

# NIACE Research and Development



## Key Findings



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## Adult Learners in the Fourth Age

### Abstract

#### To undertake a mapping exercise to:

- ❖ identify existing good practice in meeting learning needs and aspirations
- ❖ identify implications for existing health, education and social care agencies
- ❖ identify the training needs of staff working with fourth age adults

#### Research methodology:

- ❖ Literature search
- ❖ Visits and interviews with old people
- ❖ Visits to education, health and social service institutions
- ❖ Consultative conference

### Key Findings

#### The main conclusions of the project are:

- ❖ The personal development of older, frail and dependent older people through learning opportunities is being largely ignored. Individuality and potential not acknowledged.
- ❖ When activities are beginning to happen in private sector institutions it is often because there is a realisation that such engagement reduces dependency and therefore costs, and is also an effective marketing tool.
- ❖ While funding is the most common quoted barrier several institutions to making provision, several of those consulted felt need for attitudinal change to be more important than more resources.

- ❖ Any meaningful improvement in care provision that enshrines learning and personal development requires dialogue between various sectors and agencies – in particular those in health, housing, social care and education. However, this join-up approach is only beginning to touch care in later life. Multi-sectoral approach currently lacks co-ordination, rationale and planned funding.
- ❖ There is a lack of common understanding of the terms used to describe older people in care settings. Confusion over terms may prevent or delay development of collaborative services that enhance the personal development of older people in care settings.
- ❖ With provision of activities coming from many different agencies, there is little agreement on standards, assessment, qualifications and training of staff delivering activities.
- ❖ Curriculum development has to be sensitive to cultural and religious factors. The curriculum – as planned and subsequently delivered – is only infrequently subject of any rigorous evaluation.
- ❖ In many institutional settings where curriculum is delivered by care staff, they have little training to do so. Similarly, for many activity organisers, the entertainment of the resident is seen by their managers to be their responsibility alone, and not within the remit of the care staff. Learning activity may be seen as an ‘add-on’ exercise, with the delivery and learning outcomes not being shared with any of the staff, volunteers or residents’ families.
- ❖ In some day care settings – even when the programmes build on existing skills and experiences, or include the development of new skills – they are not constructed in such a way as to maximise learning gain outside the class time.
- ❖ Further study is required into the impact of learning on health and the wider social and community involvement of older people in the 4<sup>th</sup> Age.

## Recommendations

- ❖ The patterns of care for older people are changing. In addition, care-planning strategies will attempt to keep people in their own homes for longer. Given these factors, it is time to consider the potential for reducing dependency and the resulting costs.

## Output

- ❖ Soulsby, J. (2000) *Fourth Age Learning Report*. Published by DfEE.

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