

Getting out and about

**COMMUNITY
MATTERS**

ILC-UK and Age UK Seminar Series



Community Matters: Getting out and about

'Getting out and about' is the first in a series of three seminars from ILC-UK and Age UK - exploring how communities need to adapt to an ageing society.

Getting out and about is of vital importance if older people are to remain healthy, happy and active members of the communities they live in. Getting outdoors benefits older people socially, by allowing them to visit friends and interact with members of the community, and practically, by allowing them to access local amenities and services. These activities also help older people to become more integrated into their local community. Despite these benefits, research has shown that as older people age they make fewer trips outside of their home. This seminar will explore the different physical and emotional barriers affecting older people's ability to leave their house and engage with the community, with a focus on three key areas- transport, the local environment and fear of crime.

A lack of access to affordable and accessible transport options can be a significant barrier to social inclusion and independence. While older people increasingly have access to private transport, many still depend on public transport for links to friends, family and service providers. With government cuts severely affecting bus routes, older people can be prevented from accessing vital services and participating in social activities, which can lead to low morale, depression and social isolation.

Bad or poorly maintained pavements, and a lack of benches or accessible toilets create physical barriers to older people when they want to get out and about. These physical barriers then help to create mental barriers. For example, many older people do not leave their homes because of a fear of falling, a very real fear as falls are the leading cause of hospitalisation in people aged 65+, and of accidental death for the over 75s.

Research has found that many older people do not venture out of their homes because of a fear of crime. While over 60s are actually less likely to experience street crime than any other age group, these fears have led many older people to become trapped in their own homes and separated from the local community.



Transport



Studies have shown that as people get older they travel less, with data from the 2011 National Travel Survey showing that people over the age of 70 make in total 215 fewer trips per person, per year than the general population (Bichard and Knight, 2011).

There is a noticeable decline in levels of car driving among older people, with just under a quarter of people aged 80 and over not having access to a car (WRVS, 2013).

Recent research has shown that a lack of car access creates a barrier to participation in community activities. 67% of interviewees without car access said that they were experiencing some restriction on their participation in community activities, and over 25% reported that they were prevented from any form of involvement (Musselwhite et al, 2012).

For older people without access to a car or a desire to use it, public transport takes on greater importance. National Travel Survey data shows that people aged 70 and over use buses for 81 trips a year, the most of any age group (Bichard and Knight, 2011).

Despite the relatively high use of public transport by older people, research carried out by Transport for London highlights a number of problems they face when using these services, including a lack of seats on over-crowded buses leading to physical discomfort, exhaustion and anxiety about falling (I'DGO, 2008).

There are also availability issues, with the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) in England being cut by 20%, and 41% of local authorities in England making cuts to bus services in 2012 (WRVS, 2013).

Cycling may offer an alternative to public transport, and can provide a means of engaging with the outdoor environment for recreation and relaxation, as well as a way of accomplishing everyday activities such as visiting friends or going to the shops (CycleBOOM, 2014).

Currently, cycling accounts for only 1% of all journeys amongst people aged 65 and older in the UK compared to 23% in the Netherlands, 15% in Denmark and 9% in Germany (CycleBOOM, 2014).

DfT research into the travel needs, behaviour and aspirations of people in later life identified the most dominant factor affecting transport use by older people as health status rather than age. The study revealed a range of conditions which affected respondents' use and experience of transport and travel, including arthritis, increased tiredness, and incontinence (DfT, 2007).

Difficulties arise not only in accessing transport, for example where older people are unable to walk to the nearest bus stop, but also in carrying heavy shopping to the bus stop, onto the bus, and back home at the other end (WRVS, 2013).

Community transport may offer an alternative option for these people, as well as those who live miles from the nearest bus route or are unable to afford taxi fares. In England there are at least 2,000 community transport organisations of which nearly one-third are based in rural areas, which provide 15 million plus passenger journeys each year (CTA, 2012).

Percentage of journeys taken by bike for the over 65's in Europe

1%
UK

23%
Netherlands

15%
Denmark

9%
Germany

(CycleBOOM, 2014).

Environment

Interviews carried out with 200 older people discovered that at least half of the interviewees faced problems in getting outdoors due to barriers in the environment and lack of supportive facilities (I'DGO, 2007).

