Researching Age-Friendly Communities

Stories from older people as co-investigators

With contributions from Julie Asumu, Rebecca Bromley, Roger Bysouth, Angela Downing, Joan Gem, Tony Goulding, Freddi Greenmantle, Helen Hibberd, Raj Kaur, Mary O'Mahony, Robert Page, Chris Ricard, Daljit Singh, Elaine Unegbu and Bill Williams.

Edited by Tine Buffel

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The University of Manchester

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

AGE FRIENDLY MANCHESTER

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide to working with older people as co-researchers has been produced in partnership with the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA), Age UK, Age-Friendly Manchester (Manchester City Council), and the Office for Social Responsibility at the University of Manchester. Contributions come from older co-investigators and representatives of community organisations who have been involved in the planning, design, development, and implementation phases of a research project focusing on developing age-friendly neighbourhoods in Manchester. The guide aims to provide insights into the experiences of older people as they step beyond the traditional role of consultee to that of interviewer and researcher.

The editor would like to thank those who volunteered their time and effort to this project, in particular, the co-researchers: Julie Asumu, Roger Bysouth, Angela Downing, Merryn Cooke, Joan Gem, Tony Goulding, Freddi Greenmantle, Raj Kaur, Mary O'Mahony, Cathy McGuinn, Chris Morris, Rob Page, Tony Payne, Daljit Singh, John Timmins, Elaine Unegbu and Bill Williams. Furthermore, the development of this project would not have been possibly without the support of Jo Garsden, Jill Stevenson and Mark Kelly (MICRA, the University of Manchester); Chris Hewson (Knowledge Exchange and Impact Officer, the University of Manchester); Helen Hibberd and Bernard Leach (Chorlton Good Neighbours); Paul McGarry, Rebecca Bromley and the rest of the Age-Friendly Manchester team (Manchester City Council); Chris Ricard (Whalley Range Community Forum) and Councillor Mary Watson (Lead Member for the Age-Friendly Manchester Programme). Special thanks go to Prof. Chris Phillipson for his supervision and input into the project and to Prof. Thomas Scharf for his advice on the development of the guide.

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“The involvement of local residents in this study, as co-researchers, is a significant contribution to the city's Age-Friendly Manchester programme.

The approach recognises the centrality of older people as active citizens in the Age-Friendly approach and gives a unique voice to many of the most excluded older people in central and south Manchester. Moreover, the findings of this work will play a direct role in the development of the city's plans for the neighbourhoods in which the research has been conducted.”

Paul McGarry
Senior Strategy Manager, Age-Friendly Manchester

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FOREWORD FROM AGE UK

Bernadette Ashcroft
NW Regional Chair, Age UK

James Goodwin
Head of Research, Age UK

Stuart Murray
Chairman, Age UK Manchester

Age UK warmly welcomes the publication of this latest guide documenting the success that comes from involving older people directly in research, this time relating to Age-Friendly neighbourhoods. We congratulate the University, the City of Manchester and the older communities of Manchester on making it possible.

We have previously championed this cause in UK universities and internationally, integrating the notion of 'user involvement' into the WHO model of knowledge transfer, published in 2010. We are proud to have a track record in involving older people in research, both through the OPPS programme in Help the Aged and via Age Concern's collaboration with John Glasby's Birmingham University based work.

Our long held commitment to the involvement of older people in research is founded in the theoretical and moral case reinforced by the clear and substantial benefits that such involvement brings. These benefits are amply demonstrated in this guide, expertly edited and put together by Tine Buffel.

Age UK, both locally and nationally, continues to work with the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA) in the formal partnership that was signed in 2014. This has massive potential not only from the world-class research taking place in the University but also for the delivery of tangible benefits to older people, improving their quality of life, their independence and their influence on decisions made by government.

FOREWORD FROM AGE-FRIENDLY MANCHESTER

WHY INVOLVE OLDER PEOPLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES?

Paul McGarry
Senior Strategy Manager Age-Friendly Manchester, Manchester City Council

There are well-known and important debates about how public agencies 'involve', 'engage', 'consult', and (more recently) 'co-produce' policies, services and neighbourhoods with local people.

These debates can help us to think about the nature of the power relationships at play in our work, and the extent to which taking different approaches can lead to different outcomes for communities and the public agencies that service them. And of course whilst these debates are not new, they are constantly being revised and updated, taking place in new circumstances, led by new social actors with new priorities. So this pioneering study, led by the University of Manchester with the support of Manchester City Council and the people of Whalley Range, Chorlton and Chorlton Park, should be seen as an innovative contribution, not only to how we create age-friendly places, but more generally to the relationship between researchers, public agencies and local communities.

Public agencies are facing challenging times, not least the large city authorities, who have faced significant budget reductions, often leading to hard-pressed departments finding it difficult to do what would appear instinctively right: to use a range of techniques to capture the views of different groups of older – and younger – people, when setting out on something as grand and ambitious as making cities age-friendly. This against a background of consultation which has tended to focus on what services to withdraw or reduce.

However, despite these challenges we continue to see the best public agencies investing their time and energy in working alongside communities to mutual benefit.

It is fitting to mention some examples from the WHO-affiliated UK Age-friendly city network. (Since 2010 Manchester has been a member of the WHO's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, taking a leading role in the establishment of the UK Age-friendly city Network). In Nottingham local residents have produced their own Older People's Charter, with the support of the city council, whilst in Belfast, an extensive period of work with local community organisations led to the first Age-friendly Belfast action plan. In Leeds, Brighton, Edinburgh and Newcastle, older people play leading roles in inspirational local programmes. There are many other examples to explore on the WHO's Age-friendly World website agefriendlyworld.org.

In Manchester, from day one, the Age-Friendly Manchester (AFM) team has seen our programme as being a joint enterprise. You can influence, lead, or just make a good point at a meeting right across AFM activities. Here are a few local examples:

- AFM Older People's Board: has met every six weeks for over a decade, holding city agencies to account for their plans and policies.
- Older People sit on all of the AFM key groups and are supported to play an active role in decision-making.
- AFM Older People's Forum meets twice a year bringing together 100 community groups.
- AFM Culture Champions link communities and the city's culture, arts and heritage organisations.
- AFM Small Grants reward community groups looking to make a difference for older people.
- AFM Networks give people a say in their local AFM work.
- AFM Design group draws on the experience of older architects and designers.
- The Age-Friendly Old Moat research project funded by Southway Housing, works with a group of resident 'champions'.

IN THE CONTEXT OF ALL THIS WORK WHAT WOULD BE MY TOP FOUR REASONS FOR INVOLVING OLDER PEOPLE IN AGE-FRIENDLY MANCHESTER PROJECTS?

- Knowledge and expertise: I am constantly amazed – although I shouldn't be – by the fascinating life experiences, skills and expertise that local people bring to AFM neighbourhood projects. There's always someone around who can sort 'it' out.
- Neighbourhood longevity: older people tend to live in their neighbourhoods for a long time and they know where things and people are. And newcomers give a fresh perspective too.
- Trust and commitment: people trust information from those they know and local AFM champions makes projects more effective and dynamic. The commitment of older people to transform their communities, and often their own lives, is a rich seam of energy for any AFM project.
- It's about me and better for everyone: I don't want to get involved in the debates about 'what's good for older people is good for the whole community' here (but I think it's more complicated than that). However I would argue that a vibrant AFM project, promoting local voices, working across agencies, challenging ageism and making the neighbourhood a better place to live has got to be good for everyone.

I hope you enjoy reading this guide as much as I have and I hope it inspires you to take action in whatever community or organisation you are active in to work to make it more age-friendly.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

Tine Buffel
Marie Curie Fellow, the University of Manchester
Visiting professor in Educational Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

This guide evaluates the participatory dimension of a study that explored the age-friendliness of three wards in the city of Manchester. The purpose of the study was to examine opportunities and constraints for older people living in urban environments with a view to improving their experience of living in the city. It builds on policy priorities in the context of Manchester City Council being an active member of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities. Such cities are defined as encouraging 'active ageing in order to enhance quality of life as people age' (2007:12).

The project builds on a key principle developed by the WHO: the idea of prioritising the role of older people in developing research and action plans to improve the 'age-friendliness' of their neighbourhood.

The guide follows the experiences of older people as they step beyond the traditional role of consultee to that of interviewer and researcher. In this project older people not only participated in research but also were themselves the researchers. Through collaborative work with community organisations, a diverse group of 18 older residents were trained to become co-investigators[1] in the project. They have played a key role in all stages of the research, including the planning, design, execution and implementation phases.

Training sessions focused on designing interview questions, data collection and sharing/translating findings. The co-researchers conducted 68 in-depth interviews with 'hard-to-reach' older people (e.g. those experiencing social exclusion, isolation, poverty, restricted mobility or health problems) about their needs to age well in the community. They also worked together with local community organisations and key stakeholders to develop actions and strategies for social change on the basis of the research findings.

The focus of this participatory guide is on the experiences of those involved as co-investigators in the research project. The research process itself is therefore the focus, rather than the research findings and outcomes, which will be reported elsewhere. It is an account of learning by doing (Clough et al., 2006): of discovering what participatory research is, and of mutual learning between professional researchers, community organisations and older people acting as co-researchers. Building on the co-researchers' experiences of being involved in this project, it will provide new insights into the required conditions, opportunities and challenges of working with older people in developing research and action plans.

This guide will be of interest to:

- Local and (inter)national organisations wishing to research and provide advocacy to older people
- Non-government organisations and government departments seeking to research older people's experiences of living in the city to further the development of ageing policies
- Urban planners interested in designing age-friendly environments
- Researchers wishing to learn more about the opportunities and challenges of involving older people as actors in research
- Researchers and students interested in the issue of developing age-friendly communities
- Older people and older people's organisations interested in the potential and challenges of being involved in research

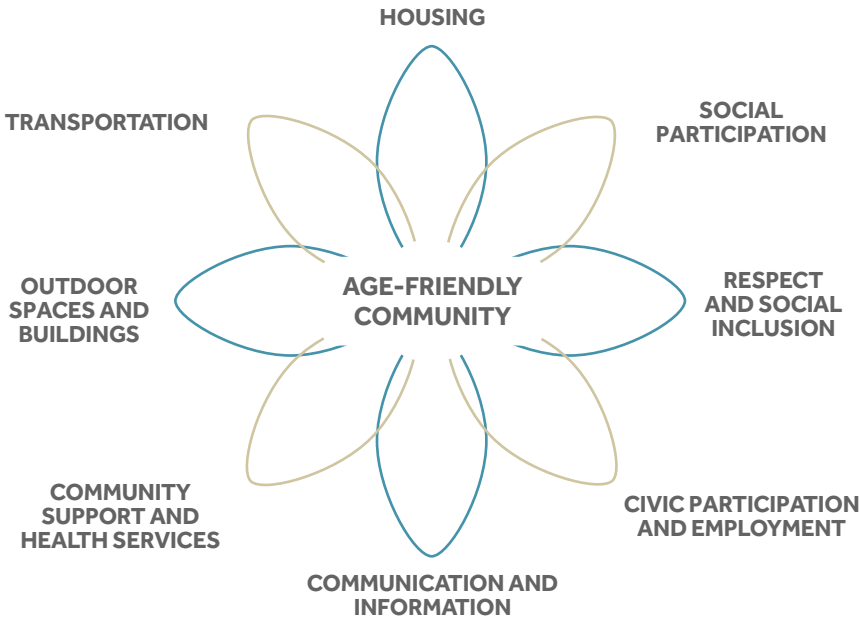
[1] The term 'co-investigator' or 'co-researcher' in this guide is used as shorthand for residents in the research neighbourhoods who were not academic researchers in their work life, and who developed their research skills in older age

AN INTRODUCTION TO AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Chris Phillipson
Professor of Sociology and Social Gerontology
Executive Director Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA), The University of Manchester

Developing what has been termed 'age-friendly' communities has become a key issue driving policies aimed at older people[2] . City regions of the UK will need to plan ahead for ageing populations with more people living into their 80s, 90s and beyond. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2002) defines an age-friendly city as one that is: '...an inclusive and accessible urban environment that promotes active ageing...In practical terms, an age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities'. The WHO (2002) has illustrated the key dimensions of an age-friendly environment in the form of the following diagram (Figure 1).

Figure One: The eight domains of an Age-Friendly Community



The WHO approach provides a helpful framework for developing initiatives. Age-friendly neighbourhoods are a crucial resource for improving the lives of older people. At least 80 per cent of the time of those aged 70 and over is spent in the home and the surrounding area. Older people are also likely to have spent a significant part of their life in their current home and neighbourhood. Communities can be a major asset for improving the quality of daily life, but they may also contribute to some of the vulnerabilities associated with old age.

