Ideas for action:
Older people shaping local
housing policy and practice

Older people using IT to pass on housing and care information to their peers in Hackney

Care&Repair
England

Older People's Housing
Champions

About this guide

This **'how to' guide** is part of a series produced by Care & Repair England in partnership with the Older People's Champions Group and older people's groups and organisations. The guides offer practical ideas for older people's groups and forums around the country who want to influence local housing policy, plans and actions.

The guides describe the ways that local groups have gone about raising housing issues with decision makers, their successes and lessons for others. They also show how local groups have tried different ways to involve a wider range of older people, especially those whose voices are often ignored.

At a glance

MRS Independent Living has run seminars for older people on housing and care options with a plan to use information technology to increase access to online support via use of tablets.

It has developed peer to peer support in accessing online housing and care services, building knowledge of local options and digital inclusion for older people in Hackney.

The work has also enabled MRS Independent Living to build accessing online information as a central part of all the projects it develops with older people.

1. What the MRS Independent Living action was aiming to achieve

1.1 Aims and objectives

Working with older people to set up peer to peer support on housing, health and social care options in later life via seminars and IT training and support with a view to:

- Creating awareness/knowledge base on options for older people to plan across housing, health and care
- Working with people to use their experience to support others
- Supporting digital inclusion for people in later life
- Taking a community development approach to support empowerment and engagement in local action
- Assessing the implications for future MRS services and support

1.2 Who is involved

MRS Independent Living is a user-led independent charity working in north-east London with disadvantaged and socially excluded sections of the community. It identifies technical solutions and provides innovative services to support individuals, their families and care workers. The organisation develops services and evaluates its activities against the expressed needs and aspirations of its service users.

Current services include:

- Staying steady - a community-based strength and balance programme.
- Making room - a therapeutic decluttering programme
- Peer support services - assisting people to offer their learning and experience to support others
- Minor adaptations - a service to Occupational Therapists to assist with provision of rails and other equipment

1.3 Seminars and learning

With funding from Silverlinks[1] the project held seminars for older people in South and North Hackney. Seminars covered the types of housing and care services available to older people and people with disabilities, how to access them and what choices might be available. Topics include different options for those with different types of tenure and have supported over 90 people with advice and information on the housing and care options available.

Further contact with participants identified several people who were keen to work with the project on using tablets to both access information and to support others to do so.

---

[1]*Silverlinks, managed by Care & Repair England and funded by the Big Lottery Fund until March 18 is about creating networks of mutual support to enable older people to make informed decisions about their housing & related care. https://silverlinksprogramme.wordpress.com/*

1.4 Peer to peer support

Many older people do not use the internet and are increasingly having trouble keeping their knowledge of housing and social care options and services up to date. Older people are increasingly excluded as more services are delivered online. The project aims to teach people how to solve connectivity issues to use the internet to access services and find information and advice online.

The project purchased 10 tablets and provided training and follow up 'one to ones' to enable 10 people to develop peer support to use on line information and access services to help others with their housing and care issues. Further funding from the Schroder Foundation enabled the project to expand the number of tablets to 16 and create local 'hot spots' for people to use equipment at home.

2. Achievements

By March 2018 fifteen peer supporters in Hackney had been trained to use the internet to find information about housing and care and are passing this knowledge on to others, with each volunteer committing to helping at least another three people.

Five group training sessions for older people, new to using the internet, were run, each lasting 3 hrs with time for refreshments and socialising. This led to one to one peer support though not quite in the way expected. MRS Independent Living found that although they took some referrals for support via the local carers agency, matching people was important. Many peers preferred to work with people they knew rather than 'strangers' so the focus was very much about talking to people in their immediate circle rather than a more formal referral process set up at first.

Supplementing the Silverlink's funding with support from NHS Healthy Hackney the project also assisted older people to register with their GPs online. This further developed the peer support project working across housing, health and care.

Ellie is 82 and a peer support volunteer for MRS Independent Living, volunteering for the Silverlinks project in Hackney. She has been supported to learn how to use the internet on a tablet and is now taking the tablet and her knowledge out into the local community to support other older people with using the internet to find information.

Ellie gave a talk at a recent event held by MRS in Hackney aimed at older people wanting to find out more information about housing & care options in the area, where she shared her experience of using the internet to find information and advice.

She talked about websites she's found which have been very useful such as Hackney iCare, which has a lot of information and advice about grants, sheltered housing, home adaptations, help at home and information on how to access these services.

Volunteers like Ellie are now helping others to access information on housing & care on the website.

Ellie says: *"I found searching on the internet has been very fascinating… I hope I've shown the extent of information one can get online and how useful using the internet can be"*.

3. Learning points

In the design of this project MRS Independent Living underestimated the time it would take for people to become confident enough in their use of tablets and mobile WIFI to the level where they were able to help others. Using tablets and hotspots for internet access has proved to be a success and motivation is high for housing, social care and health related information and peer support volunteers are demonstrating the availability of this to their peers.

As a means of passing on information about housing, health and social care issues the model has much to offer. However, for many it is the information which peers have found useful which is the major motivating factor rather than learning to access the internet.

MRS Independent Living is now developing the model further so that peer supporters will also pass on information about the internet links to housing and social care to others in their network so that for those older people who do not wish to learn the skills to use the internet they can ask friends and family to locate the information for them by accessing the links.

