



OLDER PEOPLE'S ADVOCATE NEWSLETTER



June 2009

Mental Well Being from Young to Old

The British Psychological Society recently presented psychological perspectives on ageing well. Professor Ian Robertson from Trinity College Dublin's institute of neuroscience described that just as physical health and life-span are shaped by diet and physical fitness, so our brain fitness is shaped by lifestyle factors over which we potentially have control.

Prof. Robertson maintains there are seven key factors which strongly influence brain health and fitness at all ages but increasingly as people get older. These are:- physical exercise, mental stimulation, new learning, reduced stress, social connection, diet and mental attitude.

In a feature the "mental wealth of nations" in the *Nature* publication, a number of key findings identified that learning must continue throughout life and there is a need to boost brain power in both the young and the old.

Mental ill-health is more wide spread than many realise and the annual costs of responding to mental ill-health in England alone are about £36 billion. The UK Office of National Statistics estimates that by 2071 the number of people older than 65 could double to nearly 2.13 million and those aged 80 and over could more than treble to 9.5 million.

Professor Christine Liddell from the Psychology Dept of University of Ulster indicated that the current investment strategy for safeguarding mental capacity becomes virtually zero from 65 years and over.



For further information can be found on

www.nibps.org.uk



Independent living Care in Wales

The Older People's Advocate office was invited to an event in Wales which included lessons for policy and practice from Joseph Rowntree Foundation presented by Sue Collins author of "Options for care funding: what could be done now?". Sue highlighted that in the current economic situation it could cause the reform of the UK long-term care funding model to lose momentum. The report highlights that the current long-term care funding system in Wales is:

- unsustainable. Without changes, older people—including those on very modest incomes—will increasingly have to pay more out of their own pockets;
- unfair. It is riddled with inconsistencies that determine who pays what; and
- unclear. There is often confusion about whether the health service or local authorities are responsible for payment, and there are different entitlements in different local authority areas.

In Sue's presentation she identified ways forward for fairer and more sustainable methods of funding. These include:

- **Equity release**, allowing older homeowners to pay for home-based care by deferring the costs until their home is sold; **Cost possible £33 million per annum**
- **Higher capital limits for care home fees** to help those with modest assets; - **Cost £280 million per annum**
- **Doubling the person expenses allowance** for people living in care homes supported by local authorities—**Cost £250 million per annum**
- **Restructuring help for people in nursing homes**, breaking down the barrier between health and social care.—**Cost £212 million per annum**

For more information on this this report visit **Joseph Rowntree Foundation website**





Intergenerational Solidarity

Interesting findings from an analytical report requested by the Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and coordinated by Directorate General Communication on the attitudes of young and old in the 27 EU countries include:

1. Relations between the different generations

EU citizens were most likely to agree that young people and older people do not easily agree on what is best for society (28% *strongly* agreed and 41% *somewhat* agreed), and least likely to agree that older people are a burden on society (4% *strongly* agreed and 10% *somewhat* agreed). More than 6 in 10 EU citizens *strongly* disagreed that older people are a burden on society.

2. Affordability of pensions and elderly care; the need for pension reforms

When presented with various statements about the costs of an aging population, EU citizens were the most likely to *somewhat* or *strongly* agree that their national governments must make more money available for pensions and care for the elderly – only 14% disagreed with the statement. Moreover, half of EU citizens *strongly* agreed that this need exists.

3. Contributions of older people to society

A large majority of EU citizens agreed that older people make a major contribution to society via voluntary work in charitable and community organisations in their country (44% *strongly* agreed and 34% *somewhat* agreed). Slightly more than three-quarters of interviewees thought that the contribution of older people who care for family members or relatives is not sufficiently appreciated in their country (44% *strongly* agreed and 33% *somewhat* agreed).

4. Autonomous living for the elderly, elderly care and support by social services

Only slightly more than a third of EU citizens in total agreed – and 59% disagreed – that there are sufficient social services to support frail older people so that they can stay living in their own home. Two-thirds of interviewees also *somewhat* or *strongly* disagreed that people with a responsibility of care for older family members at home receive good support from social services.

5. The role of public authorities in promoting intergenerational solidarity

More than 6 in 10 EU citizens disagreed that their government does a good job in promoting better understanding between young and old (35% *somewhat* disagreed and 29% *strongly* disagreed). EU citizens were, nevertheless, in agreement about the role of public authorities in promoting better relations between young and old.

For the Full report go to http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_269_en.pdf

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 out workings of policies and strategies aimed at older people.



Listening to Carers

As the Older People's Advocate I recently held a meeting with the Older People's Nursing Network and the Royal College of Nursing. During the meeting I was made aware of issues such as providing services to people in private residential care, ensuring the sharing of good practice, recognising the valuable work done by nurses nursing older people and concerns about the impact of the economic downturn on future provision. I have taken these issues on board and will be exploring them with voluntary and statutory agencies over the next few months.

Concessionary Fares— Smart Pass

Following a recent conference I attended some people raised concerns about concessionary fares being either changed or withdrawn. I have checked this out with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) and they have informed me they have no plans to reduce the provisions of the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme although they were always interested in ensuring the use of the scheme was as effective as possible.

I also raised concerns about the wording and style of the letter which went out to 2,000 SmartPass holders across the North seeking information for Section 75 purposes. Having reviewed the letter DRD agree it could be improved. They have notified the Department's Equality Unit of my comments and asked that they take account of them in the production of any future correspondence with older people.