



OLDER PEOPLE'S ADVOCATE NEWSLETTER

August
2009
Issue 4

Measuring the Extent of Poverty in Northern Ireland

I recently attended the launch of some important research carried out by Eileen Evason, Emeritus Professor at the University of Ulster and colleagues from the University on behalf of Age Concern Help the Aged. The research examined the extent of poverty in Northern Ireland.

As the Older People's Advocate I was particularly interested in part of the research which highlight households made up of older people. Older people make up one quarter of all the households in Northern Ireland and participants in the study included 550 (out of a total of 1,906) households which had a male head over 65 years or a female over 60 years.

While the research showed that 15% of non-pensioner households could be considered 'poor' the percentage rose to 25% for pensioner households. Moreover, if Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance, which are often essential for older people for caring purposes alone, were deducted from the pensioner households' income the figure rose to 30% of those households being described as 'poor'.

One other important aspect of the study was that it showed that 8% of single women and 2% of single men move into poverty as they get older. Given that women do live longer than men and as they grow older will likely experience disability in one form or another this increases their vulnerability over time.

The Department for Social Development has been asked to review the situation in the light of the findings of this study and concerns expressed by the Anti Poverty Forum about women's vulnerability.

The Full Report can be found on our new website:

www.olderpeoplesadvocateni.org

Cross Sector Advisory Forum (CSAF) and Sub-Groups

The CSAF has been established by the First and deputy First Minister to bring forward practical proposals how to consider to mitigate the worst effects of the economic downturn. Membership of the CSAF includes statutory agencies, the voluntary and community sector, trade unions and the private sector.

A number of working sub-groups, including one on Hardship, Poverty, Debt and Energy has been established, I am a member of this group, it will identify initiatives to relieve the social and welfare hardships arising from the present economic crisis and encourage action to be taken to implement them— I will report further in future newsletters.



Older People, Nutrition and Information

The Food Standards Agency have recently launched a new publication, *'The Good Life'*. The publication is in a magazine-style format and is aimed at over 65's. The publication contains nutrition information and advice for older people, as well as recipes, food safety advice and general issues of interest such as pension credit uptake and keeping active.

External contributors for this edition included the Department of Social Development and the Public Health Agency. *'The Good Life'* magazine will be produced bi-annually and distributed to over 100,000 older persons households in Northern Ireland. The Food Standards Agency has provided the following information for this month's newsletter.

“Health professionals have recognised for many years that poor diet is a risk factor for the major diseases of cancer, coronary heart disease and diabetes. Yet, the inequalities in what people eat – depending on their socio-economic group, where they live and their ethnic background – has not been so widely recognised. The term ‘food poverty’ has been applied to those groups who are unable to choose, buy, prepare and eat an adequate quantity of good quality foods in keeping with social norms. Older people are one of those groups most likely to be in food poverty.

While the majority of older people maintain healthy and active lives as individuals, often with the support of their families, it must also be recognised that the older community can also include some of the most vulnerable groups of our society. Research shows that eating well plays an important role in the health of older people. It can reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and certain cancers, aid recovery from illness, lead to a better quality of life and help maintain independence.

During the winter months, eating well becomes particularly important as elderly people may be at their most vulnerable to illness. Those living alone, for example, may face financial difficulties and tend to skimp on food. Some neglect their nutrition because they lack cooking skills and knowledge, especially after the death of a spouse who would have prepared the meals in the household.





Influencing elderly nutrition in the home is complex with activity taking place in a number of different places and a need to transmit a variety of messages (from simple healthy eating advice to dealing with malnourishment). It can involve a large number of issues, such as access to food, cooking skills, budgeting, general nutrition and possible malnutrition. As a result local initiatives are critical when promoting elderly nutrition because they can identify the unique issues faced in that area and target work accordingly.

At a national level the issue of health and old age has moved up the policy agenda. The programmes and policies of Government Departments and their agencies, working in partnership with the voluntary sector, are critical in tackling the key determinants of health inequalities for older people. Here at the Food Standards Agency we have made a commitment to setting priorities for helping disadvantaged groups such as older people.”

For more information on this and other programmes please contact: Andrea Marnoch: andrea.marnoch@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk

Following a meeting with members of the FSA we have agreed share information including and to provide links to through our new website www.olderpeoplesadvocateni.org

Building a Society for all Ages

The Government has released its consultation paper– Building a society for all ages in light of there are more of us living longer than ever before. In 2007 for the first time in the UK there were more people over state pension age than children; an ageing society is no longer coming it is here with us today.

The government has laid out its challenges and visions for the future in this consultation document. It will be followed by a *Families and Relationships Green Paper* this will recognise that getting older does not just affect the individual, as we age our family structures will change and more active grandparents will have the chance to play a greater role in their families lives but as well more people will be caring for their older relatives too.

To read further information or the consultation itself go to:
www.hmg.gov.uk/buildingasocietyforallages.aspx or visit our website under reports.





There has been a review of the Advocate and the Junior Ministers have listened to issues raised. They are very happy with the progress so far.

Aims and Objectives of the Older People's Advocate

The Older People's Advocate will:

- **Facilitate** public consultation events on the proposed role, remit and powers of an Older People's Commissioner;
- **Provide** a focus for individual older people and representative groups from the voluntary and community sector to highlight issues that are of concern for older people;
- **Bring** these issues and concerns to the attention of the Junior Ministers in the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister;
- **Provide** Junior Ministers with analysis based on the views of the voluntary and community sector of the impact and practical workings of policies and strategies aimed at older people.

Parkinson's Disease Society 3 Day Conference

If Parkinson's is part of your life, the Parkinson's Disease Society (PDS) can help you cope with the condition every step of the way. Whether you have Parkinson's yourself, or someone close to you has, PDS can help and support you.

If you would like to meet other people who are living with the condition you may be interested in attending our 3 day conference 'Octoberfest' to be held in the **Ramada Hotel Portrush from Wed 3rd September to Friday 2nd October 2009**. If you are interested please contact **Nicola Moore Tel: 0844 2253680**

Good Morning Northern Ireland Network

Good Morning Northern Ireland was founded in West Belfast and is a telephone support service to older people and those feeling vulnerable in particular areas. The service operates 7 days a week 365 days a year. The support team will phone the clients daily at a designated time to check on their well being, have a chat and provide information on any events in their area. If any issues become apparent during the conversation the support worker will endeavour to support the client in addressing the issue themselves or alternatively sign post to a relevant agency or body that can help solve the problem. Good Morning Northern Ireland accepts self referrals, referrals from families community organisations, social services, GP, Hospitals etc. **To register with Good Morning NI telephone 028 90 200228.**

NIO Community Safety Working Group

The Advocate's Office is a member of the NIO Community Safety Working Group on Older People and recently met to discuss a draft older people's strategy based on previous safety and community strategies. The Group is made up of the Age Sector Platform, Older People's Policing Group, a representative from an intergenerational group and the NIO. For Further information contact the Advocate's office on **info@olderpeoplesadvocateni.org**