The interview results illustrate a number of barriers including bad or poorly maintained pavements, a lack of benches, heavy traffic in conjunction with poor provision of pavements or location of traffic lights, and a lack of accessible public toilets (I'DGO, 2007).

There is very little seating on residential streets in neighbourhoods throughout the UK. One study, which audited 200 streets, found that 84% had no seating at all and only 4% had more than a single seat. This had an influence on the distance people were prepared to walk, either for transport (getting from A to B) or leisure (visiting neighbourhood green space, for example) (I'DGO, 2012).

A report on public toilet provision found that 80% of respondents did not find it easy to locate a public toilet, 78% found public toilets not open when they needed them and over half (52%) agreed that a lack of provision prevented them from going out as often as they liked (Richard and Knight, 2011).

Neighbourhood aesthetics are also an important factor affecting older people's interaction with the local community. Attractive features in nearby outdoor spaces, such as a fountain or a lakeside, may entice older people to use them more frequently (I'DGO, 2007).

Research has found that fear of falling is the most commonly reported problem that older people face when going outdoors. 19% of respondents had fallen, tripped or stumbled outside in the last 6 months, and many more said they had in the last 12 or 18 months (I'DGO, 2008).

Older people's fear of falling was not only based on health problems but also on the poor design or maintenance of the outdoor environment. Cracked and uneven paving was by far the most common cause of trips and falls, followed by slippery paving, obstructions, steps and slopes (I'DGO, 2008).

The majority of older people (89%) walk much slower than the Department for Transport recommendation of 1.2m/s. This has serious ramifications for pedestrian crossings as they use this figure for how long they give people time to cross the road (Musselwhite, 2014).

This combined with the hindrances to walking many older people face when getting out and about means they are put at risk. In the UK, older people represent around 22.8% of the population, cover 19% of all trips and miles walked, yet account for around 43.6% of all pedestrians killed (Musselwhite, 2013).



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Crime



A survey of
4,000 older
people found

**Half of
those
aged
over 75
were too
afraid to leave
their homes
after dark.**

(BBC, 2003).

Older people report a greater fear of crime than younger age groups. This is despite the fact that older people are less likely to be victims of crime. This has become known as the “fear/risk paradox” (CARDI, 2010).

Research has highlighted that older people have significant concerns about safety when going outdoors. The most commonly mentioned places where people felt unsafe after dark were city or town centres and high streets and streets with pubs on them, as well as deserted streets and places (I'DGO, 2007).

A survey of 4,000 older people found that almost half of those aged over 75 were too afraid to leave their homes after dark because they believed they would be subject to verbal abuse or mugging. Two thirds believed they would inevitably become victims of crime as they got older, while a fifth said this fear had contributed to a sense of loneliness and isolation (BBC, 2003).

This was mirrored in Northern Ireland, where the recent Pensioners Parliament survey found that fear of crime was selected by almost two thirds (64%) of older people as a major concern (Age UK NI, 2011).

I'DGO focus group and interview results illustrate these fears well, “What shame you couldn't enjoy going out for walk at night, just frightened.” On young people, “They probably won't harm you, but they look so threatening. They march up the road and ride the bicycles up and down the pavement” (I'DGO, 2008).

People who did not feel safe when they were out also tended to say that their neighbourhoods were not very attractive and that the housing and outside areas were not in very good condition (I'DGO, 2008).

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) could possibly help to alleviate some of these fears. CPTED aims to reduce opportunities for crime through effective planning and design to produce a built environment that provides and encourages empowerment to legitimate users and the marginalisation of the illegitimate (Johnson et al, 2013).

But has the fear of crime paradox, in which older people are seen as disproportionately concerned about the possibility of becoming a victim, put too much focus on age without considering other important issues, such as income and gender (Moore, 2010)?

Transport Case Studies



Public Transport Ambassadors, Netherlands

In the Province of Zeeland it was recognised that, when older people could no longer drive, their lack of familiarity with public transport led to them to reject these services and become isolated. This was exacerbated by the introduction of an e-ticketing system which many older people found complex and confusing.

In response, a scheme was set-up that recruited and trained over-55s to become Public Transport Ambassadors who help to familiarise older people with public transport. The aim is to help them learn how to use these services in a positive, enjoyable way to prevent older people becoming isolated and inactive. 'Test rides' are arranged in local areas where the ambassadors familiarise individuals or groups of local people with public transport in the context of a positive day out. The Ambassadors also attend existing community groups to give presentations and educate older people about public transport.

