

# Gateshead Link Up

LinkAge Plus

## Gateshead Older People's Assembly

The Gateshead Older Peoples Assembly aims to be the recognised independent voice for older people in Gateshead. We strive to represent the views and opinions of older people on any relevant strategic planning groups and forums and to influence service development and delivery so they better reflect the needs and wishes of older people.

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# Older Peoples Assembly

## Objective

Because of the Increasing size of our ageing population there is a need to drive public sector and voluntary organisations to deliver responsive needs led services. However, in before Link Age Plus Gateshead involvement has traditionally been ad-hoc and usually top-down. To improve this, we needed to:

- involve and consult older people effectively, and tap into the huge potential resource of older people's time, experience, and expertise; and
- fulfill the desire many of them have for meaningful involvement within their communities.

Our independent Assembly was established as 'the voice for older people in Gateshead'. We strive to represent the views and opinions of older people on any relevant strategic planning groups and forums to influence services.

The remit of the Assemblies Link Age Plus involvement is to look at the services provided for older people from across all service providers and see if they are, effective, accessible, appropriate, fit for purpose and on target, and promote the work of our partners.

## Activity

We work in partnership with the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors of our community. This valuable work has seen our partners work on this project having a much higher profile within our community. Through this we have forged strong networks to enable the issues that matter to older people in Gateshead to be addressed and resolved for the benefit of our community.

We are a resource of relevant information on local/regional/national services for our membership and the wider public to access. We have built up a good reputation for this and our reputation for this service is growing especially within our service users and statutory sectors. This strengthens our position in the delivery of effective accurate information when it matters.

Our web site is a way of engaging a wider audience and not just across Gateshead; we can keep older people informed of our service provision online. Our news letter goes out to all our membership and partners, this highlights the success of our work. We have produced a DVD of the membership of our Assembly stating their opinions on numerous issues. This DVD shows our membership as having a positive role to play in forming the opinions of those employed to serve our older population.

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## Achievements against objectives

We currently have a membership of around 1700 older people which has grown steadily since we were able to appoint a Community Development worker in 2006 through the Link Age Plus project. We believe that this has been key to our success in building capacity within our older population. It has enabled us to conduct well-designed and high quality research into social, economic, environmental and health issues with older people and show that this has a demonstrable effect on improving service delivery.

We employed a Community Development Worker for 2 years. This enabled us to:

- develop a community based provision of locally based branches of our Assembly in Gateshead;
- organise regular local meetings of these assemblies;
- organise multi agency community engagement events with these assemblies and the wider community; and
- recruit more volunteers and members.

These branch assemblies, volunteers and members carry out consultation work with older people in their own local communities across all of Gateshead. They look at social, economic, environmental and health issues and we will tackle the issues raised with the appropriate authority. These assemblies are ran by volunteers recruited from the local community, they are trained and supported in their role by the Assembly. This empowers a stronger community network of volunteers, individuals and groups of older people.

Each assembly will be able to meet on a regular basis to look at issues and engage with local older people. They also hold regular community engagement events in their own localities at which local older people will be able to meet various multi agency service providers.

We take the issues raised by our volunteers and the older population to the relevant agencies, area forums, Local Authority, Primary Care Trust etc. Through this our assemblies work in partnership with these agencies at ensuring that services are more focused at clients needs. The branch assemblies empower older people in local communities to have a stronger and more active say in how their problems are tackled, by having a cohesive structured approach to finding out the issues and then the solutions with partners from both the statutory & voluntary sectors.

## Resources

Funding of £52,000 over the two years was used to develop and promote the assembly including administration, premises and development worker costs.

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## Key lessons learned

We have through the Link Age Plus funding been able to promote best practice in service provision within the community and tackle, with our partners, the gaps in services for the benefit of older people within that community.

This process has given give local older people in our communities a more informed choice about the services aimed at improving their well being. We have achieved this by engaging local communities through holding multi agency events, consulting local individuals and groups and becoming an information and signposting resource.

Our volunteers, through the help of our Development Worker, have been able to contact local isolated older people who otherwise may have no community engagement at all. This enabled this group in our society to have a voice on how they feel about their community and the services provided for them. We have been able to reach older people who reside alone or in sheltered housing, care homes and nursing homes.

All these harder to reach individuals are now able to have a voice on the issues that matter to them.

## Further information

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## Related documents

Business Plan and three year vision.

Newsletters.