In countries like the UK, the majority of older people live in cities and suburbs and these may be experienced as 'unfriendly' for a variety of reasons. Cities have to meet the needs of both long-term residents as well as those who are highly mobile (e.g. students, young professionals). The two groups may, however, have different degrees of commitment and contrasting views about how neighbourhoods should develop. The loss of resources such as banks, post offices and corner shops is a serious problem for many communities. Older residents may be particularly vulnerable to these changes – especially people with limited mobility and those who rely on facilities within easy reach. The fear of being a victim of crime may also be an issue, with older people feeling unsafe about moving around their neighbourhood at particular times of the day or night.

Urban environments can, however, bring many advantages to older people: cities have a host of resources and facilities vital for improving wellbeing (e.g. museums, libraries, art galleries); they provide access to specialist resources and facilities; and they link people to a variety of social networks. However, realising the potential of age-friendly cities will require major initiatives at national and local government level – across all of the major dimensions identified by the WHO. Such work though will not itself deliver age-friendly environments without the direct involvement of older people themselves: hence, the importance of the work undertaken by Tine Buffel, Rebecca Bromley and their team of co-researchers.

[2] For a more detailed discussion on Age-Friendly Communities see Buffel, T., Phillipson, C. and Scharf, T. 2012. Ageing in Urban Environments: Developing Age-Friendly Cities. *Critical Social Policy*, 32(4), 597-617

The case for participatory work is at least twofold: first, identifying what we mean by 'age-friendly' is not straightforward, and older people – as the guide emphasises – really are the best group for reporting on the benefits as well as the frustrations experienced through living in a particular area.

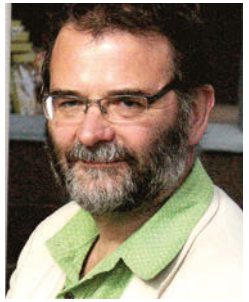
Second, whilst progress has been made in identifying some key policies for age-friendly work, there has been much less success in terms of making older people themselves central to the creation and development of policies.

So new ideas and methodologies are needed and the work described in this participatory guide represents a major step forward in developing policies and strategies for improving the lives of older people living in urban neighbourhoods. The guide provides a detailed account of the steps necessary to implement 'participatory' research – and a sense of the benefits and challenges, as well as the hard work which this involves.

In conclusion, this perspective will be invaluable for those seeking to undertake similar projects, framed by an 'insider' account from the co-researchers themselves: about what 'age-friendly' means; the motivations in becoming a co-researcher; advantages and disadvantages of the role; the skills and knowledge acquired; and, crucially, lessons learned about what an age-friendly community might look like.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Julie Asumu is one of the co-researchers in the project on developing age-friendly neighbourhoods. She is seventy years old and has been widowed for the past nine years. Julie was born and bred in Nigeria where she received her early education. She came to the UK in the early nineties to support her children in caring for her grandchildren. She has been volunteering since 2008 after retiring from her position as a community and social worker supporting families.



Roger Bysouth, one of the male co-researchers in the age-friendly neighbourhood project, is a fifty-eight year old, married Whalley Range resident who has worked on older people's issues in the City of Manchester for the past ten years. He is a semi-retired local government worker who has been involved in a number of community groups in Manchester.

Angela Downing is a sixty-six year old married woman who lives in Whalley Range, Manchester. She is a co-researcher in the age-friendly neighbourhood study. Before retirement, Angela was a psychiatric social worker with Manchester City Council for over thirty years and a lecturer in mental health social work at Manchester University for seven years. She has been active in the community from a young age.

Joan Gem is a seventy-one year old Whalley Range resident and a co-researcher in the age-friendly neighbourhood study. She worked as a clinical podiatrist in the NHS for forty-three years. When she retired six years ago, she took up several voluntary activities, including a role as an event organiser in the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester.

Tony Goulding is a sixty year old British man with Irish heritage who was born and raised in Chorlton-Cum-Hardy, Manchester. Before retirement he worked in a restaurant in Chorlton, where he was well-known for the children's parties he organised as part of his role. For the last couple of years he has been working as a volunteer in a charity shop and in the community garden of Chorlton Good Neighbours, a neighbourhood care group. He is also one of the co-researchers in the age-friendly neighbourhood project.

Freddi Greenmantle, a sixty-three year old woman living in Whalley Range, is one of the co-researchers in the age-friendly project. She describes herself as a 'retired primary schoolteacher, artist, poet, writer, singer, mother, and disabled woman of the world'. She lives in sheltered housing, mainly because of her disability needs. She is happy to be retired and able to take on new challenges and fulfil goals that she never had time for before, being a full-time working single parent for eighteen years.

Raj Kaur, a fifty-nine year old woman, describes herself as 'a British born and bred Sikh woman'. She participated in the age-friendly project as a co-researcher, and has interviewed a range of Asian older women in Whalley Range, Chorlton and Chorlton park. She used to work as a youth and community worker, supporting the employment and training and language needs of the Somali, Indian, Pakistani and Sikh community. Together with her husband, she also worked with the Gita Bavan Hindu Temple supporting older people in the Hindu community.

Mary O'Mahony is a sixty-five year old woman with Irish roots who lives in Chorlton with her partner. She has three adult children. Mary spent over 20 years running Busy Bee Toy Service trying to provide good quality toys at reasonable prices. She has had secondary breast cancer for the last 10 years but still takes part in many local groups, including an international folk dance group, Manchester Community Choir, Flower Lovers Guild and Chorlton Good Neighbours, a local care group working older people. It is through her engagement with Chorlton Good Neighbours that she became involved in the age-friendly research project.

Daljit Singh is a sixty-two year old British man of Sikh heritage who has worked with the Somali, Indian, Pakistani and Sikh community across different neighbourhoods in Manchester. He is also conducting a PhD at the University of Manchester looking at the dynamics of power relationships in the five Gurdwaras based in Manchester. As a co-researcher involved in this project he interviewed several older Asian people living in the research neighbourhoods.

Robert Page is one of the co-researchers in the age-friendly project. He is fifty-nine years old and has lived in Chorlton for most of his life. He is an out of work chartered civil engineer, specialising in civil aspects of clean water transfer, water treatment, waste-water treatment and sewerage and drainage. As a co-researcher he interviewed several older residents living in the Chorlton and Chorlton Park ward.

Elaine Unegbu is a seventy-four year old co-researcher who lives in Whalley Range. She is originally from the island of Aruba, off the coast of South America, in an area known as the Netherlands Antilles. She was trained as a nurse in the Netherlands and worked in Nigeria, the Netherlands and England. When she became widowed 28 years ago she moved to South Manchester. Her children and grandchildren live in close proximity to her. Before she retired she was involved in a range of volunteering projects in Manchester including Patient and Public involvement forums/boards. She has also been very committed to working with older people, and she is an elected member of the Age-Friendly Manchester Board, an initiative managed by the City Council.

Bill Williams is a fifty-eight year old man who volunteered to be a co-researcher in the Age-friendly research project. He is a resident of Whalley Range and has been a community activist for twenty years. He is currently the chair of a local resident association and the Whalley Range community forum, which is a representative organisation for all residents of Whalley Range.

Helen Hibberd is the coordinator of Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group, a neighbourhood care group, funded by Manchester City Council, and operating in the local wards of Chorlton, Chorlton Park and Whalley Range. Chorlton Good Neighbours supports older people through a range of services and activities and has around 250 users and 70 volunteers. Helen's support to the age-friendly research has been crucial to the development of the project. She helped to recruit older co-researchers, welcomed the researchers at many of the group's activities, gave access and supported the co-researchers to interview local older residents during coffee mornings, etc.

Chris Ricard is a community development worker in Whalley Range, working with residents of all ages. She promotes local groups and initiatives; gets information out via newsletters and bulletins; and organises a range of community events, including the volunteer-led community festival. She is also involved in setting up a Learning Hub and Health & Wellbeing activities at the Youth and Community Centre JNR8, and leads the Age-Friendly Whalley Range project, working with older residents.

Chris was involved in the age-friendly research from the very beginning. She is part of the steering group overseeing the research, and has been extremely helpful in mobilising people for the project and in recruiting older co-researchers. She also organised a number of community events where (co-)researchers had the opportunity to discuss preliminary research findings from the project with a range of community stakeholders.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH TEAM

Dr. Tine Buffel is the principal investigator of this research project. She is a Marie Curie Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester, and linked to the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA). She is also a visiting professor at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Her particular focus concerns social issues associated with ageing populations. She has been especially interested in studying questions relating to neighbourhood and community life; the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion; the impact of cities on older people and vice versa; the development of age-friendly communities and the relationship between ageing and migration.

Rebecca Bromley is a Project Officer working with the research team. Rebecca worked on the project part time to coordinate the collaboration with the City Council's Age-friendly Manchester team until April 2015, managing the Age-friendly Whalley Range project, planning and coordinating community research/age-friendly events and working as a partnership officer for the research project, promoting the research through the Age-friendly Manchester programme to a wide range of partners. Rebecca is continuing to work on the research project through MICRA, and also with the Age-friendly Whalley Range project who are currently looking at formally constituting the group to build on the work of their group over last two years, including the development of age-friendly community initiatives and findings from this research project.

Chris Phillipson is Professor of Sociology and Social Gerontology at the University of Manchester and the executive director of the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA). He has a particular interest in understanding the relationship between population ageing and urbanisation. He has undertaken a variety of research projects with colleagues focusing on social exclusion in later life, transnational migration, and the impact of globalisation on older people.

HOW TO READ THIS PARTICIPATORY GUIDE

This participatory guide tells the story of older people who have been involved as co-investigators in a study aimed at developing age-friendly neighbourhoods in Manchester. It offers thoughts, practical tips, and critical reflections to inspire ways of rethinking how older people can be involved in research and social action to improve the physical and social environment of their neighbourhood. It uses a case study that was carried out between September 2013 and April 2015 in three contrasting neighbourhoods in the city of Manchester: Whalley Range, Chorlton and Chorlton Park. The study was developed in partnership with the Age-friendly Manchester team at Manchester City Council, a number of community organisations across the three wards, and older people themselves.

The next section describes the aim of the study. This is followed by a description of the methodology of the research and the involvement of co-researchers in the research process. The study uses an ethnographic and participatory approach, covering a range of methods, including participant observation, focus groups, participatory mapping, in-depth interviews and participatory learning and action. Using data collected in several reflection meetings, and written contributions by the co-researchers, the guide reviews:

- What 'age-friendly' means
- The co-researchers' motivations to participate in the study
- The advantages and challenges of involving older residents as co-investigators
- The skills and knowledge acquired through the project
- The key findings and lessons to be learned
- Suggestions for improvements to the age-friendliness of neighbourhoods

The conclusion considers the experiences of older co-researchers within the wider context of policy development around age-friendly environments.

Role of the Age-Friendly Steering Group

The lay advisory committee, also referred to as the **Age-Friendly Steering Group**, consisted of eight local older residents and community stakeholders living and working in the research areas. The Steering Group was brought together primarily by collaboration with the local age-friendly networks and projects, namely the Age-friendly Whalley Range project managed by Rebecca Bromley. Additional members have also joined at a later date. Through these groups and networks, the research project has been directly linked to ongoing developments in the local areas, and the citywide Age-friendly Manchester programme. Supported by a community development worker from Whalley Range Community Forum, the Age-Friendly Steering Group met once every six weeks. The aim of the steering group was to inform and advise on all phases of the research process; to promote the project; to identify and recruit potential co-researchers and participants; to reflect on the findings of the research; to identify possible solutions and partners; to co-develop dissemination plans; and to co-organise community events and workshops bringing together different community stakeholders.

Focus groups with community stakeholders and older residents: Using local knowledge

Together with the members of the Age-Friendly Steering Group, **14 focus groups were organised with both community stakeholders** (local organisations, service providers, local businesses, housing associations, neighbourhood groups, voluntary organisations, care groups) **and older residents** across the three research neighbourhoods. A focus group is a group of individuals (usually 6-10 people), brought together by a moderator (i.e. the researcher in this case) who have a discussion about a focused issue, which gives information on how they think or feel about this topic (i.e. the 'age-(un)friendliness' of the neighbourhood). The purpose of these focus groups was threefold:

- To identify the issues older residents and community stakeholders themselves view as important in developing the age-friendliness of their neighbourhood
- To identify existing and potential opportunities, resources and barriers to developing the age-friendliness of the research areas

- To raise awareness about the purpose and objectives of the age-friendly work involving older co-researchers.

A total of 123 people participated in the focus groups. Community stakeholders were recruited through contacts with the locality projects and networks in the research areas, via leaflets and electronic notices, and additional dissemination through the citywide Age-friendly ebulletin. In addition to these methods, older participants were also recruited through contacts made through participant observation (i.e. the researcher's participation in and observation of ongoing activities in the neighbourhood) and snowball techniques (a technique whereby existing participants recruit future participants from among their acquaintances). In terms of the profile of the older participants, we found that residents who were socially active in the community and/or well connected were overrepresented in the focus groups. In contrast, older people from particular ethnic groups, older people living in social isolation, and those living in social housing and experiencing poverty were underrepresented. A need to include those, what we called 'more difficult-to-reach' older residents in the research was identified as a priority.