The days out are evaluated by questionnaire, and telephone interviews are conducted with ambassadors after the training event. Their advice to others attempting a similar scheme is to use community organisations to help recruit ambassadors and to use a role model, for example a politician or well-known person, to act as the face of the campaign and help to publicise it (Eltis, 2012).

Older People Cycling Training Scheme, Munich, Germany

Green City, with the support of the City of Munich, initiated a cycling scheme aimed at older people in the summer of 2006. The major goal of the scheme is to make older people enjoy everyday cycling once again, whilst simultaneously learning how to deal with critical situations in traffic and overcome inhibitions towards alternative bikes. The training courses last for roughly 4 hours with a small theoretical introduction and then practical training.

To implement the measure, three components were seen as crucial:

- Experts who can talk about road safety and the health aspect of cycling.
- A fleet of bicycles adapted to older people.
- A place where you can find older people and where there is enough space to build up a bicycle obstacle course.

Most of all it was seen as vital that the training was designed in a way that fits the requirements of older people. Therefore, meetings with relevant stakeholders like the police and people who work with older people, including Older People Service Centres, were held. The training is promoted by a leaflet, distributed at relevant places like fairs and via the programme of Older People Service Centers, and press releases (Eltis).



Environment Case Studies

National Public Toilet Map, Australia

The Australian Government's Department of Health & Ageing launched the National Public Toilet Map (www.toiletmap.gov.au) in 2001, as part of the National Continence Management Strategy. The map now contains details of over 15,000 publicly accessible toilets with data provided by over 1000 local councils and other organisations. Using the Trip Planner function, people can plan their journey and locate toilets they can use along the way. Details of toilet facilities are available along major travel routes and for shorter journeys as well. Useful information is provided about each toilet, including location, opening hours, availability of baby change rooms, accessibility for people with disabilities and the details of other nearby toilets. The website currently attracts 100,000 visitors each month and visits have risen by 700% since 2004. The up-to-date toilet map data is available as Open Data from www.data.gov.au, where it is being used by organisations to create toilet-finding smartphone applications (Bichard and Knight, 2011).

'A Matter of Balance', U.S.A

'A Matter of Balance' is based upon research conducted by the Royal Center for Enhancement of Late-Life Function at Boston University, and emphasises practical strategies to reduce fear of falling and increase activity levels. Participants learn to view falls and fear of falling as controllable, set realistic goals to increase activity, change their environment to reduce fall risk factors, and exercise to increase strength and balance.

'A Matter of Balance' consists of eight two-hour sessions for groups of 10-12 participants. Sessions are held in community sites such as senior centres, senior housing, libraries, etc. The class utilises a variety of activities to address physical, social, and cognitive factors affecting fear of falling and to learn fall prevention strategies. The activities include group discussion, problem-solving, skill building, assertiveness training, videotapes, sharing practical solutions and exercise training.

During the class, participants learn to:

- View falls and fear of falling as controllable.
- Set realistic goals for increasing activity.
- Change their environment to reduce fall risk factors.
- Promote exercise to increase strength and balance.

The program was designed to benefit older adults living in the community who are concerned about falls; have sustained a fall in the past; restrict activities because of concerns about falling; are interested in improving flexibility, balance and strength; and are age 60 or older, mobile and able to problem-solve (NJ Department of Human Services).



Crime Case Study

'Stay Safe Card', Cambridgeshire, UK

The Stay Safe Card was developed so that vulnerable people, including older adults, can get support in the community. The card holds information about the card holder including health concerns, helpful contact details for friends and family, and contact instructions if the police are required.

The card holder can go anywhere that a 'Stay Safe' sign is shown and seek support. These can be information points, shops or a police station. Alternatively the cards can simply be shown to members of the public. Stay Safe Cards were identified as an opportunity by Speaking Up's Cambridgeshire Parliaments and Youth Parliaments (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2013).

Questions for discussion

- What is the current transport situation of older people in the UK?
- How can we ensure that private and public transport facilitates the connection between the home and community?
- What are the environmental barriers that older people face when trying to get out and about?
- How can the local environment be adapted to better meet the needs of older people?
- How can older people's fear of crime be reduced while maintaining their natural defences against crime?
- How useful are planning measures, such as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), in reducing older people's fear of crime?

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