHO) – pioneers of the age-friendly cities agenda – and a number of key UK and European policy actors. These include:

- The United Nations
- Age UK
- Age Platform Europe
- The UK Network of Age-friendly Cities

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Our research

The aim of the research was to identify the issues older residents themselves viewed as important in developing the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood. A further aim was to 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.

A diverse group of eighteen older residents, aged between fifty-eight and seventy-four, were trained as co-investigators. The purpose of the training sessions was to ensure that every co-researcher had a thorough understanding of the different phases involved in conducting a participatory research project. The training provided an overview of the different components of the research process, such as designing the research materials, interviewing techniques, data analysis and translating findings into practice.

The co-researchers conducted sixty eight interviews, across South Manchester, with older people who were experiencing social exclusion, isolation, poverty or health problems. The interviews focused on ways of improving the quality of life for older people living in urban communities. During the training sessions, attention was given to the design of the research, to ensure that it was particularly sensitive to marginalised voices within the community.

Taken as a whole, the *Manchester Ageing Study* represents a significant advance in research methodology and in developing new models of community engagement. Crucially, it contributes to re-thinking public policy in relation to age-friendly cities, drawing on the direct involvement of older people themselves.

Key investigators

- Dr Tine Buffel (Principal Investigator)
- Professor Chris Phillipson (Supervisor)
- Rebecca Bromley (Researcher)



Project partners

- Age-friendly Manchester
- Whalley Range Community Forum
- Chorlton Good Neighbours
- Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA)

Further information

- Film: *Researching Age-Friendly Cities* (2015)
<http://bit.ly/1G7ykBV>
- Handbook: *Researching Age-Friendly Communities. Stories from Older People as Co-Investigators*
<http://man.ac.uk/KdYAL2>