Recruitment of older people willing to become co-researchers

In the next phase of the research, the members of the Age-Friendly Steering Group recruited 18 older residents from different ethnic groups who were willing to become co-investigators in the research project. Recruitment took place through advertising and two information and recruitment events held in the local research areas. We used a volunteer profile for their recruitment: it was stipulated that co-researchers should have good communication skills; show a commitment for the full duration of the project; were capable of listening attentively; take responsibility; and have links with more vulnerable groups of older people in the neighbourhoods selected in the research. The co-researchers also took part in two training sessions organised by the University of Manchester. Co-researchers were insured through the University and received a £10 thank you voucher for their engagement in the project. They also received a Training Certificate from the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing after they had attended the training course.

Training of older people as co-researchers

The purpose of the training sessions was to ensure that every co-researcher had a thorough understanding of the different phases involved in conducting a participatory research project. The training gave an overview of the different parts of a research process, such as discussing the research purpose, questions, designing the data collection tools and interview questions, undertaking interviews, ethical issues (e.g. information sheets and consent forms), data analysis, sharing the findings, translating into practice and evaluating the impact. The training sessions were structured around these topics, but were interactive and flexible at the same time, following the pace and issues raised by the group. We discussed the Dos and Don'ts of conducting interviews on the basis of films showing examples of good and bad interview techniques. There was also time during the training sessions for practical exercises. For example, co-researchers interviewed one another in pairs, testing out the interview questions and practicing their interviewing skills. All training sessions took place in community centres in the neighbourhoods where the co-researchers live.

Interviews conducted by the co-researchers

The co-researchers conducted 68 interviews across the three neighbourhoods with 'hard-to-reach' older people (e.g. those experiencing social exclusion, isolation, poverty, health problems, restricted mobility) about their needs to age well in the community. During the training sessions, attention was given to design the research so that it was especially sensitive to the more marginalised voices in the community. Emphasis was placed on local community issues, but within the context of a larger pattern of inequality and social exclusion amongst particular groups of older people. Issues such as minimising cultural biases, sensitivity to racial and ethnic diversity, and asymmetric power within research relationships were discussed with the co-researchers in the training and follow-up sessions.

All 68 participants were recruited and interviewed by the co-researchers. Co-researchers recruited local older residents that they had identified as potential interviewees because of their individual circumstances. Specific efforts were made to recruit residents who did not regularly participate in this type of project, older people experiencing isolation, poverty and those with restricted mobility or health problems.

During introductions, co-researchers explained who they were; the purpose of the research; what the research activities would involve; how long the interview would take; what would be done with the information that is collected; and how the research findings will be shared with the community. Following the University of Manchester's regulations with regard to ethics and good research practice, each potential participant also received an information sheet summarising these points, which they could take away and use to come to an informed decision about participating in the interview. Respondents were free to withdraw from the interview at any time and were asked to sign a consent form. All interviews took place in the participant's home or in a location that was convenient to them.

In the training with the co-researchers it was emphasised that it was important not to create any false expectations amongst the participants. Co-researchers therefore explained to potential participants that the research activities would not result in immediate material benefits.

Rather, the project would attempt to influence policies and practices so that older people's views are taken into account.

The interview questions and topic guide used during the interviews were developed together with the co-researchers, and focused on a range of issues, including: residential histories; feelings about ageing in the neighbourhood; future plans/desires in terms of residential locations and housing; neighbourhood change; safety; daily activities; use of amenities and services; community support and health services; access to food; mobility and transportation; opportunities for social/cultural/political participation; communication and information; and ideas on how to improve the neighbourhood to age well. All interviews were transcribed word for word by a transcription service for analysis.

Reflection meetings with co-researchers

To date, the co-researchers have taken part in three reflection meetings: one after they had conducted their first two interviews; one follow-up session a few weeks after; and one participatory data analysis session. During the last reflection meeting, some of the co-researchers expressed their interest in being involved in the next steps of the data analysis, and the research team (academic researcher and co-researchers) organised an additional data analysis meeting for those willing to participate. Once the interviews have been analysed, another reflection meeting will take place to discuss how the findings can be presented and shared within the community. The purpose of these reflection meetings is to encourage interactive and joint learning through discussion, analysis and critical reflection.

In the first reflection meeting, which took place after the co-researchers had conducted their first two interviews, the strategies that were used to recruit participants and the challenges they faced in the recruitment process were discussed. Co-researchers exchanged ideas on how to overcome these barriers; discussed what worked and what didn't work in terms of the interview schedule; agreed on some changes; reflected on their role as a researcher; discussed the key findings from their interviews; noted any issues for follow-up or new issues for investigation; and discussed whether there were any issues that needed signposting. We also discussed the sample that we had achieved so far, and what

strategies we could use to achieve a maximum variation sample, reflecting the ethnic, economic and social diversity of the ageing population in the research areas. It was agreed that certain groups who weren't included in the sample at this point (this was especially the case for older people from particular ethnic groups), would be targeted to include in the second round of interviews.

The second reflection meeting was a follow up on the issues discussed in the first meeting. The achieved sample was discussed as well as the key findings arising from the interviews, such as the most important and surprising findings, the major similarities and differences in viewpoints, the possible reasons for these, and the implications of the findings.

The purpose of the third reflection meeting, a participatory data analysis session, was to develop a joint framework for the interpretation of the qualitative data. The different steps of qualitative data analysis were discussed: first, immersion in the data (read, read, read the transcripts); second, coding the data (organising the data by assigning tags or labels to segments of text); third, developing and applying the code structure; fourth, use a coding structure for descriptive analysis of the data; and fifth, conduct a secondary order analysis (notice patterns in the data and identify respondent clusters).

Two different types of codes were used during the data analysis session: prior codes that the group had identified on the basis of the theoretical framework of age-friendly cities (for example, 'social networks', 'mobility', 'housing', 'transportation', 'ageism', 'meeting places', 'services', etc.), and emerging codes, i.e. ground-up codes that are identified from the data during analysis and given a label or code that describes them as they are examined. In the data analysis meeting, the research team (academic researcher and co-researchers) collectively read an interview transcript, and continued to work in pairs to assign codes (either prior or emerging codes) to particular segments of text (paragraphs, sentences or words).

As a next step, the codes were discussed and negotiated by the research team and the transcript was re-coded collaboratively while paying attention to the different interpretations of the researchers.

Throughout the data analysis meeting, we engaged in a process of comparing perspectives, actively listening, contributing and making notice of the subtle differences between the different points of view.

The coding list, consisting of the prior and newly developed (emerging) themes, that was developed collaboratively in the reflection meeting will be used and refined by the research team for further analysis of the data. Another reflection meeting is planned with those co-researchers who are willing to be involved in the next steps of data analysis. In this next meeting, we will also think about how we can effectively disseminate the findings to the people and organisations we want to influence, and how the findings can be presented and shared with different groups, and, most importantly, how older people will take part in this process.

Community events

Throughout the research process, several public engagement activities were undertaken at community events across the three research areas. Examples of such events include: winter warm events, history group meetings, coffee mornings, social gatherings and neighbourhood festivals. The research process and preliminary findings were presented at these events by members of the Age-Friendly Steering Group to increase awareness about the project and to strengthen links between the project (co-)researchers and community organisations in the research neighbourhoods.

There are also plans to hold a dissemination workshop in each of the research areas. The workshop will bring together different stakeholders (e.g. older residents, local government departments, voluntary organisations, health and care services, architects and urban planners, fire services, police, local businesses) to: reflect on the research findings and their activities in relation to older people; discuss how they can work together; secure commitments to specific actions by representatives of participating organisations; and identify indicators to monitor impact of these actions. The co-researchers and the Age-Friendly Steering Group are involved in the organisation of these events and will present the research findings alongside the research team. Together with the co-researchers, summary leaflets presenting the key research findings will be developed and distributed throughout the community.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- Participant observation in specific places in the research areas (parks, pubs, local shops, bus stops) and key community meetings and events
- 15 semi-structured interviews with city-wide key informants about the age-friendly approach in Manchester
- Participatory mapping exercises with attendees of community events to identify local opportunities and challenges in terms of developing the age-friendliness of the research areas
- 14 focus groups with a total of 123 representatives of community organisations and older residents across the three neighbourhoods
- 3 training sessions for older people to become co-researchers
- 68 semi-structured interviews with 'hard-to-reach' older people conducted by the co-researchers
- 3 reflection meetings with the co-researchers (with further meetings planned)
- Co-development of summary leaflets presenting key findings with co-researchers
- 3 dissemination workshops (planned) bringing together older people, community organisations and different stakeholders.

Key stages in a participatory research process

The participatory research process in this project involved recurrent stages of Action and Reflection. There was no blueprint for must-have methods or steps to go through; all stages were developed collaboratively with members of the Research Advisory Board, the Age-Friendly Steering Group and the older co-researchers. What follows is an overview of the different stages of Action and Reflection and activities that were undertaken as part of the participatory research process.

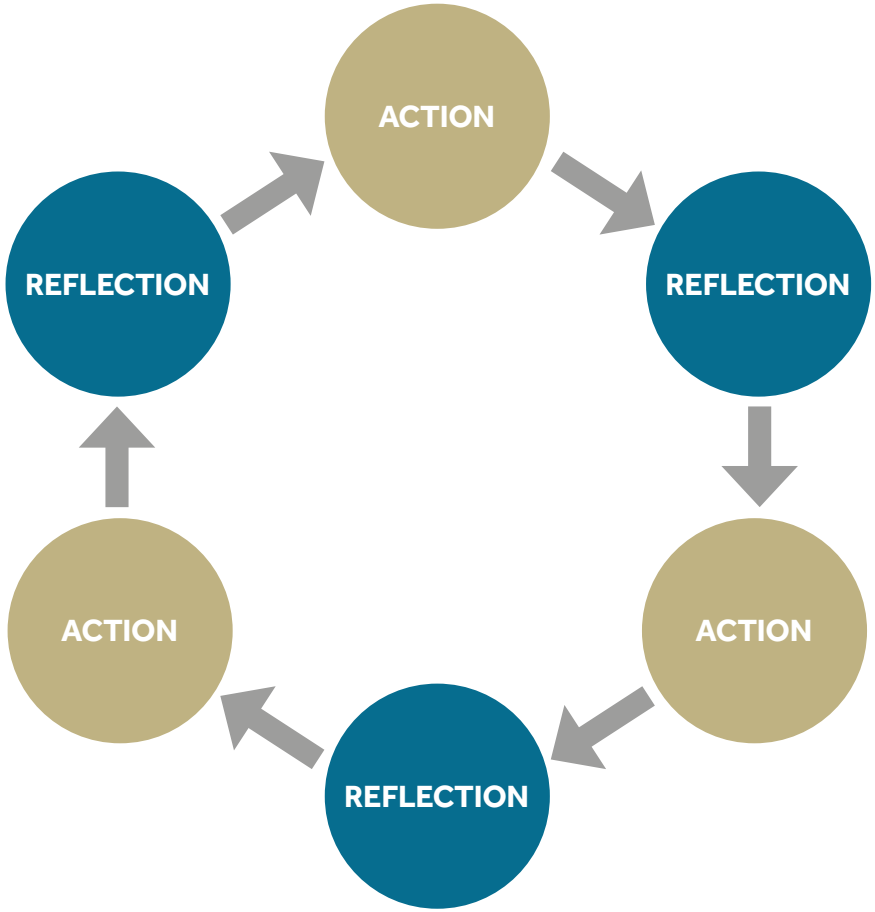


Figure 2. Key Stages in a Participatory Research process (adapted from Kindon et al., 2007)

PHASE ACTIVITIES

Reflection

On research process

- Planning and design of the study
- Preparation of ethical approval forms
- Planning of the knowledge construction process

Action

Establishment of a research advisory board (RAB) (including a variety of perspectives: from policy, academia, community work and older residents). The role of the RAB was to:

- Provide a critical mass and sounding board for the development and planning of the research project
- Identify opportunities in relation to the impact and sustainability of the project

Reflection

Literature review

- Focus on age-friendly communities
- Focus on participatory research approaches

Action

Interviews with city-wide key informants (n=15) (including academics, policy-makers, urban planners, community workers)

- To understand the City's approach to age-friendliness, ageing issues and inequality
- To explore the opportunities, resources and challenges encountered to develop age-friendly neighbourhoods

Reflection

Analysis of interviews with city-wide key informants

- Development of a framework on the basis of literature review and interview findings
- Identification of criteria relevant to the selection of research neighbourhoods

Action

Selection of three contrasting research neighbourhoods

- Analysis of census data at ward-level
- Creation of statistical summaries of research areas on the basis of socio-demographic characteristics, area deprivation, health indicators, ethnicity, etc.

