

A Safer Space in Bolton for People with Mental Health Issues :

Equalities Board “Ageing Equally?” Research Project

St. George’s Centre (Bolton) Ltd.

Summary report

This is an easier to read summary of the “Ageing Equally?” research report by St George’s Centre.

It contains some background to the research, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

We have written it to help people understand the research more easily, and to make it easier to use the findings to make places better for older people.



Glossary

Ambition for Ageing (AfA) = a Greater Manchester programme that aims to make communities more age-friendly and improve older people's quality of life

Appreciative Inquiry = a way of doing research that uses interviews and story telling to draw out positive memories and experiences

Co-production = when communities and service providers or professionals work together as equals to plan and deliver services

Communities of identity or experience = a group of people who share a common identity or experience (e.g. Bangladeshi people, LGBT people, or people living with dementia)

Data = information

Discrimination = treating someone differently because of the social group they belong to

Equalities Board (EB) = the group responsible for making AfA inclusive and accessible for everyone

GMCVO = Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations, the organisation that is responsible for managing the Ambition for Ageing programme

Identity = your sense of your self

Inclusion = working in such a way that marginalised and minority groups are involved and able to participate in or benefit from a programme.

Interviewee = someone who is interviewed for a research project

Mainstream = catering for the majority, not specialised

Marginalised = the result of being pushed to the margins of society: excluded or ignored

Minority = a group of people who are different in some way from the majority of the population

Participation = being or getting involved

Stigma = negative beliefs that mainstream society holds about a particular group of people

1. Introduction & Background

St George's Centre

St Georges Centre was set up in 1977 to provide a safe space, activities and support for people who had been on mental health wards in Bolton General Hospital for a long time. Patients were asked what they support they needed to be healthier and happier.

Pressures on mental health services and the voluntary sector

St George's Centre is a small voluntary sector organisation that provides mental health services. Although there is more talk about mental health issues these days, it is still rare to hear about the difficulties of people with more serious mental health problems. In recent years there has been growing pressure on small voluntary organisations. The government has cut funding at the same time as need for services has increased, causing some small, community-based organisations to close.

How St. George's Works

St. George's Centre believes that participation in your community is important. St. George's focuses on

members' skills and what they do well. Members often take part in focus groups and give their views in consultations, so they contribute to society as well as to the centre. The researchers used participatory approaches in their research including co-production and appreciative inquiry. Co-production can change the power relationship between service users and service providers, so decisions can be shared and may be more creative. Appreciative inquiry uses interviews and storytelling to draw out positive memories and experiences, which can be used creatively by art, drama and music groups at the centre.

Aims of the research

The researchers wanted to find out what makes an age-friendly neighbourhood for people over 50 living in the BL1 area of Bolton, who have long-term serious mental illness. These people often experience barriers to independence through stigma and discrimination in the community, and being disempowered by services.

2. Method: How St George's did their research

There were three parts to the St. George's research project. Some people were involved in more than one part of the research. All the participants were over 50 and live in the BL1 area of Bolton.

- 1) One to one informal interviews with 14 centre members. Interview questions were based on findings from "Building Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester" by Ambition for Ageing. You can read that report here:
<https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/neighbourhoods>
- 2) Collecting data from reflections by 17 centre members who went on a day trip to Blackpool in the summer. They also created a collage.
- 3) Conversations with seven members of the centre's Walk and Talk group.

3. Findings: What St Georges' Centre found out

a) Safe environment

All participants talked about the need to feel safe in their community, and for having a safe, supportive, and inclusive place to go to. Many members reported being frightened to go out alone later in the day in their neighbourhood, and many did not feel safe alone in their homes. Participants valued inclusion in their community and felt motivated to come to St George's and take part in the groups there.

b) Respect and self esteem

Participants appreciate being treated with respect, being listened to, and getting the right support, from medical professionals, service providers and at St George's Centre. They saw St George's as a place where they can use and develop their skills and increase their self-esteem. They think that peer support, working as a team, being able to contribute, feeling valued, and having a sense of achievement are important to feeling well.

c) Individual mental health impacts

Some of the research participants reported benefits to their mental health due to taking part in St George's Centre activities. For example, having a positive focus provided a distraction from negative thoughts. Walk and Talk group members said being out in the fresh air helped reduce anxiety and depression.

d) Learning about using creative methods

The researchers also reported that they found some limitations to using creative research methods, such as making the collage. Research participants found it difficult to make visual images of feelings, such as happiness and inner peace, and difficult to show movement in a static picture.

Discussion

The researchers say they have learned that:

- People in Central Bolton living with long term mental illness experience stigma and discrimination in the local community, and disempowering treatment by services and government agencies.
- A small mental health day service that is part of the community can change people's lives in positive ways.
- Members feel that St. George's Centre is a safe space and enabling service for people over 50.
- Members feel that the way the centre recognises and develops their skills and contributions helps them to be well, become more empowered, and increase their sense of self worth.

St George's Centre's recommendations

1. The government should make sure there is funding for small organisations like St. George's to be sustainable.
2. The government should support community organisations to expand their services and practices as needed, with better access to funding.

4. What can we learn from this research about what makes a good place to grow older for people in minority communities?

- Co-production, where professionals and community members work together as equals, is important in creating a service that is trusted by people who are marginalised in their local area.
- If a local area is unsafe for a marginalised group of people, it is important they have a safe community space that can offer local connections.

- Older people need to be able to maintain connections to places beyond their local areas. This may be particularly important for those who do not feel safe in their local area.



More information

The full report contains a lot more information about the background of the research, and details of Ethnic Health Forum’s findings. You can read and download this summary, the full report, and all the Ageing Equally? shorter project reports and summaries from the Equalities Board website here:

<https://lgbt.foundation/ambition-for-ageing/publications>

About the “Ageing Equally?”s Research Programme

Depending on their backgrounds, culture and life circumstances, different people need different things to feel socially connected and supported in their daily lives.

Ambition for Ageing funded the ‘Ageing Equally?’ research programme to find out more about this by asking: “What makes a good place to grow older for people who belong to minority communities?” You can find out more about the Ageing Equally? research programme here:

<https://www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/ageing-equally>