A web forum is also to be developed which will enable people to link to relevant information in a structured way and MRS Independent Living is now making accessing "online" information a central part of all projects it is developing.

As a peer support model passing on information to others, which peers have found useful, is the central component. However, using the internet additionally offers a wide variety of other benefits which can help to combat loneliness and isolation.

4. Issues to overcome

Being able to enable people to use tablets and the supply of hotspots for connectivity was essential. MRS Independent Living enabled people to buy them after the training by monthly payments.

People need to be able to take the tablets and the hotspots home with them after training so an initial budget for data use was essential. (Around £7 per 30 days).

There is also a need to provide drop in or home visit follow up, so people can get over the problems they are experiencing and gain confidence. This means engaging a person with a high level of IT literacy and another with training/communication skills.

There is a need to "mainstream" online peer information within organisations' programmes as otherwise it is a difficult project to resource and staff.

It is also important to be clear about whether you are running a peer support programme or a volunteer programme and the implications. In a volunteer programme the agency will take a far greater responsibility for the relationship and outcomes.

5. Next steps

MRS Independent Living has successfully developed a new project to address 'social inclusion, encourage independence and develop personal resilience'. (London Borough of Hackney Grant Priority 1.) From the experience of Silverlinks, it has built a community development strategy which aims to equip older people in Hackney with the knowledge, information and support they need to prepare and plan for their future.

MRS Independent Living want to increase the knowledge base and confidence of older people and to value the knowledge they have acquired through their own experience of using services. It particularly wants to embed knowledge of the changes brought about by digital transformation. This will be done by providing information to older people who will in turn share their knowledge and experience with other older people. The project has successfully achieved a grant of £21,588 for this work.

MRS Independent Living is currently elaborating its programme of work to offer pathways to social inclusion to older men living alone in Hackney in the most deprived wards. It has been successful in a bid to Connect Hackney and will now be able to further expand the project to include a focus on older men and on leisure activities.

The grant achieved from the Schroder Foundation (grant of £3,000 to buy 16 tablets and hotspots) has enabled them not only to have equipment for the digital inclusion training and enable people to practice at home before deciding to purchase but also to set up a fund to enable people to purchase the equipment through monthly payments.

It has further adapted the Peer Support Project to encompass information and support for people with Type 2 Diabetes. A grant of £3,750 was obtained from Healthy Hackney. This project has targeted African and Caribbean elder people who have been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes or are considered at high risk. In this project they are organising the information that people have used and found helpful so that it is easily available on-line for people to show their peers.

This work has started and is available on
https://independentliving.microco.sm/microcosms/1191/

Lastly the adult learning support group Conversation into Action has established a housing history work project based on research methods formerly used by Dr Caroline Holland, of the Centre for Ageing and Biographical Studies at the Open University. Participants have been invited to list and locate their homes throughout their lives, explain how they came to be there and why they moved on when they did. Three workshop meetings have been held, each one a few weeks apart, and three participants have remained involved throughout. All have contributed narratives, ideas and reflections.

By capturing the emotional meanings of house and home and the lives enacted therein participants have established a rich deliberative platform. This project is ongoing, but it is already evident that the approach helps people to think in a broader frame about their current and possible future housing circumstances. It is hoped that these can be shared in the peer to peer work on housing and care options.

6. Contact regarding this guide

Terry Bednall: Peer Support Program Manager

Charlie Lloyd: It Hub Support Worker

MRS Independent Living

Unit C1, 3 Bradbury Street, London N16 8JN

Tel: 0330 380 1013

Email: Peersupport@MRSIndependentliving.org

Disclaimer

Care & Repair England has made every effort to ensure that the information and guidance in this publication were accurate when published but can take no responsibility for the subsequent use of this information, nor for any errors or omissions it may contain. To the extent permitted by law, Care & Repair England shall not be liable for any loss, damage or expense incurred by reliance on the information or any statement contained herein. Any References or third-party URLs are given for information and reference purposes only. Care & Repair England does not control or warrant the accuracy, relevance, availability, timeliness or completeness of the information contained on any third-party website. Inclusion of any third-party details or website is not intended to reflect their importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, products or services offered, nor the companies or organisations in question.

Organisations involved in this guide

Care & Repair England

Care & Repair England is an independent charitable organisation which aims to improve older people's housing.The contact for all information on all the Ideas for action guides.

It is a Registered Society with Charitable Status Reg No 25121R.

Head Office: Unit 9, The Renewal Trust Business Centre,
3 Hawksworth Street, Nottingham NG3 2EG

Website: www.careandrepair-england.org.uk

Email: info@careandrepair-england.org.uk

Twitter: @cr_england

Older People's Housing Champions

The Older People's Housing Champions is a network of older activists who support action by older people's groups to improve housing and related services for an ageing population across England.

Website: www.housingactionblog.wordpress.com

Email: housingchampionsnetwork@gmail.com

MRS Independent Living

MRS Independent Living is a user-led independent charity working in north-east London with disadvantaged and socially excluded sections of the community. It identifies technical solutions and provides innovative services to support individuals, their families and care workers. The organisation develops services and evaluates its activities against the expressed needs and aspirations of its service users. The contact for all information on this guide.

Address: Unit C1, 3 Bradbury Street, London N16 8JN

Tel: 0330 380 1013

SMS/Text only: 07834 006 843

Website: http://www.mrsindependentliving.org/

Email: services@mobilerepairservice.org.uk

Care&Repair England

Older People's Housing
Champions