Reflection

Preparation of fieldwork: participant observation

- Identification of key places, meetings and events for participant observation in research areas
- Refinement of research questions and development of a list of things to which attention should be paid

Action

Participant observation in research neighbourhoods

- Increasing understanding of contexts, culture, key actors, (power) relationships and behaviours
- Building relationships with key informants
- Collecting information that is crucial for developing the participatory dimension of the project design

Reflection

On research design and participatory process

- Identification of people who can be approached to form a lay advisory committee that oversees and advises on the development of the research in each of the research areas (i.e. people who have knowledge, contacts, are active in the field, can benefit from the project, are engaged in similar activities)

Action

Establish relationships and form a lay advisory committee ("the Age-Friendly Steering Group")

- Bring together a mixed group of people, including older residents, representatives of local community organisations, local councillors etc. who are willing to oversee and advise on the development of the project
- Stress the innovative character of the project, the benefits of participation, and its potential impact

Reflection

Collaborative design of the research process with members of the Age-Friendly Steering Group

- Discussion about research questions; get commitment for participation; identify roles and responsibilities; agree on research purpose
- Identification of potential co-researchers and development of recruitment strategies
- Identification of potential participants (older residents and community stakeholders) focus groups

Action

Organisation and conduct of focus groups with older residents and community stakeholders (14 focus groups with a total of 123 participants across the three research neighbourhoods)

- Identification of constraints and opportunities for older people in the research neighbourhoods
- Identification of the issues older residents and local stakeholders view as important regarding the development of the research
- Identification of potential co-researchers who are willing to be trained and develop the next stage of the research

Reflection

Collaborative data analysis of focus groups with members of the Age-Friendly Steering Group

- Identification of themes which need further exploration through in-depth interviews
- Identification of groups of older people who live in the neighbourhood but were not represented in the focus groups (these were: elders experiencing severe poverty, isolation, exclusion, restricted mobility and older people from certain ethnic groups)

Action

Delivery of training to co-researchers

- Focus on research process, developing research materials, fieldwork conduct, ethical issues, interviewing skills, data analysis, translating research findings into action
- Special attention to recruiting hard-to-reach older people (especially those who were underrepresented in the focus groups)

Reflection

Reflection meeting with co-researchers

- Collaborative refinement of research materials with co-researchers (interview schedules, participatory mapping exercise)

Action

Work together to implement research process and undertake data collection

- Co-researchers conducted 68 in depth interviews with hard-to-reach older people
- Participatory mapping exercises with older residents at community events: identification of resources and constraints in the neighbourhoods

Reflection

Reflection meeting and collaborative analysis of information gathered

- Collaborative development of a coding list for qualitative data analysis
- Discussion about the interview process and whether there are any issues that need signposting
- Evaluation of sample and assessment of need for further research (e.g. accessing particular groups)

Action

Work together to fill remaining gaps in data collection

- Focus on recruiting and interviewing older people who were under-represented in the sample so that a maximum variation sample could be achieved
- Plan research-informed action which may include feedback to participants and influential others
- Community events

Reflection

Reflection meeting with co-researchers

- Collaborative analysis of information gathered
- Evaluation of the process as a whole
- Planning of community/dissemination events, collaboratively develop a dissemination strategy (deciding who we want to influence; how we will present the findings; how older residents will take part)
- Planning of collaborative writing sessions: preparation of a briefing including action priorities for the City's age-friendly programme; planning of this participatory guide

Action

Collaborative dissemination of research findings at community events and key ward meetings

- Collaborative presentations about the research
- Discussion groups with community stakeholders and policy-makers: reflect on research findings; secure commitments to specific actions by representatives of participating organisations

Reflection

Reflection meeting with co-researchers and Age-friendly steering group

- Identify options for future participatory research and action with or without researchers (taskforces)
- Identify indicators to monitor impact of actions

Action

Formalisation of steering group

- Members of the steering group have decided to formalise themselves as a group that can apply for funding for age-friendly initiatives

Reflection

Next steps will include:

- Monitoring and evaluating progress and outcomes
- Ensuring the sustainability of the group of co-researchers

Action

Possible future actions will include:

- Monitoring of existing activities and development of new activities
- Follow up study in the research neighbourhoods
- Replication of study in other areas

OLDER PEOPLE AS CO-RESEARCHERS: THEIR STORY

What follows are the stories of the co-researchers and community workers who have been involved in the planning, development, execution, and implementation of the research. Using data collected in three reflection meetings, and written contributions by the co-researchers and community workers involved in the research process, we review:

- What 'age-friendly' means
- The co-researchers' motivations to participate in the study
- The advantages and challenges of involving older residents as co-researchers
- The skills and knowledge acquired through the project
- The key findings and lessons to be learned
- Suggestions for low-cost improvements to the age-friendliness of neighbourhoods

The next sections present verbatim quotes and extracts from the co-researchers and community workers involved in the study. Twelve co-researchers and three community workers have agreed to be mentioned by name (see page 18 'About the contributors'). Other quotes will be anonymised and pseudonyms will be used for the participants in the study.

1 'AGE-FRIENDLY' MEANS...

1

‘AGE-FRIENDLY’ MEANS...

The ‘age-friendly’ idea is rooted in the WHO conceptualisation of age-friendly cities (WHO, 2007), with age-friendliness broadly defined in terms of a range of domains, such as housing, transportation, health care services and community support, public spaces, and communication and information. The WHO’s definition builds on previous work and initiatives around active ageing, including features that promote independence, health, safety and quality of life among ageing populations (WHO, 2002).

However, identifying what we mean by ‘age-friendly’ is not straightforward, and older people – as this guide emphasises – really are the best group for reporting on the opportunities and challenges experienced through living in a particular area.

Older people and community workers were asked to reflect upon the question what ‘age-friendly’ means to them, and how this issue relates to their neighbourhood.

Presented below are extracts from the co-researchers and stakeholders about the meaning of an age-friendly neighbourhood:

> “Age-friendly to me means a society or community that has the right ethos, services and structures to allow me and other people of my age group to live safely, be able to enjoy good health and stay involved. Age-friendly to me is **being recognised, understood, respected and protected by the community I live in, and not forgotten.**”
>
> 68 year old woman, co-researcher

> “To me, age-friendly would involve **good public transport, toilets in or near the local shops, and local activities in schools, libraries or church halls which are informal and regular.**”
>
> Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

“An example of age-friendliness in my community is having **safe, reliable and affordable community transport links** that allow me to live my life, such as having a bus service to get to hospital appointments.”

68 year old woman, co-researcher

“Age-friendly to me means literally, a kind and compassionate consideration for older people, with respect and care for their needs. We are seen by some as a “nuisance”, or a drain on society, and that is so wrong. We are the ones who worked hard, paid our taxes, and helped to create the world we all share now. **We have a right to be treated with respect, and compassion in our later life, and we have a wealth of skills, knowledge and experience we can share that would continue to improve this city.**”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“Age-friendly to me means **ageing along with other members of the same community, coming together to support each other, share experiences and skills, and respecting each others’ needs.**”

Julie Asumu, 70 years old co-researcher

“**I think that many of the things that make Chorlton and Manchester age-friendly are necessary whatever age we are.** For example, pavements need to be suitable for shopping trollies, wheelchairs and babies’ buggies. Roads need to be safe for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians. We all should be able to use toilets and seats in shopping areas... sixty to a hundred years is a wide age group and an increasingly large percentage of our society. All people should be treated with respect and truly consulted on major changes that might impact on their lives.”

Mary O’Mahony, 65 years old co-researcher

“**Generally speaking my own area is age-friendly although it could be better.** Neighbours in my area are temporary with young professionals renting for short durations keeping themselves to themselves without regard for next door. The state of the footpaths for walking on are a patchwork of sub-standard utility repairs, regular skips left on the road, wheelie bins not taken in after collection and litter and debris in the street. Inconsiderate parking of vehicles, such as on footpaths, can be a real problem at specific locations.”

Robert Page, 59 years old co-researcher

“**Age-friendly to me means making our City a ‘great place to grow old’ which will benefit all residents of Manchester**. Some examples include: making buses more accessible and the inclusion of age-friendly principles in the design of one of Manchester’s oldest park, Alexandra Park. Through the Age-Friendly Manchester Board, older people are also involved in developing studies on ageing in partnership with the University of Manchester, Keele University and Manchester City Council.”

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

“**To me age-friendly means ensuring that older people are able to participate without barriers that can lead to isolation** - so it’s about accessibility in terms of transport, design of buildings and public places, access to information and to social activities. It’s also about recognising the current and historical contributions of older people: **valuing all ages equally – but also ensuring that older people’s experiences and knowledge are taken into account.**”

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

“Age-friendly to me is to **show respect to those in their twilight years; to listen to the older people’s views in a thoughtful and attentive manner;** and to avoid using challenging and abrasive comments when the elderly speak from their life experience.”

Raj Kaur, 59 year old co-researcher

2 MOTIVATIONS TO BECOME INVOLVED AS A CO-RESEARCHER

2

MOTIVATIONS TO BECOME INVOLVED AS A CO-RESEARCHER

Co-researchers and community stakeholders were asked to reflect upon their motivations to become involved in the project. Different reasons to participate in the project were mentioned, including:

- The project has clear, agreed and socially relevant objectives
- Co-researchers can shape the project and be involved in every step of the research
- The project provides an opportunity to take part in a 'hands-on' training course and to develop new and improve existing skills
- Co-researchers can positively contribute to enhancing the quality of life of older people and improving their own neighbourhood
- The project relates to everyday concerns in the co-researcher's own neighbourhood
- The project provides an opportunity to shape future thinking around ageing and older people's role in society
- The project's aim is to inform local policy-making and age-friendly practice
- The project provides an opportunity to meet new people and develop links with people and organisations in the community
- Co-researchers feel that they can share experiences and skills that could benefit the project
- Co-researchers feel that the project provides an opportunity to continue or start voluntary roles in the neighbourhood
- The research project aligns with objectives of local community organisations to assess the needs of 'hard-to-reach' older residents in the community

- The project provides opportunities to link with city-wide age-friendly activities and initiatives and events at the University
- The project has a clear start and end date

What follows are extracts from co-researchers and community workers about their motivations to become involved in the project:

> "I volunteered to be a co-researcher after watching a presentation by the principal investigator on this project who highlighted the benefits of one-to-one contact with the older members of our community. Our organisations [local resident association and Whalley Range Community Forum] **have been seeking ways and means of engaging with older people, to assess their needs and to prevent their isolation in their homes.** Visiting people in the comfort of their homes makes them relaxed and confident to discuss and express their fears and concerns."
>
> Bill Williams, 58 year old co-researcher

> "I joined the research because there **was a defined project with an end product.**"
>
> Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

> "I got involved with this project through voluntary work – I am involved with Chorlton Good Neighbours. **What attracted me was that I still have a lot to give. I feel that through learning I can enhance the lives of others around me.** I wanted to see what other people of a similar age wanted, thought and felt and how this fitted with my views and feelings and how I could **help shape the future thinking regarding older people and their role in society.**"
>
> 68 year old woman, co-researcher

> "**I'm very interested in the issues as I get older myself and live in the neighbourhood.** I'm interested also as I was involved in (led) related work in East Manchester for several years. This meant **I felt I had some useful experience to contribute. I think the ideas are a very creative approach to improving communities**. And that older people can be a very vulnerable part of the community and age-friendly can insure against that."
>
> Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

> "I participated in this project because **I wanted to get a better understanding of how people feel about growing older, particularly those from ethnic minority communities**. I got immense enjoyment from being involved in this project, especially because I learned more about the in-depth experiences of life and community, and the different customs and traditions impacting older people."
>
> Daljit Singh, 62 year old co-researcher

"When I was invited to join this research team looking into older people's opinions of their neighbourhood, I felt excited and very keen to join in. When I moved in to 'sheltered' accommodation, I found myself living next to alcoholics, people suffering from varying amounts of dementia, anti-social people and isolated people. **It has made me keen to help people before they reach these difficult mental problems, and I have been thinking a lot about running workshops for people coming up to retirement, so that they can be inspired to think positively and creatively about their third age, before they fall ill.**"

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“I got involved because **I want to share my experience in ageing and to hear from others who are ageing. I want to know how they feel and what can be done better to make people age in a friendly manner.** I wanted to know how to put a research project together so I can perform better in future ageing projects. I also **wanted to improve my presentation and interview techniques** and know how and when to engage people to get the best out of them.”

Julie Asumu, 70 years old co-researcher

“I decided to participate as a co-researcher in this project to **make use of my free time and apply myself to helping older people in my neighbourhood**. It is satisfying to help, talk and to **make new friends**. It was also a chance to highlight my **input to the project on my CV**. ”

Robert Page, 59 year old co-researcher

“**I became involved because I like meeting people and asking questions and thought through the research we might make things better for older people.** Even though technically I am an older person I don’t think of myself as old.”

Mary O’Mahony, 65 year old co-researcher

“I have been involved in this project since the beginning and saw this as a challenge and an opportunity for me to **develop my research skills**. I have been involved in a project before as a researcher and know that with the right training and support, peer research can enable the interviewed person to be relaxed and open with their views.”

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

“**I thought this research project would be an opportunity to be involved in a special project that had a limited time line**. I also thought I was qualified to undertake interviews on an intimate level due to experience from my working life. I enjoyed being involved with research projects while at work and thought this was a good opportunity to participate in a local project.”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“**As a long-term resident of the area I am naturally interested in its development.** In another life I was a student of sociology so the idea of **conducting a piece of social research had a somewhat nostalgic appeal to me.**”

Tony Goulding, 60 year old co-researcher

“I value and enjoy working together with older people, we learn a lot from each other. Together we can influence the planning and development of services, locally and nationally. I welcomed the opportunity to learn from others in this project, and to learn new skills, and to have my contributions valued. **Together we can place older people at the heart of planning services and support that will enable older people to stay healthier for longer and enjoy a better quality of life.**”

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

“As a Community Development Worker I work with members of the community of all ages – and was able to promote this exciting research project via our mailing lists and networks. One aspect of my work is the Age-Friendly Whalley Range initiative in the area. The aims of the group include improving access to relevant information, addressing local and wider issues and priorities that older residents may have – and to bring people together to meet face to face. **This research project was a great opportunity to bring older residents together; many of the residents who took part in the training to become co-researchers were active in the community and part of our network**.

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

“I live locally and have been with Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group for over 30 years so have seen how older people's needs have changed. Fortunately the Care Group has adapted and evolved to meet those challenges. 25-30 years ago the service was very much focussed on practical services for older people such as shopping help, visiting, collecting prescriptions etc. Over time, with older people leading a more mobile and active life, **the need also for activities to keep everyone physically, socially and intellectually engaged has grown, so that we are now very much focussed on a preventative wellbeing agenda, keeping our local older people fitter and healthier and contented for as long as possible. Our involvement with the age-friendly researchers and agenda was quite intense and it was exciting to be a part of something new and specific to our area.**”

Helen Hibberd, coordinator Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group, Manchester

3 ADVANTAGES OF INVOLVING OLDER RESIDENTS AS CO-RESEARCHERS

3

ADVANTAGES OF INVOLVING OLDER RESIDENTS AS CO-RESEARCHERS

The participatory approach in this project is about radically rethinking who initiates and undertakes the research process, and who learns or benefits from the findings. Older people were trained to become co-researchers in this study. They played a key role in all stages of the research, including the planning, design, development and implementation phases. They also conducted 68 in-depth interviews with 'hard-to-reach' older people in the community. A number of challenges and opportunities can be identified in relation to such an approach. Advantages are linked with the project's participatory research process, opportunities for counteracting ageist attitudes, and a range of social and individual benefits.

Advantages of involving older residents as co-researchers:

Facilitation of the participatory research process

- It generates a sense of 'ownership' of the research which stimulates the participation and advocacy of older citizens
- Older co-researchers have extensive knowledge about ageing themselves, and can help shape the research design and provide valuable learning
- Older co-researchers greatly assist with the recruitment of hard-to-reach research participants, providing opportunities to get some of the most 'unheard' voices heard and elicited to shape plans and contribute to age-friendly developments
- Older residents who act as co-researchers are able to develop relationships of trust, rapport and empathy with older interviewees
- Supportive and relaxed interview situations with peers enhance high quality data
- It provides opportunities for science, policy, practice and older people to meet, interact and develop an understanding of each other

Counteracting ageism

- It counteracts stereotypes of older people by emphasising and making their involvement and participation visible
- It builds on the local knowledge and years of experience older people have accumulated through their own ageing in their neighbourhood
- It demonstrates the central role older people can play in the creation and development of policies and practices

Social benefits

- It provides opportunities to signpost older people to services and activities in line with their needs
- It has a strong empowering dimension and actively engages with diverse groups of people
- It is collaborative at every stage, involving discussion, learning, pooling skills and resources and working together
- It builds on existing, and generates new, knowledge, skills and relationships among community residents and stakeholders
- The involvement of older people and community stakeholders in research is seen as an incentive for organisations to disseminate the research findings and improve their practices
- It involves opportunities for a sustainable involvement of older people beyond funded time frames and during gaps in external funding
- It takes the age-friendly agenda forward, by working around particular actions, changes and improvements on the basis of the research findings

Individual benefits (co-)researchers

- (Co-)researchers are enabled to develop new skills, knowledge and relationships which may increase confidence and enhance life chances (see, further, section 5: skills and knowledge acquired through the project)

- (Co-)researchers achieve a better understanding of the different views of ageing in the community, and the opportunities and challenges associated with developing age-friendly policies and practices
- The project provides a forum for meaningful social engagement and mutual learning exchange, mobilising older people's expertise, and knowledge to stimulate creative reform ideas and initiatives around the age-friendliness in their neighbourhood.

Presented below are reflections from the co-researchers and stakeholders about the advantages of involving older residents as co-researchers.

> "The age-friendly research project has had a big impact in the area in the sense that it has encouraged participation and given a lot of people in Whalley Range the **opportunity to be actively involved and to be heard. It is empowering to contribute to something that will be used to benefit others and the project has recognised and respected the positive contribution older people make when involved in decision-making.**"
>
> Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

> "**Setting up an age-friendly project like this helps to signpost older people to appropriate services that will benefit them.**"
>
> Julie Asumu, 70 year old co-researcher

> "**Cath (one of the interviewees) needed particular help in the winter and I have encouraged her to come to the Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group.** James (another interviewee) feels cut off from younger people and family life so I have included him in family events, and I email him about events taking place locally which are more family based."
>
> Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

“This research project has many advantages. **The older people can speak for themselves and it shows respect for their views and acknowledging their contribution to the community.**”

Raj Kaur, 59 year old co-researcher

“**The advantages are empathy, understanding, local knowledge and experience.** If this project is for older residents, then for it to work it is vital to take into account their views and opinions. It has been my experience that older residents sometimes find it difficult to relate to younger people who do not understand the day-to-day issues they experience and hence don't disclose as much as they could.”

68 year old woman, co-researcher

“**Older people as co-researchers is a practical way of involving older people throughout the process and making sure that the whole process focuses on the actual concerns of older people.** If older people are co-researchers, then it's more likely that interviewees will trust the process and be willing to come forward and open up about their concerns.”

Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

“**I think the one big advantage is those being interviewed are more able to sit down more at ease with an older co-researcher**, over a cup of tea and a biscuit or two, and have a real good natter. In interviewing the person it is a distinct advantage if the interviewer does know the area well because it creates a good **rapport** with the interviewee.”

Robert Page, 59 year old co-researcher

“**I think that engaging older residents to interview older residents has been extremely successful. There seemed far less barriers to communication with closeness in age**. We were all able to have quite deep and meaningful conversations, except possibly when there was a language barrier.”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“**The experience of this study has been very enlightening and thought provoking.** It has improved my experience as a person and researcher.”

Daljit Singh, 62 year old co-researcher

“**I think it is important that older residents were at the forefront of the research – including designing the questions for the interviews.** This enabled these residents to draw upon their own experiences of ageing in Whalley Range – as they are living the experiences themselves and have a deeper understanding. I feel that the benefit of older residents taking on the role of interviewing other older residents means experiences can be shared and there will perhaps be **a deeper understanding of challenges that affect both interviewers and interviewees.**”

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

“Already, people are demonstrating that they feel more connected by getting involved with other projects and using the skills and abilities gained as part of this project in other areas: taking on more active roles as volunteers, and the engagement that has taken place between the co-researchers and the people they have interviewed. [...] **Projects like this empower older people and communities into realising they have a voice.**"

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

“I think it is easier to be interviewed by a person of a similar age. I am an average age of all the people I interviewed, some were older, some were younger but I imagine I am the sort of ordinary person that they are used to talking to. I stressed the voluntary aspect and always took plenty of time, never in a hurry. **I don't think the very elderly people would have agreed to meet 'students' or 'researchers' as they were often ashamed of their problems e.g. fear of computers, severe deafness, using a commode. Living in the area, I knew where to find people to fit the profile for the project.**”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“**Peer research can enable the interviewed person to be relaxed and open with their views.**”

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

“**Working with older residents like myself in this type of research might ease the creation of a rapport between those involved, leading to more in-depth responses.** Both interviewer and interviewee had a shared knowledge and experience of the area. **Also it could make the finding of people to be interviewed easier as the older resident is likely to have more contacts within the area.**”

Tony Goulding, 60 year old co-researcher

“**The two people I interviewed would not have participated in a ticking the box exercise or with students as interviewers.** Particularly Mary, who doesn't even leave the kitchen, let alone the house. You would have never found her. But she's used to me. I go and see her for an hour every Saturday and the interview was just an extension of that.”

66 year old woman, co-researcher

“The beauty of working with local older people as co-researchers is that they live in the area so possibly share the same experiences and frustrations as the people they interview. They themselves use the local shops, health and transport facilities, go to local parks and look for things to do so they often see where things are working and what needs changing. An older researcher may see the need for toilets, and benches to have a rest, whereas maybe a younger person can last out. **Also, like myself, when you live in an area you get a feel for it, you have an intuitive knowledge about the place, you read local papers and get local magazines, see notices, recognise faces and know the places where staff are kind and willing to help.... All this helps when interviewing another person and trying to understand their perspective.**”

Helen Hibberd, coordinator Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group, Manchester

“**The research will enable us to look at ways of moving forward with future initiatives taking the research findings into account and utilising the expertise and experiences of our local co-researchers.** The project will also be beneficial to other areas across Manchester as a good example/resource for identifying priorities of residents and examining the definition of an age-friendly neighbourhood.”

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

4 CHALLENGES OF INVOLVING OLDER RESIDENTS AS CO-RESEARCHERS

4

CHALLENGES OF INVOLVING OLDER RESIDENTS AS CO-RESEARCHERS

The approach of this project, involving older residents as co-researchers, also brings about a number of methodological, practical, political and ethical challenges. These include:

- It requires time, energy and commitment from local residents, the research team, co-researchers and other stakeholders
- It involves coordination of many players and multi-layered partnerships based on the negotiation of power relations between diverse groups
- It involves potential conflicts between different players
- It blurs boundaries between researcher, researched, academic and activist
- It constitutes a form of power and can reproduce the inequalities it seeks to challenge
- Co-researchers need to be supported and encouraged when they face difficulties during the research process, e.g. when facing barriers in recruiting participants for the interviews
- Co-researchers drawn from local communities can carry their biases, prejudices and beliefs into research
- Co-researchers may encounter emotional stories and experiences, especially amongst older people who could be described as vulnerable in the context of experiencing social exclusion
- Co-researchers may face technological difficulties in terms of recording the interviews
- The training, and opportunities for skills development, need be designed in such a way that it appeals to everyone involved
- It raises issues in terms of privacy and confidentiality in relation to those interviewed

- It requires a significant level of self-reflexivity on the part of the co-researchers
- Within 'communities' as a whole not everyone is able to participate, nor will everyone be motivated to be involved
- It raises expectations, and co-researchers need to be cautious not to raise false hopes with interview participants
- Competing, contested and changing versions of 'community needs' or values may emerge, which may reveal different agendas and means for enacting some solutions and blocking other
- It raises issues around the quality of data, interpretation and analysis of data
- It is difficult to work around an idea such as 'age-friendliness' in the context of austerity, when older people feel that budget cuts are negatively affecting the quality of their daily life

Presented below are reflections from the co-researchers and stakeholders about the challenges of involving older residents as co-researchers.

> "I'm not trying to make excuses. **We're trying our best, but it's difficult in the current economic climate.** There has been so much upheaval in the council. I remember when I first came here, you [to another co-researcher] were campaigning for years about getting a seat at the bus stop. Now there is no reason for the bloody bus stop [because the bus route has recently been cut]. So has it got better for older people? Will it get better? No."
>
> Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

> "**The quality of the interviews? Moderate. Only average to begin with, but it got better**. I found it difficult to not get involved in a conversation where I might pass my own views"
>
> Tony Goulding, 60 year old co-researcher

> "**I don't really see any disadvantage to older residents being co-researchers as long as they are suitable for the task, are properly trained, follow any guidelines, and have support when they need it.** [...] Many of Chorlton Good Neighbours' volunteers are in their 70s, 80s and 90s; staffing the office, running the coffee morning, sitting on the trustee board and offering lifts to people. So I am well aware of how capable and enthusiastic they are... when you work with older people all the time you can really forget their ages – they are your workforce, they gain from being valued and the organisation totally gains from their reliability and common-sense."
>
> Helen Hibberd, coordinator Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group, Manchester

> "**Because you may have a shared experience of an event, for example the pavements and the problems with the tree roots lifting up the pavement and making it hazardous, it can mean you forget your role as researcher and start swapping 'anecdotes'.** This is not unreasonable, unless you forget that your research has to be accessible to other researchers who may well not understand your local references and want to know 'what really is the issue with tree roots'."
>
> Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

> "[The challenges are:] **Lack of interest or not being objective and putting their slant on what is being said.** Many of the older residents I know can feel marginalised by the community they live in. I also think confidence could be an issue, in that it can be difficult to engage with new people and take on board their views and opinions."
>
> 68 year old woman, co-researcher

“ **The biggest issue has been the taping of the interviews and anxiety about using the tapes etc. was a definite drawback to the interview process**. I think I have learnt that and would want more practice in the use of technology and to use better equipment. This is perhaps one of the disadvantages of older residents involved as co-researchers in that **they may well lack the technical skills with IT that younger researchers may have. Though that is a training and confidence issue.**”

Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

“ **It raises expectations** – don't get me wrong I think the project should try to raise expectations. But if they are not realistic – because the older people haven't been kept informed about the scope of the project or constraints from key organisations, then this will lead to disillusion. And the next time someone tries to do similar work it will be harder to engage older people.”

Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

“ **The most difficult thing is to hear things that are painful and have been ignored.** Painful stories among some of the Asian older people I interviewed were about their children who ignored their parents or undervalued their role in the family as elders.”

Daljit Singh, 62 year old co-researcher

“ I feel one of the challenges – which could also be a positive - might be that although co-researchers will be ultimately undergoing the same training, each person is an individual - so presumably their own **personality will dictate their individual style of interviewing and what they can learn from the interviewee**.”

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

“ **I suppose the one big challenge is trying to stick to the subject and not digress too much as well as trying to make sure that the older co-researcher does not lead the interviewee.**”

Robert Page, 59 year old co-researcher

“ I have interviewed women whose voices have not been heard, especially those who are economically underprivileged and disadvantaged. I think it is important to include their views in research, but **we also faced challenges in that some were reluctant to speak because of fear of authorities.**”

Raj Kaur, 59 year old co-researcher

“ **The older resident as co-researcher may be experiencing many of the same issues and problems as the people being interviewed. It may make you ignore some things** as they are just an inevitable part of growing older in an inner-city in times of austerity.”

Angela Downing, 66 years old co-researcher

“ Attending the first meeting was quite exciting for me. **I was looking forward to interviewing as many people as possible, especially from the ethnic minority group of older people**. By the time the interview period was up I had only managed to interview one person who showed interest beyond the project. **I made several attempts to get some of the people involved but they all turned me down and I lost the enthusiasm with which I started.** I am only still participating because the coordinator of the research has continued to encourage us to carry on.”

Julie Asumu, 70 year old co-researcher

“During the interviews we used a map [as a tool to facilitate the conversation] but that didn’t really work. I felt it broke the flow of conversation and did not contribute to the gathering of people’s views – it interrupted the flow I thought. I learnt two things that need attention; we needed to make an extra effort to reach some of the ethnic minority older people in the neighbourhood, and it would have been helpful to take a leaflet with us which includes information about local services and support that we can hand over to people.”

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

“Asking people to talk about growing older inevitably means considering one’s whole life experience, the kinship and neighbourhood networks involved and the life events which have shaped them most. Though confidentiality is important, they are neighbours and the confidences given remain with the researcher. For example I did not know Jenny prior to the interview, but I see her out shopping now and we always stop to speak. I am aware that I know a great deal more about her than she does about me.”

Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

“Both interviewees and co-researchers live locally and for some of the issues it is easy to take ‘short-cuts’ and agree, without exploring it any further.”

73 year old co-researcher

“Unfortunately the very factors which may prove helpful, i.e. local knowledge of the area and number of contacts may also represent the biggest drawback. The avoidance of asking ‘leading’ questions becomes more difficult with the closeness of people taking part.”

Tony Goulding, 60 year old co-researcher

“Maybe some older people may respond in a different way to a professional interviewer in terms of being more reserved: if the co-researcher is known to the interviewee the dynamics of the interview would perhaps be different. Although that still seems to be a positive thing: interviewees may be more honest with an older/ similar aged person.”

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

“It’s hard to avoid bias in the types of people who are recruited by the co-researchers.”

66 year old co-researcher

5 SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED THROUGH THE PROJECT

5 SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ACQUIRED THROUGH THE PROJECT

Like other participatory research studies, this project values the process of the research as much as the outcomes and findings. Its 'success' rests not only on the quality of information generated, but also on the extent to which skills, knowledge and participants' capacities and networks are developed through the research experience (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995; Kesby et al., 2005). The co-investigators identified a number of competences and skills they felt were nurtured throughout the project, including:

- A better understanding of the variety, and changing meanings, of 'community' and 'neighbourhood' over the life course for a diverse group of older people
- Improved social and communication skills
- Improved listening skills
- A better understanding of the different phases involved in a research project
- Improved skills to conduct an interview in a comfortable, open, flexible, patient and non-judgemental way
- The ability to respect and appreciate a variety of different views
- The ability to form trusting relationships with interviewees
- Improved interview skills, making sure the interviewee is at ease and feels free and encouraged to share his or her views
- Improved presentation skills
- Improved competence and confidence in working with different groups of people and community organisations
- Increased knowledge about and skills in analysing interviews and reporting research findings

Presented below are comments made by the co-researchers when asked whether they felt the project had contributed to the development of existing and/or new skills and knowledge.

"**As a resident, through researching this way, you become aware of the many differences in the experiences of what is 'community' and what does 'neighbourhood mean' to different people, and also how that changes over time.** For example Cath (an interviewee) used to walk for miles and her concept of what her community was covered a wide range of parks, shops and public transport. As she has grown older her concept of her community has contracted to fewer shops and less frequent use of public transport. For her now, 'her Whalley Range' [neighbourhood] is a particular row of shops and two specific bus stops. She uses two cafes a short bus ride way away, and what was once an easy walk for her is now 'too far away'. Another interviewee, James, has a much larger map of what is 'his Whalley Range'. He is physically fit and still drives his car. He does voluntary work in the community and is actively involved in the lives of his daughter and grandchildren. He has lived in the area all of his life and has adapted to the many changes without dwelling on 'how it used to be'."

Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

"I believe that communication skills are very important. **I have learnt to detect the pace of the conversation and I have also learnt how to finish an interview comfortably for both of us.** I also use my common sense too."

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

"What skills have we acquired? **Flexibility** – e.g. if an interviewee wants to focus on a particular concern, even if it doesn't seem directly relevant, listen and note. It might turn out to be significant whether or not other interviewees raise it. It's important to give attention to the views and experiences of minorities or single people, as well as the majority. **Patience**; being relaxed and able to put the interviewee at ease; **empathy** – you may not agree with everything they say but you should encourage them to speak. **Impartiality** – just because you feel strongly about an issue doesn't mean you should pressurise the older people you talk to to voice views you hold. Similarly, if their concerns don't interest you, still take notice. **Accurate reporting** – the training we received was about the right content. Especially as there was more support available [i.e. during reflection meetings, follow up training,...] as we went along."

Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

"Co-researchers should be residents that are familiar with the area and known to the people that they chose to interview. **The interviewer needs to be cordial, understanding, and very patient, as well as being a good listener.** Older people are like an encyclopaedia of information if you approach them positively."

Bill Williams, 58 year old co-researcher

"**The ability to listen and respect the views of others is really important, to form a trusting, productive and fruitful relationship with interviewees and remain objective and calm.**"

Daljit Singh, 62 year old co-researcher

“I am a good communicator and listener, which I think are essential skills for a researcher. I am open to different ideas and opinions and am non-judgmental. **I have been able to put into practice skills that I have learnt through my working life and I have found that being able to adapt these to this research has helped my confidence. A key skill I adapted was being able to conduct the interviews in a way that kept the person's attention.** The interviews can be long and people did start to lose interest, which I needed to avoid.”

68 year old woman, co-researcher

“An interviewer must have **good communication and social skills.** As a person who loves to chat, give my opinions, share anecdotes etc. it is a different situation when interviewing, one has to be an excellent listener, make good eye contact, and be ready to encourage the interviewee to go further. I think I have these skills. **I have thought a lot recently about how one can be a good listener, focusing completely on the other person's words, without inwardly thinking of what I would say in reply.** This is partly why I have become close with one of the women I have interviewed. She was longing to be heard, and I was able to give her that. I see her almost daily, as we live in the same building.”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“**What was important for my participants is that they could speak in their own language and that I had an understanding of their culture.**”

Raj Kaur, 59 year old co-researcher

“**The training we received before we went to conduct interviews was excellent. It gave confidence to everyone of us who was to embark on the project. We also gained some consultation, communication and presentation skills.** During the training, I improved on my listening and communication skills. I see myself already using the presentation and listening skills in my other areas of work.”

Julie Asumu, 70 year old co-researcher

“It is important to have experience in dealing with people. **Good communication, patience and empathy are important but also to know how to close down a conversation.** My previous employment in healthcare and experience in taking medical histories were a great help. I was also fairly familiar with the recording equipment but practice was needed. **The training sessions were helpful in learning about the project. Getting to know the other co-researchers was also a good idea. To understand the commitment to the project was also very important. It provided structure and guidelines for the interviews.**”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“**Making no assumptions is important too, and I am learning to do this more and more in my personal life.**”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“**I have really enjoyed working on this project; it has pushed my boundaries successfully.** Although not acquiring many new skills during my research I feel I have certainly honed some long dormant pre-existing ones. **My appetite has been whetted for undertaking similar research/activities.**”

Tony Goulding, 60 year old co-researcher

“What I learnt from the interview is that people, the older generations are more conscious of togetherness and living as a community.”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“We have been trained as co-researchers and we learned how to conduct and analyse interviews. We are coding the interviews; this is an analysis of what is said. It involves looking at the paragraph, seeing what comes out to us, discussing what we understand by it, and putting names to the paragraph, such as loneliness, civic engagement, ... It is very high powered.”

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

6 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PROJECT ACCORDING TO THE CO-RESEARCHERS

6 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE PROJECT ACCORDING TO THE CO-RESEARCHERS

In the section below, co-researchers commented on what they thought were the most striking findings from the interviews they conducted themselves. Topics that were discussed included:

- The existence of strong neighbourhood attachments, and the importance of neighbourly relationships for older residents, especially those with limited mobility
- The strong desire of most older people to 'age in place', or to stay in their own home in their current neighbourhood, for as long as possible
- The importance of family relationships
- The decline or withdrawal of local amenities, facilities and meeting places which increases the risk for social isolation among older residents in the neighbourhood
- The central role of reliable and frequent local transport in being able to get out and about
- The detrimental impact of the loss of local transport connections on the quality of life of older people
- The importance of local meeting spaces for socialising and maintaining local social networks
- The importance of local opportunities for social participation, with an outreach to socially isolated older people
- Fear of crime which limits older people's engagements in and use of the neighbourhood
- The importance of safe outdoor spaces, with public toilets, well-maintained pavements, outdoor seating and effective traffic control measures

- Financial concerns and worries about not being able to make ends meet which are important issues for many older residents
- The impact of population turnover and gentrification on the exclusion of long-term older residents
- Health and mobility problems are highly influential in how older people experience, appreciate and use their neighbourhood
- The importance of easy access to good quality community support and health services
- The need for good access to information about services and activities
- Lack of respect for and discrimination against particular ethnic groups
- Budget cuts (e.g. the loss of community activities, libraries, leisure centres) which increase the age-unfriendliness of the neighbourhood, this having greatest impact on the most vulnerable groups of older people

Presented below are reflections from the co-researchers on what they felt were the most important findings arising from the interviews they had conducted with older residents:

> “**In-depth discussions indicated that facilities that used to be available in the area, which encouraged them to leave their homes to walk around the locality and socialise freely and safely, no longer exists.** Luncheon clubs used to provide three-course meals costing £1.50.”
>
> Bill Williams, 58 years old co-researcher

> “**Some of the people I interviewed have been living in the area for over fifty years with vast experience of the developments in the area, including loss of facilities and services such as transport. Fear of crime is a very strong perception among the older people.** Most of them are upset by the loss of a bus service that allowed them to use their free bus pass to visit relatives, hospital, supermarkets, community events, especially those with mobility issues.”
>
> Bill Williams, 58 year old co-researcher

> “**The transport issue is a huge problem. Getting out and about is absolutely vital, and gets harder as one gets older**.”
>
> Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

> “**There was a strong need and desire to stay in the area amongst the people we interviewed**. They also showed great respect for the support they receive. The main challenges that were mentioned were related to crime, security, and communication with services and authorities. **Some of the ethnic minority women in the study were concerned about their security and wellbeing. There were also concerns for the breakdown of the extended family.**”
>
> Daljit Singh, 62 year old co-researcher

> “**What stood out was the need for public toilets and seating as well as effective traffic control.** Also the need to be able to stop and sit down for a rest when walking to the shopping centre of Chorlton from its outskirts.”
>
> Robert Page, 59 year old co-researcher

“**All respondents commented on the general ‘friendly’ atmosphere of the area. However, some concerns were expressed as to a decline in the level of friendliness.** This decline was attributed to the influx of younger more transient newcomers to Chorlton attracted by the café-bar atmosphere of the area and now the ease of access to the city centre and the airport via the new metro lines.”

Tony Goulding, 60 year old co-researcher

“**My interviewee spoke about neighbourhood friendliness and how neighbours care about each other. She also spoke about the transport problem with getting out of Whalley Range to other parts of the city.** Bus stops are only on certain major roads, which are far from some residential areas. It actually takes a good walk to any bus stop in order to get out to other places like shopping, leisure and entertainment centres.”

Julie Asumu, 70 year old co-researcher

“**To me, what was clear was the importance still of kinship links and the reliance on family despite being part of such a mobile society. The other important area was physical health and mobility which facilitate being able to get out and about.** The weather was often discussed as a barrier to being able to get out: Cath and James both love to garden and spend time in their front gardens and speak to passers-by. Neil hates the cold and even James misses the opportunities of the better weather. None of the four interviewees mentioned religion as having an important role in their lives, but James and Neil are active in local politics.”

Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

“**All my interviewees mentioned friendly people. Having good neighbours is very important to frail elderly people, especially housebound residents. Finance is important too. Some are worried that their pensions won’t be sufficient, and those with savings are worried that they won’t last.** Paid help is often necessary i.e. gardeners, house cleaners, window cleaners, taxis etc. Health and mobility are important and free health services are vital. The cost of social care is a shock when daily care is needed.”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“By far the most significant factor in age-friendliness and the impact of ageing on the quality of life raised by all those interviewed by me was that of **mobility**. One man still uses his car regularly whilst the other man remains a committed cyclist. The two women both cited the regular bus services and especially the coming of the Metro [tramline] to Chorlton as important positive features of life in the area. Other **plus points mentioned included the plentiful availability of doctors, dentists, pharmacies and, more surprisingly, vets.**”

Tony Goulding, 60 year old co-researcher

“**One of the main concerns amongst the Asian older people I interviewed was the breakdown of the extended family and the lack of care and respect for grandparents and the isolation they would experience when possibly placed in care homes.** It is also painful when older people talk about how they **feel ignored** by officials such as councillors and the police who do not value their views and do **not treat them as an equal member of the community.**”

Raj Kaur, 59 year old co-researcher

“Raising awareness is always a positive process. There are ongoing existing community projects in Whalley Range and some are in danger of losing funding. Any projects that enable and encourage retired people to engage in community activities have positive outcomes. Unfortunately sometimes much-used projects are closed leaving people depressed and alone. **A project like the Age-Friendly Whalley Range project has highlighted the need for community gatherings often connected with meals.**”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“**I think the thing that makes the most difference to people’s lives is lack of mobility which leads to loneliness and isolation.** Another problem can be incontinence which make people more reluctant to go places where there are no **toilet facilities.**”

Mary O’Mahony, 65 year old co-researcher

“**As a community worker it has always been very difficult to get information to people who live in this sprawling community.** So the age-friendly project is about finding alternative ways of connecting with people.”

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

7 KEY LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FOR THE AGE-FRIENDLY MANCHESTER PROGRAMME

7

KEY LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FOR THE AGE-FRIENDLY MANCHESTER PROGRAMME

Presented below are some of the take away messages identified by the co-researchers and community stakeholders involved in the project:

> “For Chorlton Good Neighbours itself – the Group has always enjoyed being open to new ideas and talking part in up to date research. [...] Usually our people can't wait to have their say. **For many older people, especially those with reducing mobility and increasing dependency, sharing their experiences and offering opinions is such a positive way of feeling needed and valued. Older people are the 'community's history books' if you like, so past memories and knowledge, together with their current experiences and concerns, have real value and they ultimately should be at the heart of an age-friendly agenda.**”
>
> Helen Hibberd, coordinator Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group, Manchester

> “**I think there is a role to draw together all the information that is out there, put it into a user friendly format and distribute it to local residents.** Not everyone is on the Internet or knows how to use it. One resource centre that information could be fed into and distributed from would assist in signposting people in the right direction.”
>
> 68 year old woman, co-researcher

“I think further research is needed, especially among Black and Asian minority older people.”

Daljit Singh, 62 year old co-researcher

“**What people raise concerns about doesn’t fit neatly into service area pigeon holes**. People’s needs aren’t conveniently arranged like that. **It’s up to agencies to work together and with the older people to tackle the issues raised**, not jealously guard their own empires/remits.”

Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

“**It is important to engage with older residents, hear what matters to them and how they believe ideas or initiatives would work, and the impact it will have on their lives.** For example if you were to have an event of some nature, this may seem a great idea in terms of inclusion, but the practicalities of getting there (public transport links), the time of the event and the facilities that older people would want may differ from the event organiser’s views.”

68 year old woman, co-researcher

“**Involvement of this kind is crucial. It is not something you can do once and forget about it. It must be done continually. It is a two (or multi) way process. To voice an informed opinion at the right time to influence policy and practice, older people need a good supply of good information.** It is a vicious circle. It becomes easier as you do more of it. You may start by lancing a boil of people’s unheard discontent. As long as you start to deal with the discontent, in future things become easier on both sides.”

Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

“**Key lessons are the need to consider the abilities of the aged to be able to get around on foot safely and without risk to health.** Seating certainly provides stopping-off points to rest and catch ones breath as well as have a good talk. Public toilets are certainly a concern for those with weak bladders. Trip hazards and traffic calming are also a real concern.”

Robert Page, 59 year old co-researcher

“**It is such a shame that lack of funding is always the reason given most as to why more positive changes cannot take place, when actually, Manchester is a rich and thriving city, with many amenities for those who can afford them, and many wealthy people who should contribute more to their city.**”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“**Both the city-wide programme and the local age-friendly initiatives should work together by encouraging co-researchers from local areas to research and feed their results into the city-wide programme for a uniform service.**”

Julie Asumu, 70 year old co-researcher

“**A lot has been put in place for older people by the government. Since people now live longer than expected, the government should carry out more detailed research using co-researchers.** By categorising people into ages for their specific needs in each category, more specific results as regards their needs will be achieved. For example (50-65; 65-75; 75-80; 80+) I am only making a suggestion here.”

Julie Asumu, 70 year old co-researcher

“**A big issue that concerned me after some of the interviews is the safety and suitability of people’s houses.** There seems to come a point where people stop updating their homes, even when they have a strong desire to continue living there. **I now advise everyone to look round your house, ‘is it suitable for when you are old and frail’?** There is a reluctance to downsize to suitable accommodation even though there is plenty available in the area. Everyone living in multi-storey housing should have a ground floor toilet. Could a stair lift be installed (some houses have radiators too close to the bottom of the stairs)? **I also recommend ‘walk-in’ showers even if it means chucking out the bath.**”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“**The city centre, in my opinion, is age unfriendly at the moment.** Cultural venues do not seem to consider the comfort and facilities needed by the elderly and disabled enough. [...] There are certainly **not enough disabled parking bays** in the city, near to public venues, e.g. the Town Hall and the City Art Gallery. The new, improved Whitworth Art Gallery seems to have left parking out of their planning altogether.”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“**Approaching age-friendly issues at the neighbourhood level is crucial** – to start with clear local need and to mobilise local stakeholders (public, voluntary, community, private sector). **But on its own it can’t deal with all the problems**. Many organisations are bound by city-wide, regional or national policy, practice, law and budgets. **So it has to be tackled at a wider, national and international level too.**”

Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

“I have to ask the question age-friendly to whom? I do not think that Transport for Manchester considers the needs of elderly people. **There is the definite feeling that transport policies always favour students and young people.** Bus passes are very much appreciated and everyone uses them whenever possible. For people living on good bus routes they are always the first choice of travel. But Manchester is excluding a whole lot of people with their anti-car policy. There are reasons why some people have to use their cars and car parks are a necessary fact of life, public transport is not always an option. [...] For people who live outside the central area, travel on public transport is lengthy and complicated, and hazardous for anyone who is even slightly unsteady on their feet... There is never enough reserved parking for disabled people with parking permits.”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“Learning, expertise and resources from the research study, including this participatory guide, can be shared with programme partners in organisations, City Council departments and community groups to inform future policy and planning. **The methodology of participation with older residents can be replicated across the city in a wide range of projects both on neighbourhood and city-wide levels.**”

Rebecca Bromley, Project Officer

“**One clear message I took away with me was that this project gave older people a voice.** I enjoyed the experience and felt that I have improved my interviewing skills and in doing so, have gained in confidence.”

Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

8

IF YOU COULD DO ONE THING TO IMPROVE YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD'S AGE-FRIENDLINESS...

8

IF YOU COULD DO ONE THING TO IMPROVE YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD'S AGE-FRIENDLINESS...

The co-investigators and community stakeholders were asked to suggest one improvement to their neighbourhood which would make a difference in terms of its age-friendliness. Key suggestions for improvements included:

- Provide door-to-door community support which enables older people who cannot use buses, or for whom the distance to the bus stop is too far, to access shopping facilities, health services, community centres or other important destinations
- Involve local facilities and businesses (shops, cafes, public facilities, health services, voluntary organisations, GPs, pharmacies...) to sign up to an age-friendly charter for the area including commitments to maintain and make available up-to-date information about age-friendly facilities and activities
- Promote better use of existing meeting spaces (school buildings, church halls, community spaces, community allotments) in the neighbourhood to increase the opportunities for socialising, e.g. through coffee mornings, community events, informal get-togethers, social activities
- Recognise the importance of existing community centres, voluntary and care groups in the area, and provide financial assistance to safeguard their effective operation
- Provide regular information and leaflets about local social activities, public transport and services
- Promote closer collaboration with organisations representing different ethnic groups in the area

- Encourage local shops, services and businesses to display their commitment to age-friendliness, by showing that they are happy for older people to come in and use their toilet, or provide extra seating for use in the shop and have a rest
- Promote 'joined-up' services, which enable adequate support for people living in their own homes, including health services, practical help and social support
- Improve signage in the neighbourhood, for example to social meeting places, information centres, health services and parks
- Value and tap into the skills and (often hidden) resources available among older residents in the neighbourhood, and find ways to mobilise those in activities such as caring, learning, socialising, being a good neighbour, and helping others. Time banking could be introduced as one example of how to co-produce age-friendly neighbourhoods by building on available assets in the area
- Place benches and sitting places near to amenities and at bus stops to encourage excursions and short distance trips, essential to continued social inclusion
- Consider whether existing projects and activities can be made intergenerational, involving different groups of residents
- Involve older people in the design of services which affect them; in local decision-making; in the regeneration of neighbourhoods; and in the development of age-friendly initiatives

Presented below are some of the co-researchers' and community stakeholders' suggestions about how to improve the age-friendliness of the study neighbourhoods

> "**I would suggest to work more closely with existing organisations, including ethnic organisations,** delivering age-friendly social provision to reduce isolation."
>
> Raj Kaur, 59 year old co-researcher

> "**A local informal community centre in Whalley Range, where one could go for a cup of tea and chat.** For the people I interviewed, it would need to be very local with the freedom to come and go. **The use of school buildings, church halls, ... for an informal once a week coffee morning could be a simple asset**."
>
> Angela Downing, 66 year old co-researcher

> "The primary objective of the Age-Friendly Manchester programme should be **prevention of isolation of older people in their homes. There must be free accessible transport to encourage older people to attend social functions, and shopping areas.** There must be local functions for socialising and inclusion. Activities such as coffee mornings, lightweight chair exercises, group walking in the park, and trips to places of interest. These are low-cost ventures that could be funded at low costs."
>
> Bill Williams, 58 year old co-researcher

> "**A low-cost idea would be the publishing of a booklet four times a year on resources, public transport information, guides on wellbeing, information specific to older people** (i.e. a chemist would collect and deliver). This booklet could be funded by getting local business to advertise their service in it, i.e. pharmacies, homecare agencies, local shops, transport companies. This should fund the project and these companies get the target audience they want."
>
> 68 year old woman, co-researcher

> "One improvement to the area mentioned by all the people I interviewed was the **need to improve transport to the area of Whalley Range**, i.e. re-routing one of the buses from Alexandra Road to run along Withington Road."
>
> Elaine Unegbu, 74 year old co-researcher

“**A time bank or skills swap would be a great way to capture local residents’ wide-ranging skills and expertise to use in the community.** This has already been identified as a useful resource in one of the research areas and would be a great mechanism to increase the involvement of a huge range of people across the local community.”

Rebecca Bromley, Project officer

“**I would like to see much more joined-up thinking in terms of health and wellbeing care for the elderly, from GPs, NHS, Social Services and other public bodies.** Really working and spending money to put carers out in the community so that old people can trust that they will really get the best support while they wish to stay in their own home. And to trust that when they finally need more nursing care they will be living somewhere where they are loved, respected and helped to have as full a life as possible, and that families should not be overburdened with nursing care they cannot cope with.”

Freddi Greenmantle, 63 year old co-researcher

“**Lots of people are saying it would be good if local shops would offer use of toilets since there are no public toilets any more.** Probably not low cost but some of the pavements in Whalley Range are in a really bad way – very uneven with tree roots and cracked surfaces. The **roads** all need new **markings** and the drains need unblocking, every autumn they get more and more blocked with dead leaves that turn to mud. Residents really want the area to look nice as this encourages people to keep hedges trimmed, gardens tidy and walls maintained.”

Joan Gem, 71 year old co-researcher

“**Visible information: signs or stickers with the flower: ‘Whalley Range: an age-friendly neighbourhood’. Also the age-friendly business charter idea of ‘Take a Seat’: encouraging local shops, services, businesses to sign up and display the message is a great idea.**”

Chris Ricard, Community Development Worker

“One point raised consistently is that there is a huge amount of activity going on in neighbourhoods in terms of existing community groups and support for older people, but a lot of it is relatively unheard of, especially to residents without Internet access. **Physical information points with leaflets about local groups and services provide a low-cost method of sharing information across the neighbourhood, for residents, volunteers, local organisations and businesses – providing the information is kept up to date.**”

Rebecca Bromley, Project Officer

“**My suggestion is that there should be a shuttle bus service to help the aged to major bus stops in the area. There should be an age-friendly forum** set up and run by the community and this should link into other available services city-wide.”

Julie Asumu, 70 year old co-researcher

“Some schemes in the country are now up and running, where you have people **put a notice in the pub window or the shop window, saying there is somewhere an older person can come in and use the loo**. Or they can come in and sit down, as well, or they can come in and there will be a seat.”

69 year old man, co-researcher

“If you look at cities like New York, for example, they **have guidelines for companies how to make your shop more age-friendly or how to consider your products or services.** So there might be something that we could bring out, that you could look at what businesses need or how we can support them, and then you know, could you try that in one area.”

Project officer, Age-Friendly Manchester

“**I would hope Chorlton Good Neighbours might be held up as a good example of an age-friendly group in action.** The Group itself is already well known locally as it has been in operation for nearly 50 years. Unfortunately for the Age-friendly project it comes at a time when the local authority, our main funders, are implementing financial savings through cuts (we will be taking a 10% cut 2015-16). For an already lean organisation, as most small voluntary and community sector groups are, we do wonder how Manchester can reconcile being an age-friendly city whilst cutting funding to the groups which provide the evidence of it in action? That said, the local age-friendly project has been interesting, and we look forward to reading the full report and getting feedback from the project leads at a group session here at Chorlton Good Neighbours. Thank you so much for including us.”

Helen Hibberd, coordinator Chorlton Good Neighbours Care Group, Manchester

“I think it is important to have good public transport to all of the area. **It would be good if Chorlton’s cafes, bars, library and shops could have a toilet sticker/sign to show they were happy to let customers use their toilets**.”

Mary O’Mahony, 65 year old co-researcher

“One idea is to think more closely about the demographics of neighbourhoods. The Irish community, for example, and that is certainly true of West Indian people and certain Asian communities have got a lot of skills in gardening. **A lot of people living in this area have come from rural areas. We need to tap into these skills. They could use those skills in community allotments for example.**”

58 year old man, co-researcher

“**Maybe what services need to be doing is having more of a conversation with people that gives them some ownership of the budget and the resources and kind of explains what the constraints are.** This is what we’ve got, how should we use it best?”

58 year old man, co-researcher

“**Encourage every shop, cafe, public facility, e.g. clinic, GP, housing office, voluntary organisation, place of worship, any service active in the neighbourhood, etc. to sign up to an age-friendly charter for the area including commitments to maintain and make available up-to-date info about age-friendly facilities and issues and the neighbourhood itself.** A database can be maintained by a community organisation or statutory service with local presence.”

Roger Bysouth, 58 year old co-researcher

NOTES

A space for noting down (possible) ideas to develop the age-friendliness of your own neighbourhood

DISCUSSION

This guide presents insights into the participatory dimension of an ongoing study that explores the age-friendliness of three neighbourhoods in the city of Manchester. The guide follows the experiences of older people as they step beyond the traditional role of consultee to that of interviewer and researcher. Older people are involved as co-researchers in the project, acting as leaders in identifying areas in need of improvement and developing initiatives for community engagement and change. In doing so, the project builds on a key principle developed by the World Health Organization: the idea of prioritising the role of older people in developing research and action plans to improve the age-friendliness of their environment. An age-friendly neighbourhood can be defined as a community that is engaged in a strategic and ongoing process to improve the social and physical environment so that residents are empowered and supported to age well, and have opportunities to achieve their full potential.

The empowerment of older people in this project is promoted through a cycle of research, participation, training and community action. The project is a result of a close collaboration between the research team, the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing, Manchester City Council, a range of community organisations and older people themselves. Through collaborative work with community organisations, 18 older people were recruited and trained to become co-researchers who were involved in all stages of the project.

Participatory training sessions and reflection meetings with the co-researchers focused on all steps of the research process, including the design of research materials, data collection, data analysis, reporting and sharing and translating research findings. The co-researchers played a crucial role in the planning, design and realisation of the project, as well as in the development of local action plans on the basis of the findings of the research.

A key achievement of the project involves the development of an innovative way of engaging with communities. The co-researchers have conducted 68 in-depth interviews with older residents who can be described as 'hard-to-reach', including those experiencing multiple forms of social exclusion, health problems, social isolation and poverty. By interviewing these groups, the co-researchers were able get some of the most 'unheard' voices heard contributing views on their needs to age well in their community.

The co-researchers also continue to work together with local community organisations to develop actions and strategies for social change on the basis of the research findings. Throughout the project, new partnerships have been developed through the involvement of local and city-wide stakeholders (e.g. Age-Friendly Manchester, care groups, voluntary organisations, health providers, businesses) in focus groups to identify strategies for improving the social and physical environment on the basis of the research findings.

This process of co-production in research and action is ongoing and will continue to require intense levels of contact and collaboration between co-researchers, community stakeholders and policy-makers to improve the age-friendliness of urban neighbourhoods.

The case for participatory research around this issue is at least threefold:

- Firstly, the project demonstrates that such an approach is a viable method to engage older residents and mobilise their expertise, skills and knowledge to stimulate creative reform ideas and initiatives around the age-friendliness in their neighbourhood.

- Secondly, whilst progress has been made in identifying some key policies for age-friendly work, there has been much less success in terms of making older people themselves central to the creation and development of policies and age-friendly initiatives. This project suggests that participatory research approaches can offer a step forward in efforts to engage older residents as leaders and visionaries in identifying key aspects of the neighbourhood in need of improvement and developing age-friendly policies to address these challenges and to improve community life.

- Thirdly, the approach taken also has benefits to the older co-researchers, community stakeholders and policy-makers involved, because it provides a forum for rich and meaningful social engagement and mutual learning and exchange (see, also, Shura et al., 2010). It demonstrates that when older residents work together with community stakeholders and other partners as a team with common interests of community improvements, the resulting social process has valuable potential for enhancing the quality of life of diverse groups of older people in the city.

Despite the opportunities, a number of challenges and limitations – both existing and potential – to using participatory research approaches in studying the age-friendliness of neighbourhoods can also be identified. These include challenges associated with developing collaborative partnerships, negotiating power relationships, and economic barriers facing age-friendly cities. These warrant serious consideration but should not impede the use of participatory approaches in additional studies.

Firstly, the support and strong rapport of a range of community stakeholders and older residents is necessary to use a participatory approach effectively on a local level. Consistent investments in relationships between the research team, co-researchers, local organisations and other community stakeholders go a long way to inhibit reluctance to participate in the research process, prevent potential conflicts, negotiate power relationships, create the necessary support basis and develop a common understanding of the research aims.

Participatory research engages multiple actors at all stages, to design with them their role throughout the process, to take into account their needs and concerns throughout the project, to carefully encourage, recruit, support and train them, as well as involve them in the sharing and implementation of research findings (Shura et al., 2010). This implies the need for sufficient resources, not only in terms of research funding, but also in terms of human support, resources, energy and commitment.

Secondly, whilst seeking to democratise knowledge production and fostering opportunities for those involved, participatory research nevertheless constitutes a form of power and carries the risk of reproducing the very inequalities it seeks to address. Power relationships may exist between professional researchers and co-researchers, but also between co-researchers, who are often relatively highly educated, on the one hand and marginalised groups of older interviewees on the other.

This raises a number of questions in terms of defining what counts as a 'community' and potential tensions between (co-) researchers, the researched and activists. Resolving these issues will need a high degree of self-awareness amongst the individuals and groups involved. One way of addressing this is through maximising the heterogeneity of older people represented in age-friendly research, in terms of for example age, gender, class, ethnicity, and cognitive and physical abilities.

A third set of challenges relates to economic barriers facing the age-friendliness of cities. Given a context of economic austerity, there are significant pressures to reduce funding for what might be called preventative programmes. Taking the example of Manchester, plans to promote age-friendly neighbourhoods are compromised by significant budget cuts, which reduce public services such as libraries, information and advice centres, and day care facilities for older people.

Threats to services may also lead to a public perception that the age-friendly brand is unrealistic and unlikely to be implemented given restrictions on public spending. The concept of 'age-friendliness' therefore must itself be kept under critical scrutiny given the impact of economic austerity on urban areas. Whether applying the age-friendly approach makes a significant difference to the quality of people's lives, given the challenges facing cities, will need careful attention over the next phase of the project's development.

Despite the above challenges, this project suggests that a participatory research approach has the potential to offer a way forward in engaging older residents in a way that can benefit them as individuals, the communities in which they live, and the process of developing age-friendly cities.

The success of communities in becoming more age-friendly will, to a large extent, depend on whether older people, including those facing social exclusion, will be involved as key actors in setting the agenda for future urban development. This will require a shift in the definition of the role of older residents, and a shift in the balance of power between the resident role and the role of other urban players (Kindon et al., 2007; Shura et al., 2010).

This project suggests that the ongoing development and experimentation with participatory methods may continue to inspire new understandings and possibilities for engaging older residents as leaders and visionaries in developing the age-friendly agenda.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the work undertaken by the co-researchers suggests three important principles for developing age-friendly neighbourhoods:

- Age-friendly neighbourhoods should provide a mechanism for empowering older people and ensuring social participation in its broadest sense.
- Age-friendly neighbourhoods are a reminder about the 'rights' of urban citizens (of all generations) to full and active use of the resources of the city.
- Age-friendly neighbourhoods affirm the importance of recognising the varied dimensions – social as well as physical –, which make up an age-friendly environment.

This participatory guide provides a detailed account of how these principles can be implemented. Although the results of this project are promising, further research using similar approaches are needed to test whether these results would be replicated in other settings. We hope that this guide will be a valuable resource for those seeking to undertake similar projects which aim to work with older residents and community stakeholders to identify key aspects of neighbourhoods in need of improvement and to develop creative ideas for developing age-friendly communities.

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LINK TO FILM:
RESEARCHING AGE-FRIENDLY CITIES

Below is the link to a 15 minutes long film that has been produced in collaboration with the older co-researchers in this age-friendly research project and a range of community organisations.

https://youtu.be/WXELgwHQ34o

The producers gratefully acknowledge financial assistance in making this film from Manchester City Council and the School of Social Sciences at The University of Manchester.

“The age-friendly movement has captured the imagination of citizens, community groups, and policy makers around the world. What began in 2005 as an idea about adapting physical and social environments to meet the needs of ageing populations is now reality in over 250 communities in 28 countries. This remarkable guide represents best practice in placing older people where they truly belong, at the heart of age-friendly initiatives. The guide is a must-read for anyone connected to the age-friendly movement, showing what can be achieved when 'ordinary' citizens become involved in research that can lead to social change.”

Professor Thomas Scharf, Director, Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, NUI Galway, Ireland

“This timely and highly relevant publication provides an excellent source of information, ideas and resources on involving older people as co-researchers in researching age-friendly communities. The guide challenges readers to examine the values, attitudes, resources and approaches needed to engage in genuinely participatory, collaborative co-research. I warmly recommend this guide and know that it will become a core resource in my own work.”

Professor Mo Ray, Gerontological Social Work, Keele University

“To create age-friendly cities the knowledge about what needs to be done has to come from the older residents. It's their city, their neighbourhoods, their home. To do this you need people to participate and this guide provides an excellent example of a commitment to training people to be the co-researchers, learn new skills and contribute to change in their environment. Through innovative partnerships, this guide and accompanying video are a must for anyone serious about community development that includes all ages.”

Professor Sheila Peace, President, British Society of Gerontology

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